

# *Effects of Teachers' Roles as Scaffolding in Classroom Instruction*

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**Abstract:** This paper delves into the significant role of teachers as scaffolding in the classroom, drawing upon the diverse categorization of teacher roles proposed by Hirst, Harmer, and Krashen. Additionally, it explores the application of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) in teaching, emphasizing how teachers can effectively embody their roles in the educational process. Through meticulous analysis of classroom examples, the paper elaborates on the functions of each teacher role and their impact on the teaching and learning process. The research highlights the crucial role of teachers' adaptive and responsive approaches in stimulating student engagement and enhancing academic performance. This finding not only deepens our understanding of teachers' roles but also provides clearer and more effective guidance for teachers to optimize their teaching methods and further promote student learning and development.

## **1. Introduction**

What is teaching? Teaching is one activity that has various modes and functions[1]. Compared with other activities, directly helps people form the systematic cognition towards things in the world through demonstration and narration. Teachers are responsible for the input of knowledge from different avenues to students. Consequently, students are able to receive the knowledge accordingly, as well as transiting it from the declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge. It is indeed that different problems exist in learning process. Representatively, in China, there are around fifty to sixty students in one class, its scale is relatively larger compared with most class size in western country. Normally, the amount of boys and girls tends to be average. These students normally study fundamental English since they are nine years old, and they would receive the further English learning in middle school. Later they could study deeper in middle schools. Many Chinese teachers tend to infuse large amount of knowledge to students and leave students no enough time to differentiate. It seems that the teacher in China is more like a controller (which is mentioned in Harmer's[2] five types teacher's roles). Also, teachers normally supervise the class with such a large scale, not the mistake made by every student could be corrected. Therefore, under this study mode, student's imagination would be limited since they have few chances to exchange opinions and think critically. Since they have less opportunity to use the language, they are more afraid of speaking in front of others.

Naturally, rethinking the roles of teacher in class naturally becomes significant. Recently, according to Daniel and Alyssa[3], the main point of educational work should transfer from "what

students learn” to “how students learn”. In fact, when teachers participate in different tasks, they can show different effects to students, thus playing a helpful role in the learning process. To adapt the teaching mode mentioned above, I will firstly discuss how teachers influence students based on Sociocultural Theory[4] and different teacher’s roles. Then I would like to briefly explain the aim of chosen class (IH Video 8) and how the class is organized. Finally, according to the theoretical content, I will discuss how different teacher roles are integrated into the classroom and the impact of these roles on learning. Under this situation, teachers would be important in the second language learning process. Teachers create the environment and function to force students to develop their language learning. In learning process, teachers help students’ development by using language.

## 2. Theoretical Contents

I will discuss some key concepts and their relationships with teacher’s roles in this part. Primarily, Sociocultural Theory (SCT) is put forward by Vygotsky. SCT indicates that learners are constructed and shaped with cultural and social factors[5]. Meanwhile, SCT emphasizes that human mental functioning is a fundamentally mediated process that is organized by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts”[6]. Thus, people’s recognition can be prompted by cultural artifacts, activities and concepts accordingly. In people’s daily life, they unavoidably involve themselves in different activities, which is also the acceptance of a passive development on their cognition[7]. People’s mental and physical mediation is processed by jointly integrating cultural artifacts, activities and concepts. In this process, it would be convenient for people to use the second language as a tool to mediate. When we communicate with others it would be common to adapt our choice of words or meanings to mediate our mental activity. One typical example is exactly the private speech.

Besides, another important theory is Zone of Proximal Development(ZPD). The definition of ZPD refers to “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers”. One point that makes ZPD different from traditional tests and pedagogies lies in its guidance and indication, namely ZPD is capable of indicating what a student could do by himself in future, while traditional tests simply focus on student’s current performance and grades. In other words, ZPD brings both development acquisition and potentiality. In this process, what function ZPD reflects is the category from interpsychological to intrapsychological. The learner is activated and motivated by ZPD from the condition of “what he is” to “what he not yet is” under the common efforts of teachers and other students[8]. Thus, teachers should recognize students’ developmental potential and create the benign environment, motivating student to be the active participant in learning instead of being a simply knowledge receiver.

Based on theories above, it can be concluded that the assistance from teacher plays the necessary role in student’s study. This “assistance” is also called the scaffolding in education. Scaffolding is the support offered by teachers to those students who cannot handle the problem independently[9]. According to Van de Pol et al.[10], three factors contribute to the scaffolding should be taken into consideration, including contingency, fading and transferring of responsibility. It means that teacher should be responsible for clarifying each student’s need and stipulating appropriate study plans correspondingly. Then it is essential to offer this assistance gradually and pass this knowledge to students as the result. Under this circumstance, students can process the task and summarize the knowledge from it. However, one point should not be neglected is that scaffolding cannot be equivalent to ZPD, specifically, scaffolding focuses on how teachers use students' learning, while ZPD focuses on students' potential and how students develop their thinking.

Thus, from this point of view, a question has been raised: “How is the scaffolding teaching?” Different teachers play the important and diverse role in students’ development[11]. As the result, they can help students with their study differently. For example, student’s initiatives and self-improvement from activity participation can be promoted under the appropriate guidance from teachers. Therefore, teacher’s role could be an essential factor when they scaffold students in study. In Harmer’s book, the name of “facilitator” is used to describe teacher’s images. Different teachers may have different teaching styles depending on the role they intend to play in the classroom. Similarly, teachers can also keep students in the habit of autonomy, thus making learning easier. Instead, teachers may progress the whole teaching pace at their own speed to lead students. Therefore, categorizing different teaching roles is the necessary task for teachers to recognize their importance to students at different stages. According to Harmer, this can be divided into five types: controller, prompter, participant, resource and tutor.

### **2.1. Controller**

The stereotype of controller is to master the teaching pace and infuse knowledge continually without breathing for students. In the book, Harmer mentioned that controller often offers large resources and information to students, then it instructs students to smoothly complete the activity. Teachers can give sufficient examples to elaborate the knowledge, such as certain grammar or vocabulary. However, this way of teaching may restrict students’ imagination. Since students are accustomed to absorb what they have obtained and have less time to think independently. Students may largely rely on the teacher as an only information resource from this way. Meanwhile, fewer practice chances are offered to students, especially in language learning. And also, under this situation, a teacher talking time is created, instead of student talking time, this may demotivate students.

### **2.2. Prompter**

Teachers should help students but not taking in charge of the whole study process. Actually, teacher has duties to instructing and improving students when they come across troubles. As a teacher, he/she should offer students hints, like the phrases or words they may not remember from time to time. The reason why teachers should this is that once the help exists obviously in a direct way, the enthusiasm will be discouraged, the quality of learning quality will decreased as well. Moreover, students need the space to think critically. Another view of prompter is raised by Rindu and Ariyanti [12]. They think that prompter not only serves as the important learning supporter, but also it is a motivator. Teachers who encourage students more would make students’ learning more effective.

### **2.3. Participant**

Participant is a proper role to get along well with students in the learning process. Participating in activities is able to better penetrate students’ problems revealed in activities. In addition, participation can be the motivation for teachers to dedicate themselves into the teaching work, this atmosphere is appreciated by students as well. However, it also has some negative effects. According to Harmer, it is possible for teachers to control activities if they have high-level English competence. Therefore, the appropriate participation in activities could help with students’ learning. More specifically, teachers could present examples by themselves and thus students could get more chances to practice.

## 2.4. Resource

First, it should be clear that teachers have accepted the higher education and absorb much more knowledge than students, and teach students. Fundamentally, teachers themselves are the resources and they have to present these knowledge in class. In the meantime, the teacher could not only be an encyclopedia for students to look for information, but also they can choose proper information from resources like textbooks or internet to apply into practice. Under this circumstance, it is more useful for students to utilize these resources and knowledge.

## 2.5. Tutor

It is important for teachers to be a tutor when making dissertation or large-scale activities. As a tutor, the teacher should not only play the role of prompter, but also the resource givers. When offering the assistance to students, teachers tend to give instructive suggestions and also recommend related reading lists. Moreover, we prefer to view the tutor as a coach, since teachers can guide and support their students with useful resources, to further supervise students' behaviors[13]. However, one notable deficiency of tutor lies in its limitation, it is more suitable for small groups of students or individual tutorial rather than a large scale of class.

## 3. Example Lesson

The course will focus on the topic of business success and teach listening and phonology in the context of English as an international language. In addition, teachers also hope that students pay attention to the prominent chunks as the carrier of information in oral English, develop their listening skills, and develop their ability to pronounce correctly by practicing chunks and highlighted words. The lesson includes four students in upper-intermediate level (B2). The course totally includes seven stages, as follows:

- Introduction: To establish the topic of the lesson.
- Preparation: To establish the context by watching the video and to prepare for the listening task.
- Listening task 1: To highlight the context and listen to the video to focus on the text meaning.
- Listening task 2: To develop the skill of focusing on the main message and the role of prominence.
- Focus on pronunciation: To highlight the role of tone of key units and articulation of syllables.
- Practice: To practice fluent production of spoken chunks.
- Conclusion

This essay will especially focus on the stage between stage 5 and stage 6 (33'00"-43'20"). In order to figure out the role of the teacher in the teaching process,, I took the video "IH Video 8: Listening and Phonology (ESP)" as an example to analyze teacher's roles. In this lesson, the teacher asks students to do some tasks about chunking and practices about prominent words to improve their listening and speaking abilities, the class context is a prestigious watch brand called "Swatch". There are four students in this lesson. The video is excerpted from 18:30 to 28:30, for ten minutes in total.

### 3.1. Controller

In the selected stage, the teacher presents as a controller in the field of giving instructions. The teacher gives proper instructions in proper timing. Based on Harmer, a good teacher knows exactly when to conduct an activity and guide to the next part. The teacher uses sentences like "What is

missing here? Can you fill in other words?" (35'00"), "Have a look at the text and read it to yourself. Decide when you would breathe." (39'25") or "Just discuss these questions in pairs." (39'50"). The teacher plays the role of controller effectively to guide the teaching pace in class. A few times, the teacher would say "OK, let us stop here" during a discussion to ask for the pause, or the teacher would point to each student and talk about what they have written. Thus, he can reasonably ensure that every part of the activity is connected to the previous activity. Meanwhile, through the well-controlled instruction, the unnecessary time waste in class can be decreased, and more available time can be left for students to listen to the video, practise and participate activities.

### 3.2. Prompter

On the one hand, the teacher prompts students by encouraging their behavior in activities. Rindu and Ariyanti mentioned that the prompter could also be the motivator in learning process. Whenever students give their answers or ideas to questions, teachers will praise them with "Okay" or "That is so interesting". This can not only build students' confidence to show themselves, but also create a good learning environment for these students. On the other hand, the teacher uses his knowledge to support students to finish the discourse or handle the problem in the video. In an excerpt (35'50"):

T: This is a...ummm...

S: A sport?

T: the Swatch wants to ...people, to let them feel, oh, this is a good watch. To let them think, oh, I love this watch.

S: maybe...sell?

T: to...to appeal.

We could find in this excerpt, the teacher intends to explain the purpose of the watch company by using the word 'appeal' in the form of a sentence. In fact, the teacher uses simpler sentences to describe the target content as much as possible, which is also a good example of scaffolding. Meanwhile, it is more like a hint that the teacher gives to students. Furthermore, it is the lesson about teaching listening and phonology. The pronunciation of different salient words is significant. The teacher leads students to point out the breathing part of every prominent word or syllables based on high-skilled English knowledge (42'20").

### 3.3. Resource

Actually, the role of resource is presented frequently in class. In the lesson IH 7, the teacher lectures on listening skills and phonics, based on videos that are at the heart of Swatch's success. He plays the video at 34'00" to indicate the discourse that explains the core of success. In addition, as Harmer mentioned, the function of resources can be expressed as teachers' own knowledge. As we discussed above, the teacher elicits students to speak the word "appeal" by explaining it in a context (35'50"). The teacher provides a simple context as input so that students can identify what words should be put in this place. Therefore, we could make it clear that teachers as resources do not give the target words or results directly. Instead, they should provide relevant information as a resource for students to reason and think critically.

### 3.4. Participant

Harmer mentioned that participation in activities can create a relaxed atmosphere in class, which is beneficial to their study. At 42'20", the teacher asks students to choose chunks, then students speak to the teacher, the teacher repeats and students read after him. In this activity, the teacher brings correct articulation cases on chunks and shows them specifically to students, which scaffolds

students by exemplification.

### 3.5. Tutor

In this lesson, the teacher does not give detailed and personal suggestion specially in activities. However, one point is that when the class is collecting key words, the teacher puts forward a question(37'30") that "Is there any words important and ignored?" Accordingly, he gives the answer of Swatch and asks for the reason, no student could notice it since the video talks about the success of Swatch. Therefore, if the word is not mentioned clearly, students will automatically ignore it. The teacher analyzes the problem, gives the reasons, and reminds the students to memorize key words. The teacher in this lesson controls the timing of interrupting and gives proper explanation. That is a combination of resource and prompter.

Back to my own context, the role presented in class is relatively practical in China. As we mentioned above, controller is a very appropriate role, allows each student pay as much attention to what the teacher says as possible. At the same time, as the controller, teachers can control the teaching progress between different activities. In addition, teachers may need more input and resources into the class. Encountering with different information would be beneficial to the critical thinking. That is to say, designing some activities and involving teachers themselves in activities could create good learning atmosphere, which will also encourage students to participate in more activities, and expect to get more useful knowledge from teachers. Moreover, teachers should create more student teaching time to let them discuss their ideas. In this process, teachers could move among different pairs to give suggestions accordingly. Ultimately, any scaffolding should be processed excessively, otherwise it will lead to students' excessive reliance on teachers.

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is easy to find that teacher's role has the directly impact on student's studying. However, the results may not be significant only under the influence of roles. What teachers really need to do is combine the different roles and apply them to different stages of a class to get the most out of it. When a teacher produces input, he or she should make it comprehensible[14]. Teachers acquire language by constantly passing on knowledge. It has relations with the role of controller. At the same time, teachers can be the resource in the process. Then, to enhance understanding, activities should be organized, which can be called interactions, including group work and task description. These tasks provide students with a great deal of productive opportunities. In this process, teachers can act as prompters to help students who are afraid to speak. From another point of view, teachers may be participants in activities with students, providing examples of knowledge and creating a relaxed atmosphere. Last but not least, Teachers should evaluate students according to their needs and put forward instructive suggestions. After receiving feedback, students could correct themselves. Thus, therefore, reasonably constructing students with different roles and using ZPD theory to tap students' potential can make teaching more effective.

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