

Empowering Students through Scaffolding: Enhancing Critical Reading and Text Analysis Skills

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000540>

Received: 20 October 2025; Accepted: 30 October 2025; Published: 18 November 2025

ABSTRACT

Developing students' critical reading and text analysis skills is essential in today's information-driven society. However, many learners struggle with these competencies due to insufficient reading strategies, limited prior knowledge, and inadequate instructional support. Scaffolding, rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, offers a structured approach that enhances comprehension and analytical abilities by providing temporary, tailored assistance that gradually fades as students gain independence. This study explores the role of scaffolding in fostering critical reading skills, synthesizing relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical research to propose a comprehensive instructional model. Existing literature demonstrates that scaffolding strategies—such as guided reading, thinkalouds, and metacognitive support—significantly improve students' ability to engage with complex texts. However, gaps remain in understanding how scaffolding fosters higher-order critical analysis, particularly in digital and multimodal reading environments. Additionally, limited research addresses the long-term effects of scaffolding on students' independent learning. This paper introduces a conceptual framework integrating Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, and Cognitive Load Theory to illustrate how scaffolding enhances deep textual engagement. The findings suggest that scaffolding not only improves comprehension but also cultivates analytical reasoning, metacognitive awareness, and learner autonomy. The implications highlight the need for differentiated scaffolding strategies to accommodate diverse learners, the integration of digital scaffolding tools, and the incorporation of scaffolding within innovative pedagogical models such as flipped classrooms. Future research should explore the role of AI-driven adaptive scaffolding and assess its long-term impact on critical literacy. By addressing these gaps, educators and policymakers can develop more effective instructional strategies that empower students as critical thinkers and lifelong learners.

Keywords— Scaffolding ,Critical Reading ,Text Analysis , Metacognition, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

INTRODUCTION

Teaching critical reading and text analysis is an important part of every academic discipline in today's educational environment. It is also important for academic performance because reading critically is a skill that enables students to develop analytical skills and critical thinking, which can be beneficial for them in making informed opinions and sound decisions both in academic and professional contexts (Niculescu & Dragomir, 2023). At the same time though,

many students have difficulty acquiring these skills, whether due to poor background knowledge, less optimal reading strategies, and the heterogeneous nature of language proficiency. Such challenges can inhibit their capacity to engage critically with texts, suggesting a need for instructional interventions that provide structural support and guidance.

Scaffolding which is deeply rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is definitely an important instructional approach to bridging these gaps. It often involves the arrangement in making a gradual structured support for

learners to become more independent and encourage for learners' autonomy, skills and creativity (de Leon & Hermoso, 2020). Utilising scaffolding strategies in reading, such as guided reading, think-aloud, and collaborative learning, have been found to have a positive impact on comprehension and analytical skills (Narbayevna, 2025). Scaffolding does not only improve reading ability but also prepares learners to be more self-sufficient and confident in their own skills by tailoring support to the needs of individual learners.

The significance of scaffolding in teaching critical reading encompasses beyond academic achievement as it equips students with essential skills for lifelong learning and the ability to appropriately analyse every day's reading materials. This skill set equips students with the tools needed to critically analyse what they encounter in a world swamped with text. Additionally, scaffolding allows educators to provide individualised support, addressing the unique challenges faced by students from different socio-economic backgrounds (Tan, 2024). As a result, the inclusion of scaffolding strategies in reading instruction is not only a professional necessity, but also a way to back students as critical-thinking, well-informed individuals.

Although scaffolding has proven to strengthen critical reading and text analysis skills, its ideal implementation is still hindered by certain challenges. Existing research has mostly focused on the efficacy of scaffolding strategies in improving reading comprehension (Belland et al., 2017; Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021). However, studies that have been examining how these strategies help to foster critical reading and analytical abilities are still much limited and scarce. Moreover, while some studies have explored scaffolding techniques in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, limited research exists on their application in diverse educational settings (Samsonova, 2024). Additionally, the integration of metacognitive scaffolding within flipped classroom models remains underexplored, indicating a gap in understanding how these combined approaches can enhance critical reading skills (Van et al., 2022). In order to create more successful teaching strategies that enable students to interact critically with texts in a variety of learning contexts, these gaps need to be addressed.

This conceptual paper discovers the role of scaffolding in developing students' critical reading and text analysis skills thus contributing to the broader discourse on effective pedagogical strategies in literacy education. The study provides a theoretical summary of contemporary literature while proposing an integrated framework for scaffolding which aligns with existing cognitive and sociocultural learning theories. Key discussions include the necessity of differentiated scaffolding approaches to accommodate diverse learner needs, the interplay between metacognitive and affective scaffolding, and the potential of technology-enhanced scaffolding tools. The paper also introduces a conceptual model illustrating how structured scaffolding interventions can progressively cultivate independent critical reading skills. The primary research objectives are to identify best practices in scaffolding critical reading, evaluate its impact on student engagement and comprehension, and propose a systematic approach to scaffolded instruction in educational settings.

The rest of the paper is following this structure: The next section reviews relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies on scaffolding and critical reading, highlighting key trends and gaps in the literature. This is followed by a presentation of the proposed conceptual model and its implications for instructional design. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of gaps in literature and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empowering Students Through Scaffolding: Enhancing Critical Reading and Text Analysis Skills

Scaffolding is one of many critical instructional approaches that is used by teachers and language instructors to support students in developing essential reading and analytical skills. Scaffolding starts by providing structured guidance and over time transferring that responsibility to learners, thus fostering a deeper engagement with texts, enhancing comprehension, and strengthening critical thinking. This literature review synthesizes current research on scaffolding in reading instruction, focusing on its role in fostering critical reading and text analysis, relevant theoretical frameworks, and existing research gaps that need further exploration

The Role of Scaffolding in Developing Critical Reading and Text Analysis Skills

Scaffolding, as an instructional technique, provides temporary support to students as they develop new skills, gradually reducing assistance as they gain independence (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). In the context of critical reading and text analysis, scaffolding plays a crucial role in helping students engage deeply with texts, interpret implicit meanings, and evaluate arguments (Langer, 2001). Effective scaffolding strategies include guided reading, think-aloud, questioning techniques, and collaborative discussions, all of which enable students to process information more critically (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

One of the primary ways scaffolding enhances critical reading is by breaking down complex texts into manageable parts. Research has shown that students struggle with higher-order comprehension tasks when exposed to challenging texts without sufficient support (McNamara, 2007). Scaffolding mitigates this challenge by providing structured steps, such as pre-reading activities, annotation strategies, and teacher-led discussions, which allow students to develop analytical skills progressively (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Additionally, scaffolding fosters metacognitive awareness, which is essential for text analysis. When students are taught to reflect on their reading strategies and monitor their comprehension, they become more adept at identifying biases, detecting logical fallacies, and constructing well-reasoned arguments (Paris & Winograd, 1990). Research suggests that students who receive metacognitive scaffolding show improved critical thinking and a greater ability to synthesize information across multiple texts (Zhang & Duke, 2008).

Theoretical Foundations of Scaffolding in Reading Instruction

Scaffolding is deeply rooted in **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory** (1978), which posits that learning occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the space between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. In reading instruction, scaffolding within the ZPD ensures that students engage with challenging texts at an appropriate level, preventing frustration while fostering skill development (Reynolds, 2017).

Another relevant framework is **Cognitive Load Theory** (Sweller, 1988), which emphasizes the importance of managing the cognitive demands placed on learners. Scaffolding reduces extraneous cognitive load by providing step-by-step guidance, allowing students to focus their cognitive resources on deep textual analysis rather than decoding complex language structures (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006).

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) also underpins scaffolding strategies in reading. This model outlines a structured approach in which teachers initially provide extensive support (e.g., modeling strategies), then gradually transition to guided practice, and ultimately encourage students to apply their skills independently. Studies have found that classrooms implementing this model see improved student engagement and deeper textual analysis (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

More recently, **Metacognitive Scaffolding Theory** (Azevedo & Hadwin, 2005) has gained attention for its role in self-regulated learning. This theory suggests that when students receive scaffolding that promotes selfquestioning, goal-setting, and strategy reflection, they develop stronger analytical skills. Integrating metacognitive scaffolding into reading instruction has been shown to enhance students' ability to critically engage with texts, particularly in digital and multimedia environments (Moos & Azevedo, 2008).

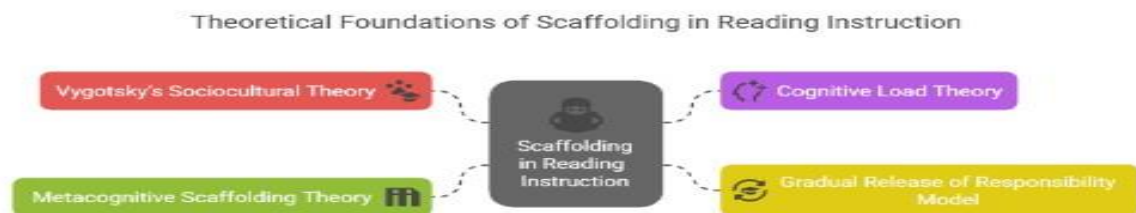


Fig 1 Theoretical foundation of scaffolding in reading instruction

The figure is a conceptual diagram titled "**Theoretical Foundations of Scaffolding in Reading Instruction.**" At the center, there is a dark gray box labeled "**Scaffolding in Reading Instruction,**" which is connected to **four surrounding-coloured boxes, each representing a theoretical foundation:**

1. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Red box with a paw print icon)
2. Cognitive Load Theory (Purple box with a globe icon)
3. Metacognitive Scaffolding Theory (Green box with a building icon)
4. Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Yellow box with a circular arrow icon)

Dashed lines connect each theoretical foundation to the central concept, visually indicating their role in supporting scaffolding in reading instruction.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

Despite extensive research on scaffolding in reading instruction, several critical gaps remain.

Limited Focus on Critical Reading Beyond Comprehension:

While many studies highlight the role of scaffolding in improving reading comprehension (Belland et al., 2017), fewer have explored its impact on higher-order critical reading skills, such as argument evaluation and intertextual analysis. More research is needed to examine how scaffolding fosters critical engagement with texts in diverse academic disciplines.

Underrepresentation of Scaffolding in Digital Reading Environments:

With the increasing prevalence of digital and multimodal texts, it is essential to investigate how scaffolding strategies can be adapted for online reading. Studies suggest that digital platforms require unique scaffolding techniques, such as hyperlinked annotations and interactive discussion forums, to support critical analysis (Cho & Afflerbach, 2017). However, empirical research in this area remains scarce.

Integration of Scaffolding with Emerging Pedagogical Models:

While scaffolding has been widely studied in traditional classrooms, its application within innovative instructional models—such as **flipped classrooms** and **inquiry-based learning**—remains underexplored (Ling & Harun, 2014). Future studies should examine how scaffolding interacts with these models to enhance student engagement and autonomy in reading instruction.

Scaffolding Strategies for Different Educational Contexts:

Current research predominantly focuses on scaffolding in general education settings, with limited exploration of its effectiveness in multiple educational contexts. Thus, there is a need for further research on the impact of various scaffolding approaches across different educational contexts, particularly in ESL settings (Tatum & Huber, 2020).

Expanding research to include these diverse contexts is crucial for developing equitable instructional practices.

Relevant Past Studies

Author(s)	Year	Title	Methodology	Key Findings
Belland et al.	2017	Effects of Scaffolding on Reading Comprehension	LITERATURE REVIEW	Scaffolding is a highly effective intervention in classrooms; providing critical, compelling, and linguistically

				scaffolded literature can enhance comprehension for students.
Elizabeth Bunga DU et.al	2024	Enhancing Critical Reading Through Metacognitive Scaffolding in Flipped-Classroom Settings	Experimental study with Grade 9 students	Integrating metacognitive reading, scaffolding strategies, and flipped classroom approaches improves critical reading skills.
Wanzek, Al Otaiba, & McMaster, 2020	2020	Intensive Reading Interventions for The Elementary Grades.	Instructional strategies and recommendations	Implementing specific instructional practices helps students read, understand, and engage with complex and foundational content.
Richards Maldonado	2023	Reader Quizzer: Augmenting Research Papers with Just-In-Time Learning Questions to Facilitate Deeper Understanding	Development and evaluation of an augmented reading interface leveraging ChatGPT to generate comprehension and analysis questions	The augmented reading interface facilitates deeper understanding and development of critical reading skills by co-locating comprehension and analysis questions within academic papers.
Palani et al.	2023	Relatedly: Scaffolding Literature Reviews with Existing Related Work Sections	Design and user study of a system that scaffolds exploring and reading multiple related work paragraphs on a topic	The system helps scholars generate more coherent, insightful, and comprehensive topic outlines by spotlighting unexplored information and reducing redundancy.

Table 2: Previous related studies

This table provides an overview of recent research efforts focused on scaffolding strategies to enhance critical reading and text analysis skills among students.

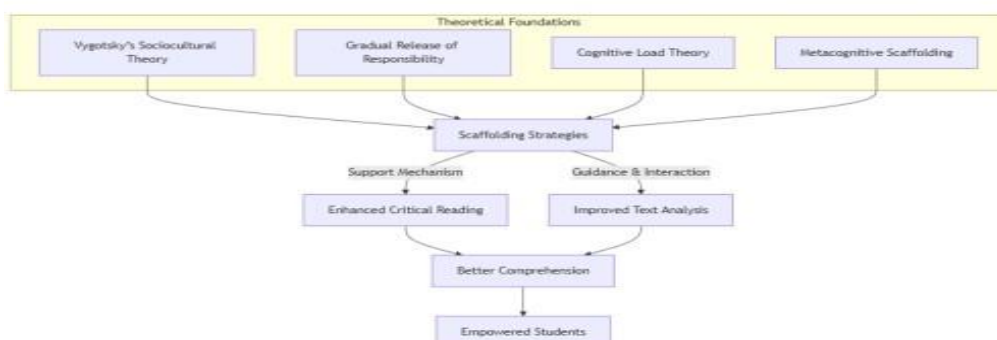


Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework for Scaffolding to Enhance Critical Reading & Text Analysis

The conceptual framework for "Empowering Students Through Scaffolding: Enhancing Critical Reading and Text Analysis Skills" integrates several educational theories to elucidate the components and their interrelationships. Central to this framework is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which posits that learning is inherently a social process, occurring through interactions within one's cultural context. A pivotal concept here is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from more knowledgeable individuals

Scaffolding operates within this zone, providing tailored support that is gradually withdrawn as learners gain proficiency. Complementing this is the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Model, which outlines a structured approach to shifting learning responsibility from teacher to student. This model comprises phases such as focused instruction, guided practice, collaborative learning, and independent tasks, each designed to build student autonomy

Additionally, Cognitive Load Theory emphasizes managing the cognitive demands placed on learners to optimize information processing and retention. Integrating Metacognitive Scaffolding encourages students to reflect on their thinking processes, thereby enhancing self-regulation and deeper comprehension

In this framework, scaffolding strategies are employed within the ZPD to support critical reading and text analysis. Through the GRR model, responsibility is progressively transferred to students, aligning with their developing competencies. Attention to cognitive load ensures that instructional support is optimized without overwhelming learners. Metacognitive scaffolding further empowers students by fostering awareness of their learning strategies, leading to improved critical reading skills. Collectively, these components interact to create a cohesive approach that enhances students' analytical abilities through structured and supportive instructional practices.

DISCUSSION

Despite extensive research on scaffolding and its role in student learning, several gaps persist in the literature, particularly in the context of critical reading and text analysis skills. First, while studies have validated Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, there is a lack of empirical research on how digital scaffolding tools (e.g., AI-assisted reading guides, adaptive learning platforms) specifically support students' higher-order analytical thinking in diverse educational settings. Additionally, most studies have focused on teacher-led scaffolding, with insufficient exploration of peer scaffolding and selfregulated scaffolding strategies and their long-term impact on independent critical reading skills.

A promising area for future research involves cross-disciplinary approaches, integrating cognitive science, educational technology, and linguistics to examine how scaffolding enhances deep comprehension across subject domains. Research could also explore cultural and linguistic variations, as many existing studies predominantly focus on Western educational contexts, neglecting multilingual and multicultural student populations. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to assess how scaffolding interventions influence students' analytical reading skills over extended periods.

From a policy perspective, educational institutions should develop scaffolding-inclusive curricula, ensuring that teacher training programs emphasize differentiated scaffolding techniques for diverse learners. Policymakers must also consider equity in access by investing in technology-enhanced scaffolding tools, particularly for students in underserved communities. Future research should further examine how AI-driven adaptive learning systems can provide real-time scaffolding tailored to individual student needs, thereby bridging the gap between traditional and digital literacy development.

Addressing these research gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of how scaffolding can empower students in mastering critical reading and text analysis, ultimately enhancing their academic success and lifelong learning skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scaffolding can be effectively integrated into critical reading lessons to support learners' gradual movement from surface comprehension to deeper, independent analysis of texts. Instructors can begin by modelling critical questioning strategies—such as identifying authorial bias, recognizing persuasive techniques, and evaluating evidence—before gradually transferring responsibility to students. Using think-aloud demonstrations, guided discussions, and structured questioning prompts, teachers help students unpack complex ideas and challenge assumptions embedded within texts. As learners become more confident, scaffolds can be progressively withdrawn, encouraging them to generate their own critical questions and interpretations. This gradual release model fosters both cognitive engagement and autonomy, ensuring that critical literacy develops as an active, reflective process rather than a teacher-led exercise. Below is a sample of a mini lesson plan that can be used by teachers to integrate scaffolding into the lessons.

Mini Lesson Plan: Scaffolding Critical Reading

Topic: Developing Critical Reading through Scaffolding

Level: Intermediate to Upper-Intermediate ESL Learners

Duration: 60 minutes

Text Type: Short opinion article or editorial (e.g., “The Role of Social Media in Education”) **Lesson**

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify the main argument and supporting evidence in a text.
2. Recognize bias, assumptions, and persuasive language.
3. Use guided questions to critically evaluate the author's stance.

Stage 1: Pre-Reading (Scaffolding – Activation & Prediction) Teacher Role: Provide background context and model questioning.

Activities:

Brainstorm prior knowledge about the topic.

Predict the author's viewpoint based on the title and visuals.

Guiding Questions:

1. What do you already know about this issue?
2. What do you think the writer's opinion might be? Why?

Stage 2: While-Reading (Scaffolding – Guided Comprehension) Teacher Role: Model think-aloud questioning, then guide pair work.

Activities:

Read the text in sections; pause to discuss author's purpose and tone.

Highlight key claims and evidence.

Guiding Questions:

1. What is the author trying to convince the reader to believe or do?
2. Which words or phrases show the author's bias or emotional tone?
3. What evidence is used to support the main argument? Is it convincing?

Stage 3: Post-Reading (Scaffolding – Critical Response)

Teacher Role: Gradually reduce support and encourage independent thinking.

Activities:

Group discussion: Students evaluate the text's credibility and reflect on their own stance.

Individual reflection or short written response.

Guiding Questions:

1. Do you agree or disagree with the author? Why?
2. What assumptions does the author make about readers or society?
3. How would you respond if you were to write a counter-argument?

Stage 4: Extension / Independent Practice

Students apply the same questioning framework to a new text individually, demonstrating transfer of critical reading strategies without direct teacher scaffolding.

CONCLUSION

This literature review has explored the critical role of scaffolding in enhancing students' critical reading and text analysis skills, emphasizing its foundation in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model. The findings highlight that scaffolding fosters higher-order thinking, independent learning, and deep textual engagement by providing structured support that gradually diminishes as students develop autonomy. Research has also shown that teacher-led scaffolding, peer collaboration, and digital scaffolding tools contribute to improved reading comprehension and analytical reasoning across diverse learning environments.

Despite its proven benefits, key gaps in the literature remain, particularly regarding the long-term impact of scaffolding on independent critical reading skills, the effectiveness of technology-enhanced scaffolding in diverse educational settings, and the role of cultural and linguistic factors in shaping scaffolding strategies. Future research should adopt interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from cognitive science, educational technology, and linguistics to design more inclusive and adaptive scaffolding models. Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to assess how scaffolding interventions support students' lifelong learning and literacy development.

The potential of empowering students through scaffolding extends beyond academic settings, equipping learners with the analytical skills necessary for success in higher education, the workplace, and society. Policymakers should advocate for scaffolding-inclusive curricula, while educators must receive specialized training to implement effective scaffolding strategies. Furthermore, collaboration between academicians,

polycymakers, and industries is crucial to developing innovative scaffolding frameworks that bridge the gap between traditional literacy practices and modern digital learning environments.

Ultimately, scaffolding serves as a transformative educational tool, fostering critical reading, independent thinking, and lifelong learning. By addressing the existing gaps and leveraging cross-disciplinary insights, future research can further enhance its impact, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, gain the analytical skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our gratitude to the members of Academy of Language Studies UiTM Kedah and the campus management for making the publication of this article possible

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