



## Revisiting the Significance of ZPD and Scaffolding in English Language Teaching

Muntasir Muntasir<sup>\*1</sup>, Indra Akbar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*, 2</sup> Politeknik Kutaraja, Banda Aceh, Indonesia, 24415.

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to describe the definition and application of ZPD and scaffolding in English language instruction. This study is a critical review that focuses on how ZPD and scaffolding can be used to construct and structure curriculum materials. Scholars and practitioners in the field of language learning have always sought to develop a theory to facilitate the learning process for students. Some academics have focused on ways to improve students' performance in language learning or how teachers might facilitate the language-learning process. To genuinely know what to help with and how to aid, language teachers must be aware of their students' capacities. The instructor should view students as distinctive individuals with distinct needs, identities, and skills. Teachers should recognize what children can perform alone and what they need assistance with. To empower the teacher, Vygotsky (1978) proposed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding theories. In this study, we endeavor to examine the theory of ZPD and Scaffolding. Secondly, we apply this idea to the context of language teaching and learning. Lastly, we discuss the significance of these theories for language learner identity.*

## INTRODUCTION

### ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development)

According to Vygotsky (1978), the definition of the Zone of Proximal Development is "the distance between the actual development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under the guidance of an adult or in collaboration with more capable peers". Thus, it is possible to draw the conclusion from ZPD definition that learners are divided into two zones: the first zone corresponds to the learner's *Actual Development*, and the second zone corresponds to their *Proximal Development*. *Actual Development* zone is a can-do level. Learners at this level are capable of carrying out the activity and finding a solution on their own. In other words, the actual development zone refers to all of the tasks that learners are capable of completing without assistance from the instructor (Kusmaryono & Kusumaningsih, 2021). In this stage, the learners do not require assistance, and in fact, if the teacher provides an excessive amount of assistance and review for something that the learners have mastered, it may cause boredom in the teaching-learning process, which in turn demotivates the learners to invest more time and effort into the learning process (Tran & Moskovsky, 2022).

On the other hand, the ZPD level is the potential level where the learners are not capable of working independently and require a guidance or aid from the teachers or the more educated peers to build new abilities or understandings. This level is also referred to as the potential level (Raymond, 2000; Salo, 2021).

In addition, ZPD encourages students to construct new understandings on the basis of previously acquired information with the assistance of a teacher or, even better, a peer. In addition to this, Vygotsky conceived of the ZPD as a "means of expressing the dynamic interactions that persons have with their environment and how this brings about growth" (Lantolf & Poener, 2008). Vygotsky argues that in order for humans to gain a higher cognitive function, they must go through an interactional process with their environment. He also considers social interaction to be an effective source of learner development. For instance, in the classroom, the interaction that students have with one another when negotiating the meaning of something in conversation or when students have a discussion with the teachers helps them to form a new understanding and develop their cognitive function. This can also happen when students have discussions with one another outside of the classroom. This views can be found in Vygotsky's book, *Mind in Society*.

In addition to that, Vygotsky contends that the process of learning can take place successfully in ZPD, and that the lessons and guidance should be directed at this zone. Because of this, knowing the ZPD for each learner is extremely crucial since learning does not take place if the instructor teaches in a ZPD that is inappropriate for the student. The learning that occurs outside of the ZPD could be too difficult or too easy for the individual who is doing the learning. For instance, if the students have already understood or are familiar with some words, rather than asking them to keep reviewing the same words, it is preferable to use those words to teach phrasal words or new words. For instance, using the word "look" to teach "look after" is an example of using a word that is already understood to teach a new word. Yet, if the students come into the class with no prior knowledge at all on a certain subject, then the learning will be both pointless and impossible. Consider the challenge of educating a child in tenses when that child does not even have a vocabulary to begin with. As a result, the educator should continually analyze and evaluate the students' ZPD in order to ensure that effective learning is taking place (Clapper & Iris, 2015).

### **Scaffolding**

As was previously discussed, understanding a student's ZPD allows teachers to choose what type of learning support to provide. The phrase "scaffolding" refers to the help that instructors provide. According to Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), the term "scaffolding" refers to any type of guidance or assistance offered by a more competent student (and/or teacher) to an inexperienced learner in order to enable the inexperienced learner become independent. Given that Olson and Pratt (2000) argue that scaffolding should extend beyond what students are capable of independently completing, the roles of the competent peer and the teacher are vital in scaffolding (ZPD). A knowledgeable peer and teacher can facilitate the beginner's learning of a new concept and skill that the novice cannot accomplish unaided, given the novice's prior knowledge (Malik, 2017). For example, scaffolding is crucial to the acquisition of language skills because children require support in negotiating meaning and adopting new forms in order to progress (Kayi-Aydar, 2013; Puntambekar, 2022).

Yet, McKenzie (1999) contended that teachers must pay attention to a number of distinct factors in order to give effective scaffolding. They include the clarity of guidance to prevent misunderstanding, a sustainable task, the provision of a clear purpose for scaffolding, the teacher's expectations for the activity, performance feedback, evaluation, a good source of learning, and the reduction of the difficulty of the task and activity. The learner is better equipped to self-evaluate their capabilities and judge whether or not they have accomplished the goal after having the objective of the scaffolding revealed to them. In addition, providing feedback improves the learner's comprehension and heightens their awareness, making it easier for them to notice when they have made a mistake (Schmidt, 1990; Smagorinsky, 2018). In addition, Nassaji & Swain (1997) and Fithriani (2019) advocate for the employment of feedback, as well as ZPD and

scaffolding. They argue that feedback is a vital part of the interaction between teachers and students in the context of the classroom, and that it leads to enhanced and more in-depth learning.

But, in the process of scaffolding, the positions of informed peer and instructor are only meant to be ephemeral. According to Hartman (2002), the primary objective of the use of scaffolding is to facilitate the development of the learner into an independent problem solver. In addition to aiding in the completion of the activity at hand, scaffolding teaches the learner how to function independently and how to apply what they have learned to other contexts. Hence, help is required only until the beginning learner is capable of working alone. As soon as the student is capable of executing the task independently, the support should be reduced or eliminated.

## METHODS

This study is categorized as a critical review. For this critical review paper, we summarized and evaluate a piece of literature related to the ZPD and Scaffolding theoretical frameworks, its complex and problematic relationship (Xi & Lantolf, 2021). In order to provide a genuine and objective evaluation of the selected text, we read the selected texts in its entirety as well as additional texts that are connected to, then we evaluate those selected writings, and break it down into its major ingredients and then understand how those components relate to, connect with, and possibly affect one another (Bryman, 2016). This comprehensive study not only enables authors to collect evidence-based solutions by critically engaging and synthesizing a large number of journal articles, but also helps authors to develop significant evidence-based research for decision-makers. We intended to investigate ZPD and Scaffolding theory and we apply this concept to English language teaching and learning context. Finally, we address the implications of these theories for language learners' identities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Implementation ZPD and Scaffolding in the Language Classroom**

Students in a language class can be helped along in their learning using a variety of strategies, including being given partial answers, being shown a prompt, being shown an example, and having questions asked of them (Hartman, 2002). Yet, given the strong relationship between ZPD and scaffolding, it is essential for the instructor to have an understanding of the student's ZPD prior to beginning the scaffolding in order to ensure that the learning will be successful. For instance, in a class with students of mixed abilities, in which some students have a greater understanding than others (Chapman and King, 2003), a scaffolding activity could begin by posing the issue to the entire class in order to kick off the discussion. The instructor can lead a discussion on "how to produce a given tense" by posing questions in a step-by-step format, such as "if action occurs in the past, what tenses do we use?" After that, the teacher can move on to verb tense by asking, "what verb do we use in the past tense?" The instructor instructs the class to think of an example on their own. During this practice, more knowledgeable classmates explain how they generate a past expression and display the example; the information that they provide to the beginner student is invaluable to their learning.

Cooperative learning or collaborative work as a scaffolding is the next activity that can be presented as a follow-up to guided discussion or inquiry activity. This activity can be seen as a continuation of the previous activity. This type of education takes the form of a learning activity that encourages participants to collaborate on a shared goal (Song & Chai, 2018). In many instances, novice language learners are aware of

the structure necessary to build a tense, such as an expression in the past tense; nonetheless, they struggle with its use in conversation. Learners are able to share their knowledge, provide assistance to one another with the skills, and practice the application of past expression when working together on projects (Nemati et al., 2019). The ZPD of the learner can be used by the instructor to determine which pupils should be placed in which group in order to make the process of acquiring that skill more manageable.

Nonetheless, in order to make it more efficient, considering that each person has their own unique identities and requirements, the differentiation approach can be applied to group work. It is done by assigning different roles or tasks to different learners dependent on how advanced they are (Tomlinson, 2001). The teacher is able to offer assistance to the better peer because the better peer helps scaffold the learning process for the novice learner. In addition, the learners may be able to successfully practice their skill without the assistance of their companions either during or after the time spent working in groups. Consequently, the teacher should monitor and observe the student in order to look for an opportunity to new prospective zone for the learner, in comparison to both their better classmates and their beginner counterparts (Clapper & Iris, 2015).

### **Language Learners' Identity**

A classroom is made up of a number of students, each of whom has their own unique identity. The identities of these students indicate their capacity and impact the method in which they learn as well as the way in which they view themselves. Identity, according to Norton (2013), is defined as "being numerous," "being a site of struggle," and "constantly altering over time and space" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p.45). The identities of those students shift in different ways depending on what they have gone through and where they come from. Because of this, ZPD and scaffolding can be helpful tools for addressing the various identities that students bring to the learning environment.

As mentioned earlier, the ZPD of each learner is unique, despite the fact that they may conventionally be thought of as being at the same level. In ZPD, the interaction that students have with a teacher or, even better, a peer, is the primary focus, as this is what motivates pupils to become more independent (Lantolf & Thorne, 2007). During this interaction, various students employ different methods to pick up the new understanding, and this method is also strongly tied to how the students position themselves in the learning process.

Learners may find it easier to position themselves during the interaction that takes place in the classroom or throughout the process of scaffolding if they have a distinct zone of proximal development. According to Menard-Warwick (2009), when we contact with one another, we all claim a specific identity not just for ourselves but also for the other person. Learners were able to build aspects of their identities, such as transitioning from the identity of a beginner to that of a more autonomous speaker of the target language, while engaging in interaction inside ZPD or while being scaffolded. As a result of the expansion of their ZPD, they also have more power in the use of language.

In addition to that, once students grasp what they are capable of accomplishing both on their own and with the assistance of others, they are able to negotiate their identity in terms of whether or not they wish to be seen as a novice or a knowledgeable peer. While there are certain students who might be considered experts in one area, but beginners in another, it's important to keep an open mind. A person's awareness of their zone of proximal development (ZPD) gives them the ability to place oneself during contact and grants them the authority to contribute to their own learning. Students do not have an obligation to be the same to other people and can expand their ZPD while simultaneously developing their identity because the ZPD of

each person is different. In addition, because the ZPD of each person is different, students do not have an obligation to appear identical to other individuals.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize, the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is where effective learning takes place, therefore it is essential to determine students' ZPD before offering assistance to those children. Students are able to develop based on their own capabilities as well as through interaction with their surroundings, thanks to ZPD philosophy. The purpose of scaffolding is to broaden the zone of proximal development (ZPD) of each learner and to facilitate interaction between novices and more experienced classmates and instructors. Within the context of such engagement, the students are expected to be more self-reliant in their approach to problem solving and to be prepared to apply the skills they acquire to other aspects of language acquisition. In addition, because there are many different people in the classroom, ZPD provides the opportunity for less experienced students to cultivate and negotiate their identities during the course of their interactions with more experienced classmates. Because it is built on interaction, ZPD establishes the role of the teacher in the classroom not as the owner of the power but rather as a facilitator of assistance. The pupils have the ability to choose where to begin and what kind of identity to cultivate for themselves.

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