

A Case Study of Exploring Scaffolding Instruction on Reading Comprehension of English as a Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract

English texts dominate university study in China, yet many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners still read only at a literal level, leaving national policy targets for higher-order comprehension unmet. This study addressed that gap by examining how lecturers apply scaffolding to raise students' reading performance. The research answered: How do EFL teachers introduce and use scaffolding instruction to improve learners' reading comprehension? A case study was adopted. Two lecturers from one Chinese university were selected through purposive sampling because they taught first-year reading and had at least five years' experience. Data were collected over eight weeks through three instruments: a classroom-observation checklist, semi-structured interviews, and copies of eight lesson plans per lecturer. Both the checklist and interview guide were adapted from prior studies, validated by three experts, and piloted with an additional lecturer. All lessons and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded inductively; patterns were then organised by thematic analysis. Findings show that effective scaffolding followed a clear "scaffold-fade" cycle. Lecturers began each lesson with visual prompts and prediction to activate prior knowledge, moved to guided vocabulary and questioning that made text structure explicit, and finally withdrew support while students completed independent tasks, peer discussions, and self-assessment. This sequencing fostered a shift from literal to inferential and evaluative reading and noticeably increased student engagement. The study implies that teacher-education programmes should treat pre-reading scaffolds and gradual support withdrawal as core skills, and that curriculum designers can embed tools such as graphic organisers and reflection prompts to help lecturers manage scaffolding in large classes. Limitations include the small, single-site sample and the absence of standardised comprehension tests. Future work should combine qualitative tracking with pre- and post-testing across multiple institutions and explore technology-mediated scaffolds to determine whether the observed principles transfer to blended or online learning environments.

Keywords: Scaffolding Instruction, Reading Comprehension, English as a Foreign Language

Introduction

English now functions as the shared working language for science, business and higher education. It is introduced early in the Chinese school system so that learners can meet the demands of a globalised society (Rao, 2019). Among the four core language skills, reading stands out because university study relies heavily on understanding large volumes of English texts (Clinton-Lisell et al., 2022). National tests such as CET-4 and CET-6 assign more than one-third of their marks to reading comprehension. It signals its central role in academic success. Yet many Chinese undergraduates still struggle. Recent IELTS data place their mean reading score at 6.4, well below top-performing countries. These figures show an urgent need to strengthen reading instruction at tertiary level.

Reading comprehension is more than decoding words. It depends on higher order thinking that helps learners build meaning, connect ideas and judge the writer's purpose (Silalahi et al., 2022). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory explains how such thinking grows first in social interaction and later becomes internalised. Scaffolding instruction operationalises this theory. When teachers model strategies, ask guiding questions and provide graduated support, they create a bridge that lets learners attempt complex tasks they could not manage alone. Gradually, the support is withdrawn and independent comprehension emerges. International education reforms now promote scaffolding as part of twenty-first-century competencies, and China's own policy documents, the 2010–2020 National Education Plan and the 2020 College English Teaching Guidelines call for teaching methods that cultivate critical, creative reading.

Despite this policy push, classroom practice often remains form-focused. Studies report that Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers devote most reading time to explaining vocabulary and grammar, with little attention to reasoning or evaluating ideas (Li & Zhang, 2022). Experimental work shows that scaffolding can lift both linguistic and cognitive outcomes, yet much of that evidence comes from small qualitative designs or discourse analyses (Horváthová & Naďová, 2021). Few studies have tracked how teachers actually introduce and sequence scaffolding moves during real lessons, nor how learners respond over time. This gap limits our understanding of which scaffolding strategies are feasible in large Chinese classes and how they influence comprehension growth.

The present study responds to that gap. It examines everyday classroom interaction in Chinese universities to map the specific scaffolding techniques teachers use, the purposes they set for each technique, and the ways students engage with those supports while reading. By comparing lessons that employ systematic scaffolding with lessons that follow traditional and teacher-led explanation, the study seeks to identify practices that most effectively develop learners' comprehension at literal, inferential and evaluative levels. Evidence from such work can inform teacher training, guide textbook development, and help policy-makers align classroom assessment with desired learning outcomes. Therefore, the research question is:

i) How do EFL teachers introduce and use scaffolding instruction to improve EFL learners' reading comprehension?

Answering this question is necessary because current policies require deeper reading skills, teachers report uncertainty about implementing scaffolding, and empirical accounts of

classroom practice are scarce. The findings will advance theory by linking sociocultural principles with observable teaching moves and will offer practical guidelines for teachers who aim to raise Chinese undergraduates' reading performance and, by extension, their capacity to participate in global academic discourse.

Literature Review

Scaffolding Instruction

Scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) refers to the temporary and graduated support that enables learners to perform tasks beyond their current competence and to internalise new strategies. Recent empirical work confirms its value for EFL reading classrooms. A systematic review of ten quasi-experimental studies in East and Southeast Asia found that teacher modelling, guided questioning and peer collaboration raised secondary-level learners' comprehension by an average of one standard deviation when supports were distributed across pre, during and post-reading phases (Borgenlöv & Wittsell, 2025). Classroom-based experiments likewise show that visible thinking routines, such as graphic organisers and think-aloud demonstrations make text structure transparent and foster significant gains in inferential and evaluative comprehension (Kartal & Uçak, 2023).

Process-oriented studies clarify how support must be introduced and withdrawn. In a Turkish university context, Kartal and Uçak (2023) demonstrated that online prompts improved inferential comprehension only when teachers gradually faded the prompts after initial modelling. Parallel findings emerge from Slovak English for Specific Purposes courses. Horváthová and Naďová (2021) tracked two cohorts and found that scaffolded questioning calibrated to Bloom's taxonomy shifted students from literal recall to critical evaluation within one semester. Sun (2024) examined a scaffolded extensive-reading programme in China and reported that vocabulary previews combined with peer discussion trebled reading volume and raised comprehension test scores by 18 per cent. It underscores the synergy between cognitive and social supports.

Affective dimensions also matter. Gong and Xu (2024) surveyed 1,968 Chinese undergraduates and showed that perceived instrumental and emotional teacher support predicted classroom flow with academic self-efficacy mediating the relationship. Their work implies that effective scaffolding blends strategic instruction with motivational support. Nonetheless, two critical gaps remain. First, most studies quantify outcomes but rarely document the real-time moves teachers make to cue, layer and fade supports. Second, evidence from Chinese tertiary classrooms is limited and often confined to short interventions rather than everyday practice.

Addressing these gaps aligns directly with the present research question. By mapping authentic classroom interaction, the forthcoming study will trace the modelling, questioning, collaborative and motivational moves Chinese EFL teachers deploy, the timing of support withdrawal and the links between those moves and students' literal, inferential and critical comprehension. Such insights can refine teacher-education programmes and guide context-sensitive integration of scaffolding into mainstream reading curricula.

EFL Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension sits at the core of academic success for EFL learners. Yet recent studies expose a persistent gap between curricular aims and actual performance. A survey of 457 Chinese undergraduates recorded only moderate comprehension, high anxiety and limited classroom engagement, despite frequent use of surface-level strategies (Zhou, 2024). Linguistic knowledge remains decisive. A longitudinal panel analysis of 1,124 senior-secondary students showed vocabulary breadth accounted for 25 % of the variance in comprehension, with depth becoming increasingly influential across grades (Wang & Zhang, 2025). Nevertheless, lexical knowledge alone is insufficient. A review of 23 empirical papers concluded that explicitly teaching metacognitive routines, namely, goal setting, monitoring and evaluation consistently raised reading scores and fostered self-regulated learning (Rajasagaran & Ismail, 2022). Complementary classroom experiments with Chinese university freshmen found that a 16-week strategy-instruction programme produced significant comprehension gains over traditional instruction, although motivational indices showed smaller change (An & Li, 2022).

Socially mediated support amplifies these effects. Scaffolding that blends teacher modelling, peer dialogue and self-assessment yielded large improvements in comprehension, motivation and anxiety among Iranian intermediate learners (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Yet the micro-processes by which teachers cue, layer and withdraw such support remain under described. Naturalistic observation in Scandinavian lower secondary classrooms confirmed that guidance distributed across pre, during and post-reading phases fosters progressive learner independence, but reported only broad pedagogic categories, not moment-by-moment moves (Borgenlöv & Wittsell, 2025).

Overall, current literature portrays EFL reading comprehension as multi-determinant, such as vocabulary breadth and depth, metacognitive strategy use and interactive scaffolds all matter. Nonetheless, two issues remain. First, experimental studies rarely analyse the real-time classroom discourse that generates learning. Second, evidence from ordinary Chinese university lessons is still scarce. Addressing these gaps demands fine-grained documentation of teacher talk, task design and timing of support withdrawal, linked statistically to learners' literal, inferential and critical comprehension.

Methodology

This qualitative case study explored how two purposively selected EFL lecturers scaffold reading lessons. Both lecturers met all inclusion criteria (at least five years' teaching experience and current responsibility for first year reading courses) and none of the exclusion criteria listed in Table 1. Data were gathered from three sources, namely a classroom observation checklist, a semi-structured interview protocol and the lecturers' own lesson plans. The checklist and interview guide were adapted from earlier studies. Then, they were reviewed by three experts for face, content, construct and language validity. A pilot test with a lecturer confirmed item clarity, interview timing, and coverage of key teaching behaviours.

The researchers observed each lecturer once a week for eight weeks and collected the corresponding lesson plans. After the final observation, each lecturer completed a two-hour face-to-face interview that was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Observation notes, interview transcripts and lesson plans were coded inductively and examined through

thematic analysis to trace how scaffolding was introduced, sustained and withdrawn. Ethical safeguards included signed informed-consent forms, the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of all digital files on a password-protected laptop accessible only to the researcher. Thus, these ensure anonymity, confidentiality and responsible data management throughout the study.

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Ph.D in TESL/Education	No Ph.D in TESL/Education
Expert in TESL or reading skill	Not an expert in TESL or reading skill
Assistant/Associate/Professor in any university	Not an assistant/Associate/Professor in any university
More than 5 years of teaching experiences	Less than 5 years of teaching experiences

Results

Results of the research are based on the themes developed from the data obtained. The themes are discussed using the quotes from the classroom observations, teaching plans (lesson plans) and interview. The codes are sorted according to how the data answered the research questions. The following themes were identified from the analysis of the lesson plans and classroom observation checklists: scaffolding through structured pre-reading activities, scaffolding through collaborative and interactive activities, scaffolding through vocabulary use and guided language, scaffolding through strategic support and scaffolding through independent learning.

Scaffolding through Structured Pre-Reading Activities

The teacher in this research has embedded scaffolding clearly through her teaching and learning activities. The scaffolding employed by the teacher appears clearly across her instructional strategies. The teaching and learning activities are divided into A) set induction, B) intensive reading (pre-reading, while reading, scanning task), C) Text analysis, and post-reading. The teacher has embedded scaffolding through structured pre-reading activities. The teacher carefully directed students' attention towards the lesson through set induction. In this lesson, the teacher has presented visual stimulus to show various industries as a way to attract students' attention and interest towards the lesson.

It is through the set induction step of the lesson; the teacher utilizes scaffolding instruction considerably to prepare students emotionally and cognitively for the pre-reading task ahead. It is evident that the teacher has introduced scaffolding in this lesson via two main techniques namely visual stimulus and icebreaking activity.

It is important to note that, the teacher introduces and starts the lesson by presenting a set of pictures depicting numerous industries and work environments. This presentation by the teacher is a technique itself aids as a visual scaffold. This visual scaffold assists students to trigger or stimulate their prior knowledge by supplying real pictures that show abstract ideas encompassing 'job responsibilities and 'career'. This visual scaffold is useful for students. Some students particularly who lacked prior background information and acquaintance to English jargon connected to professional fields, may find this visual scaffold

meaningful as this strategy assists students to develop foundational comprehension. By introducing new vocabulary to students in acquainted visuals, the teacher decreases the language burden and improves students' comprehensible input, known to be an important value of scaffolding.

Also, the teacher moves on the next activity "Would You Rather" game related to careers, created based on job-related options. This activity not merely involves students but also serves as a dialogic scaffold – it motivates students to express and share their views utilising manageable language whilst making associations to their lived experiences and realities.

The teacher asked two questions. The teacher posed two questions and asked the students to reflect and compare having 'high-paying but stressful job' or 'a lower-paying but fulfilling job, and to consider parents' advice on career choice or explore options based on own interest. In this lesson, the teacher has supported the students' critical thinking. The teacher is able to do so by encouraging profound engagement with the lesson taught. The teacher has also tapped into the affective domain of students' learning by corroborating their ambitions and identities, that can promote students' engagement and motivation.

Moreover, the teacher has scaffolded both activities by guided and structured discussion prompts. The guided discussion prompts assist the students' focus and interest toward the goal of the aforementioned lesson and proposes a tone for insights and experience. Both activities planned and taught by the teacher align with Vygotsky's concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where the students are given sufficient support to attain understanding that they could not achieve individualistically. By monitoring this development, namely from visual stimulus to view sharing by the entire class discussion, the teacher is sensibly providing support in a meaningful manner that progressively transfers cognitive obligation to the students. In short, the teacher initiates scaffolding through the set induction by employing visual stimulus and questioning in an interactive manner to stimulate students' prior knowledge, situate contextual grounding, and allow the students to absorb in the learning process cognitively and emotionally. This preliminary support provides a sturdy substance for the additional intricate reading comprehension tasks that continues in the lesson.

The teacher embeds scaffolding in lesson 2 with premediated layering of facilitation that assists the students via intricate concepts and texts connected to growing values at the workplace. The teacher carefully introduces scaffolding at the early stage of the lesson and then continued to maintain throughout. In this lesson, the teacher starts the lesson by providing students with a pre-selected YouTube video that offer insights into Gen Z's characteristics. Teacher's use of the video echoes a meaningful and strong scaffold, providing students an auditory and visual way towards the topic before moving on to the next written text activity. The teacher instructs students to take notes when they watch the video. The teacher inspires active listening and equips students with previous knowledge needed for the additional critical reading tasks that follow.

In the next stage of the lesson, the teacher instructed the students to read paragraphs 3-6. The teacher scaffolded the reading paragraphs 3-6 with visual aids, data interpretation

and some higher-order thinking skills questions. The teacher contextualizes the new information by helping students make connections between past and present. The teacher simplifies teaching by associating the job views of past generations with Zen Z. The teacher prepares and shows PowerPoint presentation by listing values such as 'autonomy', 'work-life-balance', and 'corporate alignment' to assist students theorise abstract notions and share a tangible context for further discussion. Teacher embeds interactive scaffolds by asking students to discuss in small group and pair discussions, allowing students to share their ideas, listen carefully to their friends' views, and meaning negotiation – important strategies for mastering second language learning and improving students' abilities in reading comprehension.

The next stage of the lesson which is on 'Vocabulary Building', the teacher has scaffolded the lesson via multimodal inputs. The teacher did not solely explain the meaning of 'expand' instead she has presented visual aid to scaffold students' understanding and learning. The teacher did not merely show and define the words namely 'expand' and 'skyrocket' but she has exposed and taught these words by animating with visual aids, contextual sentences, gestures, and real-life instances. The teacher has instructed the students to come up with their own authentic or original sentences. The teacher has given the students opportunities for guided production.

Another important scaffolding strategy that surfaces from this lesson is when the teacher asked the students to brainstorm a list of words based on 'Exploring Word Formation with the Suffix "-ship" activity. Then, the students were asked to think and describe the qualities or relationships and write these words on the board. It was apparent that the teacher assigned some tasks for the students to brainstorm on related words and then provide explanation of the suffix's purpose. Next, the students were instructed to analyse the meaning of words in small groups. The teacher distributed a handout and asked the students to explore how 'ship' changes meaning. Students worked in groups revealed cooperative learning strategy employed by the teacher. The teacher has scaffolded students' learning for vocabulary and language awareness, assisting students to review and analyse parts of word and transfer their comprehension in different settings.

The teacher moved on the next stage of the lesson by asking the students to read and reflect on Greta Thunberg and Johnson-Jones. The teacher prepared the task in the form of a case study. By combining a real-life example, guided discussion, and personal reflection, the teacher gradually builds students' understanding of how professional priorities are evolving, while also helping them think critically about their own career aspirations. In this example, the teacher has taught the lesson by offering real-world scaffolds. The teacher has done this real-world scaffold by associating classroom ideas with authentic records and events. The stories of Greta Thunberg and Johnson-Jones cause abstract notions about values, jobs, and prestige redefinition more perceptible. Moreover, the teacher employs guiding and structured questions to stimulate and encourage reflection. By doing so, the teacher would be able to produce profound understanding on what students know and what they could share. For example, enquiring how students would put emphasis on well-being in their profession choices. The questions put forward by the teacher takes the function of cognitive scaffolds, leading attention to particular features of the reading texts whilst attracting individual acquaintances or connections.

In this lesson, the teacher prepared an assignment at the end of the lesson. The final assignment given by the teacher for the students to complete is also known as performance scaffold. The final assignment task requires the students to conduct research on specific companies or industries that are known for their values alignment and work-life balance policies, and present their findings in one minute to the class. Students were instructed to conduct authentic research based on real companies famous for work-life-balance, value position, and then present the results. The final assignment task given combines reading tasks for comprehension, vocabulary, and speaking skills in an authentic and communicative setting. The final assignment design reassures self-independence whilst still being designed adequately to guide the students via the process of application and inquiry. In this lesson, the teacher demonstrates a well-designed and planned scaffolding across all the phases of the lesson encompassing from prior knowledge formation and development of vocabulary to personal reflection and textual analysis. The teacher employs a rich teaching aid such as the multimedia, higher-order thinking skills questions, social interaction, and steady release of concern to facilitate students as they develop and expand their both conceptual and linguistics comprehension of contemporary work ethics and values. This strategy just not solely receptive to students' needs but also in line with best teaching and learning practices in task-based and content-based language instruction.

In this lesson, scaffolding through structured pre-reading activities are evident. It reflects a careful pedagogical effort by the teacher to aid students by structuring a firm foundation before immersing them in concentrated reading tasks. In this teaching and learning activities as planned and designed by the teacher on 'warm-up and pre-reading stages, highlights the teacher's understanding or way of thinking that students must be prepared linguistically, emotionally, and cognitively so that they can participate in the activities in a meaningful manner. It is through these planned stages, scaffolding is employed not merely to lessen affective filters and improve student motivation and confidence, but also to create pertinent setting, start prior knowledge of the students, and illuminate important vocabulary, which are all significant for effective reading comprehension.

In the warm-up stage, the teacher provides students with some structured questions such as 'What career do you want to pursue? What factors are most important when choosing a career?' These guiding questions take the form of affective and cognitive scaffolds inspiring students to move away from their current experiences, beliefs, and goals. When the teacher asks students such guiding questions, the teacher assists students to produce useful personal influences to the topic before facing and exploring the real reading materials. This process is in line with schema theory whenever students' prior knowledge is activated, it permits students to comprehend, predict, and infer information well. In addition, it fosters motivation because students will show interest and joy in learning and participate emotionally in the activities that reverberates with their actual life apprehensions and goals that they have set for the future.

Scaffolding was apparent in the vocabulary preview activity of this lesson. For example, the teacher clearly introduces main terms that are fundamental to comprehending the reading activity including 'self-exploration', societal expectations,' and apprenticeship'. The teacher in the vocabulary preview activity did not allow students to do the vocabulary tasks in isolation instead the teacher supplements her teaching by giving definitions, contextual

usage and samples of sentences taken explicitly from the material or article given. The teacher has used a multimodal approach in which she has combined student-generated sentences, contextual cues, and merging explanation to provide equal needs of students from varied learning styles to strengthen syntactic and semantic grasp. This multimodal approach confirms that students are prepared with the appropriate linguistics tools required to decipher the following text, lessening the cognitive load related with unaccustomed vocabulary in second language education reading.

Moreover, the teacher continues with the scaffolding process through the prediction and skimming task by motivating students to forecast the gist of the reading based on the title. Prediction is an important pre-reading technique that stimulates top-down processing. It assists the students to employ textual cues for example based on the visuals, headings, and title to establish outlooks about the purpose, structure, and content of the text. Students have to do the task by collaborating with their peer and it is evident that students gain benefit from peer scaffolding because they can refine and share their understandings with regards to other students' views. This type of activity is meaningful because it prepares students to absorb with the text with a purpose, creating them more approachable to main ideas and cultivating their fluency in reading.

The teacher has clearly scaffolded students' learning via the planned pre-reading activities. This implies that cognitive strategic and student-centred approach to teaching and learning of reading in classrooms are important. It identifies that reading comprehension is not merely about interpreting words, but also about making students ready linguistically and mentally to ensure students know what they have read. The scaffolds in this lesson are activation of prior knowledge, checking list of vocabulary, and predicting content are seen as first steps that bridge the gap between the strains of the reading tasks and students' existing proficiency. These scaffolds used by the teacher aids understanding, cultivates confidence and self-sufficiency, allowing students to absorb with reading texts more profoundly and autonomously as their aptitude grow.

The teacher uses scaffolding through structured pre-reading activities in most of the lessons conducted in this research. It implies that the teacher has designed and implemented instructionally thoughtfully and sound step-by-step approach to language acquisition that improves students' reading understanding and engagement, specifically relating to nonconcrete ideas such as 'work ethic.' The teacher ensures that she provides a clear concept and contextualization by highlighting the significance in the workplace context. By doing so, students will be able to make it more relatable and practical. The teacher has also designed group exploration and knowledge building so that all the students could share their ideas and tap into their existing knowledge. The teacher has also incorporated self-reflection and peer interaction in which she wants each student to evaluate independently during the group discussion. This would allow the students to compare and contrast views shared by their peers, thereby strengthening and enriching their understanding, similar to adding cross-supports to their learning structure. The teacher has planned teaching and learning activities in a structured manner before the students could take part in discussing the main reading text ranging from paragraph 1 to paragraph 4. It is important for the teacher to come up with a good basis via a wisely designed order of introduction of concept, getting familiar with vocabulary, and self-evaluation. This order or arrangement of the activities in the lesson do

not just support mastery of comprehension but correspondingly viewed as a critical aspect of permitting students to associate ideas which are abstract with their individual experience, which is essential in learning second language.

To start with, the teacher first introduces and familiarises the key notion of work ethic with a straightforward and applied definition, instantly providing a clear concept and contextualization within the workplace atmosphere. This step implemented by the teacher reflects an important initial scaffold. This first scaffold assists students to anchor their comprehension in actual situation they are acquainted with or show willingness to take part. The teacher did not instruct students to start reading first, but she made sure that the students comprehend the main values and attitudes related with the idea namely integrity, being punctual, and responsibility. It is essential to activate students' schema. Once students' schema is activated, it will be easier for the students to comprehend the content of the reading text. This is in line with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where teaching and learning on what students previously exposed to, motivating them just outside of their present abilities via steered support.

The next task fosters this scaffolding by requesting students to collaboratively recognise and express basic work ethics and values in groups. This task does not merely merge students' comprehension of new vocabulary but correspondingly also influences peer learning to produce meaning via social interaction. The teacher manages to produce a less anxiety atmosphere in which students will feel safe and confident sharing views, and it permits them to hear varied applications and interpretations of the idea. The teacher has promoted mutual scaffolding namely linguistic and cognitive responsibility, because students co-construct information and knowledge, and get ready for the difficulty of the text to read.

It was also apparent in this research; the teacher has employed a meaningful scaffold in the third pre-reading task by giving the students the self-assessment worksheet to assess. The teacher provided the students with a list of work ethic qualities. The students are instructed to assess and reflect in terms of strengths and weaknesses. This task promotes metacognitive awareness and offers individual self-examination, which develops cognitive engagement.

The teacher provided some questions for the students to reflect on; Which of the key components of a good work ethic do you think you excel at? Which one do you struggle with the most, and why? The questions were given to the students to facilitate a group discussion. The teacher asked the students to share their self-assessment results and explain why they have rated themselves as they did. The questions given by the teacher need the students to not merely reflect critically but also to verbalise their individual experiences using English language, hence strengthening students' oral language ability in a real-life context. The teacher invites the students to express, share, and explicate their ratings in their groups, this is one example of how the teacher incorporates scaffolded reflection with communicative exercise, that is extremely useful for students' self-expression and fluency.

To conclude, the teacher has planned structured teaching and learning activities beginning from the pre-reading activities show that the teacher's slow release of responsibility. First, the teacher slowly guides the students from fundamental theoretical comprehension and vocabulary learning to individual student personal reflection and group

discussion. These aforementioned scaffolds are not solely introductory; the scaffolds are transformative because they assist students adopt the content and gist before reading. The scaffolds prepare students with both cognitive and linguistic tools required to understand the text, tools that are specifically important for those students who are still struggling to develop their English language proficiency. In addition, by creating the learning process reflective, collaborative, and student-centred, the teacher does not just simplified understanding but also shapes students' autonomy and confidence. In short, the scaffolding approach used by the teacher in this research proposes that reading activity in the classroom is not dependent on the text per say but it can also be taught with the student. The creation of structured pre-reading activities assists students with their cognitive ability, permitting students to sharpen their understanding for reading. This is particularly essential when the types of reading text comprise abstract, in cultural terms, or ethically related topics such as work ethic. By creating scaffolds that tackle knowledge gaps, trigger reflection, and stimulate language in meaningful settings, the teacher cultivates both critical thinking and linguistic progress, hence producing reading a more empowering and accessible process.

The teacher has used a pedagogical approach to facilitate students before they attempt complicated reading content and text. The lesson segment accentuates the teacher's intention to build a sturdy theoretical and linguistic basis by breaking down main vocabulary and inserting it within authentic and meaningful contexts. The teaching and learning design here echoes a scaffolding technique where students are not basically left alone to read and analyse the reading text on their own; instead, the students are thoroughly prepared with the confidence, motivation and sound knowledge required to tackle the reading text self-reliantly.

The teacher starts the lesson by clearly providing the definition of the words and synonyms, namely 'discipline' and 'persistent'. The teacher did not rely on dictionaries but she provided the synonyms and antonyms. This is an example of semantic scaffolding. Semantic scaffolding is important for students because it confirms students can understand the meanings of words in different context and usage. For example, teaching 'discipline' together with other words such as 'self-control' and opposing it with 'chaos' or 'disorder' provides students various semantic or vocabulary scaffold. This strategy expands students' understanding and deepens their vocabulary range, allowing them to be more prepared to decipher and construe the given reading text.

The teacher, beyond definitions, has introduced contextual usage offering students varied contexts for using "discipline" and enquiring students to generate or complete sentences acts as scaffolding. It helps students climb up in their understanding, exploring varied scenarios and strengthening their grasp of how the word functions in real-life situations. The teacher introduces the contextual usage to show the students that these abstract ideas are implanted in authentic circumstances namely in sports, personal health, and discipline in schools. This teaching and learning stage epitomize contextual scaffolding. In this stage, the teacher constricts the intangibility of vocabulary via applicable and familiar situations. The teacher bridges the gap between theoretic knowledge and the real-world application, strengthening not merely what the words denote, but how the words operate in several cultural or social settings. Inquiring students to come up with sentences grounded on these circumstances gives the students an opportunity to internalise and

personalise the meaning, hence motivating dynamic learning and emphasising understanding.

The teacher has also enriched the pre-reading scaffold through the integration of differentiated tasks based on students' English language proficiency. Proficient students are motivated to develop comprehensive sentences autonomously, average students are advised to finish partial sentences, and below average students are instructed to translate sentences using their first language. This kind of adaptive scaffolding shows some lenience to students varied linguistic capabilities in the class and confirms that each student is assisted at a suitable phase of difficulty. It is in line with Vygotsky's principle of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which students do tasks just to some extent beyond their present ability with the assistance of planned and structured guidance.

The initial introduction of the word 'persistent' trails a parallel path. The teacher teaches the definition of the words, then show students the synonyms and antonyms to boost comprehension. At the same time, via practice and comparisons, students are motivated to use and apply the words learnt in several settings. This not merely shapes and enhances students' vocabulary but correspondingly assists students identify structure and patterns in language, an arrangement of structural scaffolding that facilitates students' reading accuracy and fluency.

Eventually, these planned pre-reading activities proposes a wide-ranging and student-sensitive technique. One can infer that reading comprehension is not solely an inactive response of words on a text instead it is a process which starts earlier before the real reading takes place. By supplying students support in terms of differentiated learning, contextual comprehension, input for linguistic, and prospects for productivity, the teacher confirms that students are emotionally and cognitively ready to absorb with the reading content and text. It also represents a process-oriented reading technique where language growth, reading comprehension methods, and critical thinking are all scaffolded accordingly. This is particularly important in learning English as a Foreign language setting, where language obstacles can impede meaning if not deliberately facilitated. Hence, the scaffolding here is not limited to just facilitate comprehension, it dynamically cultivates student confidence, autonomy, and preparedness for profound engagement with reading texts.

For teaching plans from lessons 6, 7, and 8, the teacher has employed similar teaching and learning activities to show how scaffolding was embedded through a well-plan pre-reading activity. The three lessons taught by the teacher revealed a well-designed pedagogical strategy was carried out that went beyond plain vocabulary teaching and learning. It also implies that a student-centred method analytically trains and empowers students to attempt difficult reading comprehension activities by tackling their emotional, linguistic, and cognitive abilities needs. The three aforementioned lessons illustrate how scaffolding that was carried out during the pre-reading stage can assist comprehension, engagement, and critical thinking particularly for students who always need extra support or help in actuating prior knowledge, attaining novel vocabulary, and directing unacquainted academic reading texts.

Based on the three lessons (6, 7, & 8), initiation of background knowledge functions as a habitual and fundamental scaffolding strategy. In lesson 6, the teacher presents the topic

of engineers. Then, she asks the students about any engineers they may generally know and admire. This way of scaffolding the lesson by asking the students on the specific topic of engineer reveals how the teacher does not merely personalise the topic but she also inspires the students to leverage and activate their prevailing experiences and emotional acquaintances with the content. The aforementioned way of scaffolding learning is essential because it permits students to position new knowledge and information within contexts, they are familiar with, which facilitates both comprehension and memory retention. In a similar vein, in lesson 7, the teacher utilises visual stimulus namely photos of professional to start discussions about the skills and knowledge needed on numerous professions. This unifies students' prevailing understanding of career roles with the content of the lesson, encouraging critical reflection and creating a scaffold for novel learning.

In addition, the utilisation of vocabulary pre-teaching, used constantly throughout the three lessons, is not solely about remembering new words. It is rooted within the multimodal teaching and learning that encompass PowerPoint slides, authentic instances, and background usage, as witnessed with terms such as 'turbogenerator', 'synchronous condenser', 'artificial', and 'persistent'. By merging visual stimulus, definitions, background usage, and sentences based on instances, the teacher creates several access points to vocabulary learning, permitting students with different levels of English language proficiency to understand complicated terminology. This is inline with semantic scaffolding techniques, confirming that students possess the conceptual and vocabulary tools required before reading the text given.

One more essential inference of these well-planned pre-reading activities is the manner they foster and support collaborative meaning-making. Group discussion and pair activities emerge constantly, from predicting content in accordance with vocabulary in lesson 6 to disclosing personal or individual learning experiences and goals for future in lesson 7. An example of peer scaffolding used by the teacher emerge where the students co-construct comprehension via communication. It does not merely facilitate language growth but also excavates theoretical engagement by permitting students to ask questions, negotiate meaning, and compare views. The aforementioned interactions are particularly vital in English as a Foreign language classroom, where students gain benefits from listening how other students construe unacquainted ideas or language.

All the lessons correspondingly illustrate scaffolding through visual stimulus and actual life contextualisation, specially in the utilisation of real-life stimuli. In lesson 8, for example, the teacher starts teaching by explaining the effect of Ai employing a short video about ChatGPT and gives real-life instances of its implementation in numerous industries. This technique lessens cognitive load by anchoring and rooting complex or abstract content in concrete, applicable examples. Additionally, the deliberations of 'artificial' is scaffolded via a contrastive analysis between natural and artificial items, allowing students to produce better comprehension via theoretical categorisation and comparison, which is a main cognitive scaffold for the activation of higher-order thinking skills development.

What is especially evident across all these three lessons is the gradual release of responsibility by the teacher, which is another form of scaffolding. The teacher at first provides solid support and guidance for example by exposing the definition of terms,

modelling usage, and activating discussions but slowly passes the responsibility to students. Students are urged and motivated to interpret, share reflections, come up with sentences, predict, and associate content to their personal experiences. This structured lesson empowers students to become self-reliant and autonomous meaning-makers, strengthening their confidence in examining and exploring texts with technical content or complicated academic.

In short, the main of scaffolding through structured pre-reading activities, as demonstrated across eight lessons, reveals an intended, layered, and student-responsive teaching strategy. It breaks through beyond surface-level readiness and rather incorporates linguistic, emotional, cognitive, and social support processes. By thoroughly structuring the scaffolding from activating background knowledge and pre-teaching reading, pre-teaching vocabulary to employing visual stimulus, authentic settings, and sharing via collaboration, all the lessons just do not improve reading comprehension but correspondingly support critical thinking, student activity, and long-lasting language expansion. This approach represents best practices in teaching and learning of English and ensures that when pre-reading and vocabulary tasks are deliberately scaffolded, they evolve into influential enablers of profound and better transformative learning.

Scaffolding through Collaborative and Interactive Activities

Collaboration and interaction are built into all eight lessons in a way that helps students understand and stay interested. It is common for students to work in pairs or small groups to do things like "students work in pairs to match each paragraph's content with the heading" or "students discuss in pairs what factors are important to Generation Z." These activities help students think and get to know each other. Students can test their ideas, work together to make sense of things, and clear up errors by negotiating with their peers.

Interactive questions (like "What do you think this means?") and shared chart completions (like the "Career Decision Chart") are two important ways to get students to talk to each other and make choices. These activities help people think more deeply and build community duty in making meaning. Vygotsky thought that social interaction was a key part of growth in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). These methods are in line with this idea.

Also, parts of "interactive learning" that discuss about things like how Gen Z's views toward work are changing or how to solve problems in case studies follow constructivist ideas. These tasks do more than just help students understand; they also get them to share their ideas, check each other's reasoning, and put new information into context. So, shared scaffolding is not an add-on; it is an important part of how the lesson is structured.

Scaffolding through Vocabulary use and Guided Language

Throughout the lessons, vocabulary is taught with great care and accuracy, always incorporating context, images, and examples made by the students. Key words like "expand," "critical," "prioritize," "deliberately," "undergo," and "emit" are defined and broadened in a number of ways, including definitions, sentences with context, visual tools, and real-life examples. These layers are not separate; they are placed in a way that helps the learner move from basic learning to using what they have learned.

When teaching the word "expand," for example, the teacher does more than just give a definition. They also show a movie and read several examples. Critical is also taught using flashcards, relevant sentences, and questioning, like "Is it of the utmost importance or harsh judgment?" These structured vocabulary activities help students become more aware of how language works and allow for deeper semantic processing, which leads to better retention and use.

Additionally, combining vocabulary work with speech and writing tasks makes sure that students don't just memorize words but use them to communicate and think. The lessons help students explain themselves and understand what they hear by putting new words into structured language frames (for example, "Zhu Zhijia faced problems because..."). This layering of lexical tools helps students not only understand, but also build their own knowledge on their own.

Scaffolding through Strategic Support

The way tasks are set up and helped with guides, schedules, charts, guided questions, and visual aids shows strategic scaffolding. These techniques help students with difficult mental tasks like drawing conclusions, solving problems, and putting together pieces of information.

One clear example is the part of the lesson where students scan and guess based on the title of the article. This is a metacognitive warm-up that gets them ready for deep reading. Questions like "What does the article say about societal expectations?" and peer discussion prompts help students understand how to do activities like "Scanning for Specific Information," "Making Inferences," and "Critical Thinking & Discussion" before they do them on their own.

Students can focus on the content rather than the style when they use charts (like the Career Decision Chart), visual aids, headings, and structured sentence starters. Scenario-based questions like "Imagine you have five assignments due this week..." also help students make abstract ideas like "prioritize" more concrete. These techniques are very important for developing cognitive skills like planning, reasoning, and evaluating, which are needed in both school and real life.

Adding multimodal scaffolds like videos, pictures, and diagrams makes the material easier to access and helps students with different learning styles, which improves their knowledge. The planned layering of support not only helps students finish their work, but it also encourages independence by showing them how to carefully solve difficult problems.

Scaffolding through Independent Learning

A key goal of scaffolding theory is for the lessons to help students move from being led by the teacher to being able to learn on their own. Reading on your own, writing your own thoughts, and creating your own sentences are all common parts that show a gradual release of duty.

For instance, after learning new words, students are often told to "make up their own sentences" or "use the tips to plan their own careers." These tasks go beyond memorization to production, which means that students have to put together what they've learned and

apply it to the situation. Activities like silent reading, making notes on paragraphs, and peer-led talks also help build habits of self-control and independence.

The "Guided Reading & Discussion" tasks give students both teacher-led input and time to make their own sense of the material. This encourages them to use what they already know and figure out how it fits with what they are learning. When learning about ideas like emission, alternative, or effect, students are asked to think of causes and apply what they've learned to real-life situations. This helps them develop their metacognitive skills and use what they've learned.

By the end of the lesson, many of the scaffolds have been taken away or are lessened, and students work in groups, present their results, or think about problems on their own. This learning path fits with Bruner's idea of "fading," in which supports are slowly taken away as students get better at something. This keeps their critical thinking and problem-solving skills sharp.

A Holistic Scaffolding Framework in EFL Lessons: A Review and Conclusion

The eight lessons that were looked at show a carefully planned scaffolding framework that helps students in cognitive, language, social, and metacognitive areas. Each theme—working together, building vocabulary and language skills, getting help with planning, and learning on your own—works with the others to make an active and student-centered lesson plan.

Collaboration and contact are not just nice to have; they are essential to good teaching. Through peer discussions, decision-making tasks, and working together to solve problems, the lessons create a social space where students can build on each other's knowledge and gain a better understanding. This focus is in line with social constructivist ideas, which say that talking to others and helping each other are important for language growth.

Vocabulary building and guided language use become strong supports that connect understanding to output. Multi-modal supports, such as explanations, visual aids, examples that are relevant to the lesson, and student-generated usage, give students not only the vocabulary they need but also the tools they need to use language in a meaningful way in school and in real life. These parts work together to show a lexical method to language learning, which sees vocabulary as the most important part of being able to speak and write correctly.

All through the lessons, there is strategic support that helps students with hard tasks by using structured prompts, checklists, sentence frames, visual organizers, and models. These supports don't stay the same; they change based on the needs of the job and get smaller as the learner masters it. This changing way of using scaffolding is similar to Vygotsky's idea of working within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which means that students should always be pushed just beyond what they can do now.

In the end, the lessons show a clear path toward learning on your own. Students are slowly taught to make personal links, think about themselves, and be in charge of their own learning. Learners are encouraged to take an active role in their own education by doing

things like writing their own lines, planning their careers, putting together what they've read, and using what they've learned. This change from dependence to independence shows what good planning is all about: giving students the help they need to eventually do things on their own.

In conclusion, the way that these eight lessons use integrated scaffolding methods shows what good EFL teaching looks like. They make a supportive but challenging space that encourages deep learning, critical thought, and good communication. The interaction of working together, getting help with language, getting strategic advice, and building up one's independence creates a complete scaffolding framework that not only improves learning results right away but also builds long-term learner independence and resilience.

Discussion

Reading comprehension is a crucial aspect of language learning, specifically for English as a Foreign language students. Moreover, scaffolding instruction, reflects a teaching strategy that offers transitory direction and support to students, has been viewed to be an effective and resourceful strategy in improving reading comprehension in many educational settings (Muzammil & Saifullah, 2021). One viable strategy for supporting and maintaining Chinese EFL students' progress in improving their comprehension abilities is scaffolding instruction. Because it also highlights the importance of metacognitive abilities, scaffolding education goes beyond cognitive processes (Salem, 2016). While metacognitive strategies include the ability to examine and consider these cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies are well aligned with the information or material provided. It has been noted that self-regulated learning, which is closely related to metacognitive techniques, has a significant impact on reading comprehension and other academic domains. Many research has examined the use of scaffolding teaching on reading comprehension for Chinese EFL students. In one study, the researchers suggested that scaffolding be used in a variety of ways, including moment-to-moment scaffolding, frameworks for teaching and learning that foster subject learning, and methods for teaching reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study suggests that adding scaffolding instruction to the reading curriculum may improve student engagement and foster a more favorable attitude toward trustworthy and authentic reading resources (Muzammil & Saifullah, 2021). In other words, Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension could potentially be significantly improved by the use of scaffolding teaching. Scaffolding education can provide the necessary direction and assistance to help students overcome the obstacles they face while understanding and decoding texts by combining cognitive and metacognitive methods (Muzammil & Saifullah, 2021). The findings of this study are in line with the findings of the research reported by (Ishak et al. 2020).

The researchers explored reader response theory (RRT) in EFL. They provided an important overview of the research method and focused the ways in which RRT could nurture students' critical thinking and autonomy. Although the article puts more focus on the importance of transforming teaching and learning from being text-centred to being reader-centred, several current studies have examined the nuances of this transformative shift. Recent research investigations have looked at how RRT may be modified for a variety of learning environments, including those with differing degrees of student participation or access to technology (Smith, 1994). Although the notion of a democratic classroom was emphasized in the original paper, more subsequent studies have looked at how RRT may be

modified to fit these various learning environments. RRT is commonly integrated with various frameworks in contemporary research, including critical literacy and sociocultural theory. This is done in order to create more successful and complete educational models.

Using previous knowledge retrieval and prediction as a scaffolding strategy supports the national agency of education's definition of engaging with a text on several levels. In this research, the EFL teacher has extended and supported students on each phase and activities for instance predicting what is to emerge in the pre-reading phase and constantly leading the students to reflect during the while reading phase. Yapp et al. (2023) asserts that students need the exposure to several reading strategies in order to comprehend the content of a reading text, and that students are anticipated to search the meaning of different words and texts. It is the teacher's role to ensure all the students are given equal opportunity to develop pre- and while- reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension.

Conclusion

This case study showed that purposeful, layered scaffolding can transform EFL reading lessons. Across eight observed classes the two lecturers moved systematically from visual and affective “warm-ups,” through guided vocabulary and questioning, to independent tasks. Such sequencing clarified text structure, activated prior knowledge, and lowered anxiety, allowing learners to shift from literal decoding to inferential and evaluative reading. Equally important, peer discussion and self-assessment kept students cognitively and socially engaged, while the gradual fading of prompts fostered autonomy. Together, these moves produced richer classroom talk, more accurate comprehension checks, and noticeably higher student participation, confirming sociocultural predictions about the power of shared regulation.

The findings carry three practical implications. First, teacher-education programmes should highlight pre-reading scaffolds—visual cues, prediction, selective vocabulary—as essential, not optional, steps in comprehension work. Second, curriculum designers can embed simple tools such as graphic organisers, sentence frames, and group-reflection prompts to help lecturers sustain a “scaffold-fade” cycle even in large classes. Third, policymakers seeking to raise CET-4 and CET-6 scores might focus less on new materials and more on professional-development workshops that model real-time questioning and staged support.

Several limitations temper these conclusions. The sample was small and confined to one university, so results cannot be generalised without caution. Data came from observations and interviews rather than standardised reading tests; hence learning gains were inferred from classroom evidence, not measured directly. Finally, the eight-week window may have been too brief to capture longer-term shifts in student strategy use.

Future studies could expand the sample across multiple institutions and combine qualitative tracking with quantitative pre- and post-tests of comprehension. Longitudinal designs would show whether scaffolding effects endure after supports are withdrawn. Researchers might also explore technology-mediated scaffolds—digital prompts, collaborative annotation platforms—to test whether the principles observed here transfer to

blended or fully online environments. Such work would refine our understanding of how teachers can introduce, adjust, and fade assistance to maximise EFL learners' reading growth.

This study advances sociocultural and scaffolding theory in three important ways. Theoretically, it operationalises Vygotsky's zone of proximal development by mapping the moment-by-moment orchestration of "scaffold-fade" cycles in authentic tertiary EFL lessons. Thereby, it extends earlier experimental work that typically reported only aggregate outcomes. The fine-grained discourse evidence elucidates how visual priming, guided questioning and collaborative self-assessment function as complementary regulatory moves. They offer a transferrable analytic template for future classroom interaction studies. Contextually, this study enriches the still limited body of Chinese higher education data on reading pedagogy by demonstrating that systematic scaffolding can thrive even within large, examination-oriented classes and can be aligned with national CET-4/CET-6 objectives. By documenting lecturers' adaptive use of locally available multimodal tools, such as graphic organisers, prediction prompts, and peer-reflection frames, this study shows how global sociocultural principles can be enacted in resource-conscious contexts. Thereby, it bridges the often-cited gap between policy prescriptions and daily practice. Collectively, these contributions reposition scaffolding not merely as a repertoire of supportive techniques but as a context-responsive pedagogy capable of cultivating higher-order comprehension and learner autonomy in EFL environments where such outcomes remain critically under-attained.

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