

# Exploring Peer Scaffolding Strategies through Discourse Analysis in Senior High School

Indira Jill M. Tampipi<sup>1</sup>, Joanne Bermillo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education – Division of Bukidnon, Bernardo Pajo Nietes Integrated School

<sup>2</sup>Faculty, Central Mindanao University, University Town, Musuan, Bukidnon 8710 Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored peer scaffolding strategies among senior high school students during collaborative group work through discourse analysis. Conducted at Kiburiao National High School in Bukidnon, Philippines, the research examined how learners used language to support one another cognitively, socially, and linguistically in authentic classroom interactions. Data were gathered through classroom observations, audio-recorded group discussions, and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. The analysis revealed nine interrelated themes organized under three focal areas. Under peer scaffolding strategies, students employed clarification and simplification, role assignment, and active engagement to sustain collaborative dialogue. Under the influence of learning and participation, peer interaction enhanced motivation and engagement, improved understanding and communication skills, and fostered ownership of learning. Under peer scaffolding challenges, students encountered task imbalance, emotional barriers, and communication breakdowns that sometimes hindered group cohesion.

Findings demonstrated that peer scaffolding is a dynamic, socially situated process that enhances comprehension, confidence, and collective responsibility among learners. Despite recurring challenges, the discourse of collaboration reflected empathy, adaptability, and shared problem-solving. The study concludes that structured, supportive group work can transform classroom interaction into a space for mutual learning and linguistic growth. It recommends that teachers intentionally design collaborative tasks that ensure equitable participation, cultivate emotional safety, and strengthen communicative competence to maximize the potential of peer scaffolding in multilingual classrooms.

**Keywords:** peer scaffolding, discourse analysis, collaborative learning, senior high school, multilingual classrooms

## INTRODUCTION

Learning is a social process that thrives on interaction, communication, and shared meaning-making. In the classroom, these processes are made visible through peer collaboration, where students co-construct understanding and support one another's learning. The concept of scaffolding, first introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) and later grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, underscores that learning occurs most effectively when learners engage in guided interaction within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Within this framework, peers act as both learners and facilitators—providing cognitive, linguistic, and emotional support that enables others to perform tasks they might not be able to accomplish independently.

Building on Vygotsky's ideas, Donato (1994) expanded the concept of scaffolding into what he termed collective scaffolding, in which learners collaborate to construct knowledge through reciprocal dialogue jointly. Similarly, Swain, Brooks, and Tocalli-Beller (2002) emphasized that peer dialogue serves as a space where students reflect, negotiate meaning, and co-develop linguistic competence. Mercer (2000) further illustrated how language operates as a cultural tool for thinking together, while Gee (2014) situated discourse as the medium through which identity, power, and meaning are enacted. Collectively, these foundational scholars demonstrate that learning through talk—particularly peer talk—is a deeply social and discursive act.

In the 21st-century classroom, peer scaffolding has become increasingly significant as educational systems shift toward learner-centered, collaborative, and communicative approaches. Cooperative learning research consistently shows that structured peer collaboration promotes critical thinking, engagement, and higher academic performance (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Gillies, 2016). This perspective also aligns with the goals of the Philippine K–12 curriculum, which emphasizes communicative competence, teamwork, and independent learning as essential outcomes of basic education. Within this framework, teachers are encouraged to design activities that foster student autonomy through guided interaction—making peer scaffolding a highly relevant instructional approach in local classrooms.

However, effective collaboration is not guaranteed; it depends on the quality of discourse, equitable participation, and the presence of emotional and social safety within groups. As Jin, T., Jiang, Y., Gu, M. M., & Chen, J. (2022) observe, peer interaction plays a crucial role in language learning. However, it can be undermined by power dynamics, lack of confidence, or ineffective communication. Recent studies reaffirm the evolving nature of peer scaffolding and the challenges it entails. Salarvand, Mousavi, and Rahimi (2023) revealed that even in online and hybrid environments, students encounter cooperation and communication barriers that hinder meaningful interaction. Usop, J. L. (2024), in a study of Filipino senior high school students, found that socio-cultural and emotional barriers—such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and hesitation to express opinions—significantly affected learners’ participation in group tasks. Likewise, Manuel (2025) demonstrated that scaffolding strategies like guided questioning, modeling, and visual aids enhance engagement and self-efficacy, particularly for students who struggle academically or emotionally. These recent findings affirm that emotional and affective dimensions of learning are integral to successful scaffolding, not merely cognitive or structural supports.

While numerous studies have examined peer collaboration through quantitative or observational lenses, fewer have focused on the language that mediates these interactions. Despite the potential of discourse analysis to capture the subtleties of peer interaction, it remains underutilized in Philippine classroom research. Studies that do explore scaffolding often rely on surveys or structured observations, missing the rich detail that naturally occurring language can provide. In such cases, researchers may overlook how students subtly prompt one another, negotiate misunderstandings, manage group dynamics, and build social cohesion—all of which are essential to effective group learning.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on the discourse of senior high school students from Kiburiao National High School (KNHS) in Bukidnon as they engage in collaborative group activities. These students, many of whom form self-selected, familiar peer groups, regularly participate in teacher-facilitated performance tasks that require coordination, negotiation, and co-construction of academic outputs. The KNHS context—characterized by its multilingual student body, strong emphasis on group-based activities, and grounded community relationships—provides a valuable setting for examining peer scaffolding as a situated, language-based process.

This research also incorporates teacher perspectives to understand how scaffolding is facilitated, encouraged, or unintentionally hindered in the classroom. Teachers’ insights offer contextual understanding of how collaborative tasks are structured, how student interactions are monitored, and what expectations guide peer support. By combining qualitative discourse analysis with thematic analysis, the study aims to uncover both the observable strategies and the underlying patterns that shape peer scaffolding in group work settings.

By closely examining naturally occurring talk among student groups and triangulating this with interviews and classroom observation, the study sheds light on the social and linguistic processes that drive peer learning. It highlights the ways students scaffold one another’s thinking, regulate task completion, manage group roles, and negotiate meaning—all through the lens of real-time classroom discourse.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on discourse-based learning and peer collaboration by highlighting how emotional safety, equitable participation, and communicative competence intersect in classroom discourse. It underscores that peer scaffolding is not a static instructional technique but a dynamic, socially mediated process—one that requires empathy, structure, and reflection. Insights from this research can guide teachers in designing collaborative tasks that nurture both cognitive growth and emotional resilience, ensuring that every student’s voice contributes meaningfully to shared understanding.

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## Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the peer scaffolding strategies used by senior high school students in a collaborative classroom setting through discourse analysis. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What peer scaffolding strategies do students employ during group discussions and collaborative tasks?
2. How do peer scaffolding strategies influence learning and participation among students?
3. What challenges do students encounter in performing peer scaffolding during collaborative work?

Through these questions, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how peer scaffolding unfolds in authentic classroom interactions and how emotional, social, and linguistic factors shape the learning process in a multilingual senior high school context.

## Scope and Delimitation

This study focused on exploring peer scaffolding strategies manifested through the natural discourse of Grade 11 Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students at Kiburiao National High School, Bukidnon. It examined how students used language to support one another cognitively, socially, and emotionally during collaborative group work and how these interactions influenced participation and learning outcomes. The research was confined to one naturally formed group of eight students and three teachers who regularly engaged in group-based performance tasks. Data were drawn from one classroom activity—a manuscript speech task—recorded and analyzed using discourse and thematic analysis.

The study was delimited to spoken peer interactions and teacher interviews; written outputs, nonverbal cues, and longitudinal effects of peer scaffolding were not examined. Additionally, the findings reflect the unique multilingual context of a single public senior high school and therefore may not be fully generalizable to other disciplines or settings. Nevertheless, the study offers valuable insight into how peer scaffolding operates in authentic classroom discourse and provides implications for improving collaborative learning practices in similar educational environments.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using discourse analysis to examine peer scaffolding strategies as they naturally occur during collaborative group work. A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore student experiences, interpret meaning from interactions, and analyze the linguistic mechanisms underlying peer assistance. Discourse analysis, in particular, offers a powerful lens for examining how students use language to co-construct understanding, manage tasks, and support one another's cognitive and emotional needs during group learning (Gee, 2014). By focusing on spoken discourse captured during actual classroom tasks, this study addressed not only what scaffolding strategies were used but also how they were delivered, interpreted, and negotiated in interaction. It also allowed for an in-depth understanding of the social dimension of learning, emphasizing communication, context, and power dynamics. This design was complemented by thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and strategies, and by triangulation of data through student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observation.

### Research Locale

The study was conducted at Kiburiao National High School, a public secondary school in Bukidnon, Philippines. The research focused on Grade 11 students enrolled in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand, where performance tasks often require collaborative outputs such as oral presentations and manuscript speeches. English is the formal medium of instruction, but students frequently use Bisaya or Filipino during planning and informal exchanges, especially in group work contexts. This multilingual environment reflects a rich and interactive learning culture, ideal for analyzing how peer scaffolding emerges in a naturalistic setting.

## Participants

The study involved eight Grade 11 students and three teachers, selected through purposive sampling. The student participants were members of a naturally formed group that regularly worked together on collaborative activities. Based on initial interviews, these students had established rapport and shared a positive working dynamic, making them ideal for exploring authentic peer scaffolding practices. The three teacher participants were selected based on their consistent integration of group work into their teaching and their familiarity with discourse-based instruction. Their insights provided context for how scaffolding was structured, encouraged, or hindered in classroom settings.

## Data Collection

To gather comprehensive and context-rich data, multiple techniques were employed. Group work sessions were observed during regularly scheduled classes to preserve ecological validity. The researcher recorded approximately 45 minutes of group interaction involving the selected students as they worked on a manuscript speech task. No interference was made during the sessions, allowing natural interactions to emerge. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, preserving code-switching and pauses to retain authenticity and nuance. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each student to explore how they perceived their roles, the support they gave or received, and what strategies they found most effective. Teacher interviews were also conducted to understand how collaborative tasks were designed and monitored, and to gain their perspectives on student engagement and scaffolding behaviors.

## Instrumentation and Validation

Data for this study were collected using two main instruments: (1) semi-structured interview guides and (2) audio recordings of group work sessions. These tools were designed to gather insights into the strategies students used to support one another, as well as teachers' perceptions of how peer scaffolding manifests during group activities.

Since the instruments were researcher-developed and not standardized, they underwent a validation process using Lawshe's (1975) Content Validity Ratio (CVR) method. A panel of three experts—comprising the school's Research Coordinator and two master's degree holders with units in doctoral studies—reviewed the instruments to evaluate the relevance and clarity of each item. Each expert was asked to categorize items as “essential,” “useful but not essential,” or “not necessary.” The CVR for each item was calculated using the formula:  $CVR = (n_e - N/2) / (N/2)$ , where  $n_e$  is the number of experts rating the item as essential, and  $N$  is the total number of experts (in this case, 3). Items meeting the minimum CVR threshold based on Lawshe's table were retained, while those below the cut-off were revised or discarded. This process ensured that the instruments were valid, focused, and appropriate for capturing rich qualitative data relevant to the research questions.

## Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework proposed by Naeem et al. (2023), which is compatible with discourse-analytic approaches. The phases included familiarization with the data through transcription and repeated listening, initial coding of scaffolding behaviors such as prompting, rephrasing, role assignment, and elaboration, and grouping codes into broader themes. These themes were reviewed for coherence and named accordingly, then synthesized into a coherent narrative. Illustrative quotes from the transcripts were used to support the analysis. Teacher interview data were triangulated with student data to validate interpretations and capture multiple perspectives.

To ensure trustworthiness and research rigor, strategies such as triangulation, peer debriefing, and audit trails were used. Triangulation was achieved by comparing findings across multiple data sources, including student discourse, student interviews, and teacher interviews. Transferability was strengthened through a detailed account of the school context and participant selection. Dependability was established through consistent coding procedures, while confirmability was maintained by documenting all methodological decisions and reflexive notes taken throughout the research process.



## Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the school administration prior to the start of the study. All participants were given informed consent forms explaining their rights, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and withdrawal without penalty. For minors, parental consent was also secured. Participants were assured of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, and audio data were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher. Interviews were scheduled at the students' convenience, and they were encouraged to speak in any language they were comfortable with. This ensured that responses were sincere, relaxed, and reflective of their authentic thoughts and experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Peer Scaffolding Strategies

The study reveals three major themes under peer scaffolding strategies frequently used by students. (1) Clarification and Simplification Strategies, (2) Role Assignment, and (3) Active Engagement and Participation Strategies. These themes reveal how students actively support one another to enhance comprehension, organization, and participation in collaborative learning tasks.

#### Clarification and Simplification Strategies

The analysis revealed that students frequently employed clarification and simplification strategies during group work to bridge gaps in understanding. These strategies—such as explanation, rephrasing, and the use of real-life examples—enabled students to simplify complex ideas and make them more accessible to all members. Students often broke down challenging concepts into simpler terms or rephrased their peers' ideas to make them easier to grasp. They also relied on familiar experiences and scenarios to clarify theoretical concepts, making abstract ideas more tangible and relatable.

As Participant 1 shared, "One of my classmates, who is good at that, took the time to explain it to me in a way that made sense. She broke it down step by step to make it clear to me." Similarly, Participant 3 noted, "When I struggle to understand something, my classmates usually help me properly by explaining it clearly and sharing their ideas or opinions." These statements show how peers not only clarified lessons but also personalized their explanations to match each other's learning needs. When further simplification was needed, students provided concrete illustrations—such as Participant 4's statement: "I also explain to them what I understood about the topic, and if they still find it hard to understand, I give them examples that are easy to understand." Participant 5 further emphasized the importance of using accessible language, saying, "My classmate explained it step-by-step in a way that was easy to follow using vernacular or the Bisaya language and even gave me tips to remember it better." Participant 7 echoed this by stating, "I break things down into simpler explanations and give examples to make it relatable."

These responses demonstrate how students scaffold one another's understanding by simplifying complex content through explanation, rephrasing, and contextual examples. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing the value of peer-led scaffolding in promoting collaborative meaning-making (Casinto, C. D., 2023; Alzubi, A. A., Nazim, M., & Ahamad, J. 2024). Clarification strategies serve as social tools that support collective comprehension and deepen conceptual learning Soekarno, M., & Ting, S. H. (2020). Moreover, the practice of using vernacular and relatable examples reflects what Smit, J., & van Eerde, H. (2011) describe as contextualized scaffolding, where learners adapt their communication to peers' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In this light, peer scaffolding emerges as a dynamic and socially grounded process in which students co-construct understanding through clarification and simplification.

#### Role Assignment

While clarification and simplification focus on conceptual understanding, the next theme—role assignment—highlights the organizational aspects of collaboration. Role assignment emerged as another key peer scaffolding strategy that helped students organize their group work effectively and ensure equitable participation. By dividing tasks according to each member's strengths, students fostered a sense of accountability and shared

responsibility within the group. This approach not only balanced the workload but also motivated members to contribute meaningfully, thereby enhancing the team's overall efficiency and collaboration.

As Participant 1 explained, “We divide the tasks based on our strengths and interests, depending on who is good at which part.” Similarly, Participant 2 said, “I divide the tasks among my groupmates based on their strengths. For example, if someone is good at drawing, I give that part to them. If someone else has good handwriting, I assign them to do the writing.” These statements show that students considered one another’s competencies to create a more comfortable and efficient workflow. Participant 4 highlighted inclusivity, saying, “I make sure that they can share their own ideas and opinions about the activity.” Participant 5 supported this, stating, “We start by discussing goals and assigning roles based on everyone’s strengths and where they feel comfortable. For example, someone good at writing handles documentation, while others take care of research, designing, or presenting. We make sure that everyone has a role and contributes to the project.” Finally, Participant 6 added, “When working with classmates, we usually start by discussing the task and dividing the work,” underscoring how clear task division early on set shared expectations and guided smooth collaboration.

These practices resonate with contemporary research emphasizing the role of structured collaboration in peer learning. According to Hussaini, M. (2024), assigning roles based on strengths promotes positive interdependence, where group members rely on each other’s contributions to achieve a shared goal. Similarly, Lu, H. S., & Smiles, R. (2022) found that equitable task distribution increases engagement and accountability in cooperative settings. More recent studies (Zhou, T., & Colomer, J., 2024; Wilson, K. A., Brickman, P., & Brame, C. J., 2018) also highlight that defined roles enhance both individual responsibility and collective achievement in team-based learning. Hence, the participants’ experiences affirm that thoughtful role assignment not only distributes work fairly but also reinforces collaboration, leadership, and mutual support within peer scaffolding contexts.

### **Active Engagement and Participation Strategies**

Transitioning from organizational strategies to interactional dynamics, the third theme highlights how students maintain participation and focus within peer groups. The data revealed that students employed active engagement and participation strategies to facilitate collaborative learning. These included guiding questions and behavioral cues that helped maintain focus, promote inclusivity, and regulate group dynamics. Classroom observations indicated that students frequently used subtle cues and guided questioning to direct the flow of group tasks. For instance, one student inquired, “Do you want something light? Like a school announcement style?”, prompting peers to consider the theme of their output. Another asked, “Who can write fast? So, it’s quicker. After that, we’ll copy it onto the manila paper that ma’am gave us.” Such questions not only assigned tasks but also encouraged shared decision-making and collective responsibility.

In addition to questioning, students provided reminders to ensure clarity and adherence to group norms. One participant remarked, “Just make sure it’s clear, okay? We shouldn’t adlib. It has to be word-for-word.” Another added, “Exactly. No adlibs. This is manuscript style, so it should all be written in advance.” These reminders helped prevent misunderstandings and ensured that all members remained aligned with the group’s plan.

These findings suggest that Active Engagement and Participation Strategies extend beyond content comprehension; they also encompass the regulation of group interactions. The questioning prompts peers to think, plan, and negotiate collaboratively, while the behavioral cues help maintain structure, clarity, confidence, and shared commitment. Supporting this observation, T’Sas and De Maeyer (2025) found that when students engage in exploratory talk during group tasks, their reasoning and problem-solving skills improve significantly compared to groups that do not engage in such discourse. Their study indicates that practices such as guided questioning, mutual clarification, and discussion regulation contribute to measurable gains in learning outcomes.

In summary, the peer scaffolding strategies identified reflect a blend of cognitive, social, and organizational support, emphasizing that collaborative learning is both an intellectual and interpersonal process. Through clarification and simplification, role assignment, and active participation, students co-construct understanding and sustain engagement within their groups. These strategies demonstrate that peer scaffolding is a dynamic, socially grounded mechanism that transforms learning into a shared and empowering experience.

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## **Influence on Learning and Participation**

Three major themes emerged regarding the influence of peer scaffolding: (1) Motivation and Active Engagement, (2) Improved Understanding and Communication Skills, and (3) Ownership of Learning. These themes highlight both cognitive and affective gains from collaborative peer interactions.

### **Motivation and Active Engagement**

Peer scaffolding emerged as a pivotal strategy influencing students' motivation and active engagement in collaborative tasks. Participants consistently reported enhanced confidence and a heightened willingness to participate when they received assistance from their peers. This support not only facilitated task comprehension but also fostered a sense of inclusion and value within the group dynamic.

One participant remarked, "I enjoy helping my groupmates by providing feedback on their work or simply offering words of encouragement to motivate them." This statement underscores the reciprocal nature of peer interactions, where both providing and receiving support contribute to a collaborative learning environment.

Another participant shared, "I feel a little shy asking for help, but when they explain things nicely, it motivates me to do better." This highlights how peer explanations, characterized by clarity and patience, can alleviate apprehensions and encourage students to seek assistance proactively.

Further, a participant reflected, "It shows that they care about my success and encourages me to work harder and ask more questions." Such expressions indicate that peer support extends beyond academic assistance, encompassing emotional encouragement that motivates students to engage more deeply with the learning process.

Another participant noted, "When I receive help, my confidence increases. I feel comfortable asking them for help, and I don't feel shy about it." This suggests that consistent peer support can build self-assurance, making students more comfortable in seeking help and participating actively in group activities.

Lastly, a participant remarked, "I feel thankful and more motivated. It shows I'm not alone and that others care about my learning too." This emphasizes the importance of a supportive peer network in sustaining motivation and engagement, as students perceive their collective success as interconnected.

These findings align with Gillies (2016), who noted that cooperative learning structures create an environment of emotional safety, leading to greater involvement in tasks. The more students felt encouraged, the more likely they were to stay engaged in discussions and contribute meaningfully. Gillies' research underscores the significance of peer interactions in fostering an emotionally supportive learning environment that enhances student engagement.

### **Improved Understanding and Communication Skills**

While motivation establishes a supportive foundation, peer scaffolding also directly influences cognitive and communicative development. Participants reported that frequent discussions, questioning, and feedback exchanges improved their understanding of content and enhanced their ability to articulate thoughts clearly. They became more confident in expressing opinions, negotiating meaning, and resolving misunderstandings.

One teacher participant emphasized, "Their communication and interpersonal abilities also improve through constant peer interaction." This statement underscores how sustained dialogue and collaboration allow learners to refine both their social and linguistic skills. Another teacher participant noted, "It also helps them develop key skills like communication, teamwork, and active listening," highlighting how peer discussions encourage students to articulate thoughts effectively and respond constructively to others.

Further, a teacher participant elaborated, "Peer scaffolding promotes active engagement, deeper understanding, and correction of misconceptions. It helps students build confidence, communication, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, and self-regulation skills. Students also improve their ability to give and receive

constructive feedback.” This perspective reveals that peer scaffolding supports a holistic learning experience that strengthens both cognitive and interpersonal competencies.

These responses suggest that peer scaffolding functions as a dual learning process: as students explain and discuss ideas, they not only clarify content for others but also reinforce their own learning. This reciprocal exchange fosters a deeper grasp of the material and develops essential communication and collaborative competencies.

Supporting this, Roy, K. (2024) affirm that peer teaching benefits both the explainer and the learner. As students articulate their understanding and communicate ideas to others, they not only strengthen their comprehension but also reinforce long-term knowledge retention.

Similarly, Azir, I. D. A. (2019) found that peer scaffolding significantly enhanced EFL students’ speaking performance by encouraging them to clarify meaning, express ideas confidently, and engage in purposeful dialogue. These findings collectively emphasize that peer scaffolding enriches both understanding and communication skills, promoting meaningful interaction and lasting learning outcomes.

### **Ownership of Learning**

Transitioning from collaborative influence to individual empowerment, the third theme reveals that peer scaffolding promotes ownership of learning. Students became more responsible, reflective, and autonomous as they learned to rely on themselves and peers rather than solely on teachers. Participants expressed that collaboration encouraged them to take initiative in tasks and develop leadership skills.

One participant expressed, “If we work together and listen to each other, we can make group work more fun and productive.” This statement highlights how collaborative learning fosters a collective mindset in which students recognize that success is achieved through mutual effort. Another participant remarked, “It also makes me feel like I’m not alone and that we’re a team,” underscoring how peer scaffolding fosters a sense of belonging that motivates students to contribute to group outcomes actively.

Similarly, a participant shared, “I realize that we are all in this together and can learn from each other’s strengths and weaknesses.” This reflection demonstrates that students perceive learning as a shared process in which each member’s contribution enhances the group’s performance. Another participant added, “Helping others makes me feel useful and reminds me that learning is better when we support one another.” Such expressions emphasize that peer collaboration empowers students to take initiative, develop empathy, and value their role in the group’s collective achievement.

These findings mirror Johnson and Johnson’s (2009) theory of cooperative learning, which asserts that shared responsibility within a group enhances individual accountability and active participation. Similarly, Manuel (2025) found in her study on scaffolding strategies in inclusive classrooms in Bulacan that guided practice, prompting, and visual aids significantly improved students’ engagement and self-efficacy. As learners became more confident and proactive, they demonstrated greater ownership of their learning—reflecting the present study’s findings that peer scaffolding nurtures both individual initiative and collaborative responsibility.

In summary, peer scaffolding positively influenced students’ learning and participation by motivating engagement, strengthening understanding and communication skills, and fostering ownership of learning. These findings demonstrate that collaborative peer support enhances both academic and socio-emotional outcomes in group settings.

### **Challenges in Peer Scaffolding**

Three primary challenges emerged in peer scaffolding: (1) Task Load Imbalance and Role Inequity, (2) Emotional Barriers, and (3) Communication Breakdown. These themes reveal the barriers that can limit the effectiveness of collaborative learning.



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## Task Load Imbalance and Role Inequity in Peer Scaffolding

One key challenge that emerged from the data was task-load imbalance and role inequity in peer scaffolding contexts. Participants described situations in which some group members carried a disproportionate share of responsibilities, while others contributed minimally or not at all. This unequal workload distribution often resulted from unclear role assignments and differing levels of motivation among group members. Consequently, a few students tended to assume leadership roles or take on the majority of the work, while others disengaged from active participation. Such an imbalance disrupted the collaborative learning process and weakened the intended reciprocal nature of peer scaffolding.

As one student participant shared, “My experience in group activities, especially when I am chosen as a leader, is that it is not easy. Some of my classmates don’t cooperate.” This statement reflects the frustration that arises when collaborative tasks are not equally shared, leading to increased pressure on active members. Similarly, a teacher participant observed, “Some students tend to dominate while others stay passive, leading to an imbalance in participation.” This highlights how dominant behaviors from a few individuals can suppress others’ involvement and hinder equitable peer interaction.

Another teacher participant added, “The challenges are unequal participation, misunderstandings, dominance by certain members, and difficulty expressing ideas. These issues can lead to frustration, reduced engagement, and hindered learning if not addressed.” This observation emphasizes how inequity in participation not only affects task completion but also the quality of learning and interpersonal relationships within the group.

These findings align with Johnson and Johnson’s (2009) Social Interdependence Theory, which identifies social loafing as a recurring challenge in group learning, in which some members reduce their effort, relying on others to carry the load. Such an imbalance undermines group cohesion and limits the effectiveness of cooperative learning.

More recent studies support these observations. Zambrano, J., Kirschner, F., Sweller, J., & Kirschner, P. A. (2019) found that group work effectiveness depends heavily on balanced task distribution and clearly defined roles; when these are absent, learners experience frustration and disengagement. Similarly, Quinn, K. N., Kelley, M. M., McGill, K. L., Smith, E. M., Whipps, Z., & Holmes, N. G. (2020) reported that inequitable participation in peer-assisted learning environments negatively impacts both academic achievement and group morale, as dominant members monopolize decision-making while passive members withdraw from meaningful contribution.

Overall, these findings underscore that successful peer scaffolding requires intentional role structuring, mutual accountability, and equitable engagement. Without these elements, peer scaffolding risks becoming one-sided, reducing opportunities for collaborative growth and shared understanding.

## Emotional Barriers

Emotional barriers emerged as significant challenges affecting the effectiveness of peer scaffolding. Among these, fear of judgment was particularly prominent. Several students hesitated to ask questions, share ideas, or admit misunderstandings because they feared how their peers might perceive them. These emotional barriers often resulted in reduced participation, limited communication, and missed opportunities for collaborative learning.

One participant shared, “When my classmates help me, I feel happy and motivated. But sometimes, I feel shy if I don’t understand something easy because I’m afraid they might judge me.” This statement illustrates the internal conflict between wanting to learn and the anxiety of being perceived as less capable. Similarly, another participant remarked, “Yes, it motivates me. But sometimes, I also feel that I am not a good leader and, being a negative thinker, I fear that they might backstab me as their leader.” This reflects how fear of peer evaluation can extend beyond academics, affecting students’ confidence and sense of belonging within the group.

Additionally, a participant noted, “Sometimes, I feel shy or embarrassed if I don’t understand something right away.” This highlights students’ tendency to conceal confusion to avoid embarrassment, which hinders open dialogue and knowledge sharing—key components of successful peer scaffolding.

These findings align with Saunders, W. M. (1989), who suggested that learners often withhold participation in collaborative tasks due to anxiety over peer judgment. Such fear can lead to communication avoidance and reduced engagement, ultimately weakening the benefits of cooperative learning.

Recent research further supports this observation. Wang and Eccles (2023) found that fear of peer judgment in group settings diminishes students’ willingness to engage in exploratory talk and risk-taking, both essential for deep learning. Similarly, Gonda, D., Tírpáková, A., Pavlovičová, G., & Ďuriš, V. (2024) emphasized that emotional safety is a prerequisite for effective collaboration, as students who feel psychologically safe are more likely to express their ideas freely and seek clarification. Moreover, Van Ryzin, M. J., & Roseth, C. J. (2019) highlighted that fostering empathy and trust among group members can significantly mitigate fear of judgment, thereby enhancing participation and mutual support in peer learning environments.

Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of cultivating a psychologically safe and empathetic classroom climate. By addressing emotional barriers such as fear of judgment, educators can promote authentic communication, encourage mutual respect, and enhance the overall effectiveness of peer scaffolding.

### **Communication Breakdown**

Furthermore, communication breakdowns emerged as a significant challenge in peer scaffolding. Misunderstandings, unclear explanations, and differing communication styles occasionally hindered group collaboration and learning outcomes. These lapses disrupted the flow of discussion and affected students’ motivation and sense of belonging within the group. When communication faltered, ideas were misinterpreted, tasks went unfinished, and the group’s overall cohesion weakened.

As Teacher Participant 1 observed, “Others may face conflicts due to differing opinions or work ethics. It sometimes leads to misunderstandings or incomplete tasks, which affect the group’s overall performance. These issues can also lower motivation and create frustration among group members.” Similarly, Teacher Participant 2 noted, “It can make students feel confused or left out, especially if they don’t understand the topic or feel unheard. This can lead to frustration and wasted time as the group struggles to stay organized. When ideas clash or someone doesn’t want to participate, it can hold everyone back. In the end, it makes it harder for them to work well together and learn from each other.” These accounts highlight how communication challenges can lead to emotional strain, reduced participation, and inefficiency within group work, ultimately impeding the effectiveness of peer scaffolding.

This finding aligns with Mercer’s (2000) sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes that shared understanding through dialogue is vital to the collaborative construction of knowledge. Recent studies further support this. Veniati, V., Setyaningsih, E., & Drajadi, N. A. (2023) found that communication breakdowns often arise from unclear articulation and unequal participation, both of which weaken group cohesion and learning outcomes. Similarly, Chen, M. H., & Ye, S. X. (2022) observed that delays in feedback and misinterpretations in peer interactions—particularly in online or hybrid contexts—can erode trust and cooperation. Moreover, Bozkurt, Buse & Aydin, Selami. (2023) reported that communication anxiety and limited interpersonal skills can hinder students’ ability to express themselves, reducing the overall effectiveness of collaborative learning environments.

Taken together, these findings underscore that communication competence is a cornerstone of successful peer scaffolding. Encouraging open dialogue, active listening, and empathy among learners can minimize misunderstandings and create a more inclusive, supportive space for collective learning.

In conclusion, while peer scaffolding promotes engagement and shared learning, it is not without challenges. Issues such as unequal task distribution, fear of peer judgment, and occasional communication breakdowns reveal that collaborative learning requires balance, sensitivity, and guidance. These difficulties underscore the need for teachers to create structured, supportive environments where students can navigate group dynamics

effectively. Despite these barriers, the challenges themselves become valuable learning experiences, teaching students empathy, accountability, and adaptability—skills essential for lifelong learning and teamwork.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that peer scaffolding is an interactive and socially grounded process that significantly enhances students' learning experiences. Through discourse, learners co-constructed understanding, clarified concepts, assigned roles strategically, and maintained engagement. These scaffolding behaviors fostered motivation, improved communication and comprehension, and strengthened ownership of learning. However, persistent challenges—such as unequal task distribution, emotional barriers, and communication breakdowns—highlight the complexity of sustaining equitable collaboration.

The findings affirm that meaningful peer interaction develops not only cognitive competence but also interpersonal and emotional maturity. When structured and supported by teachers, peer scaffolding transforms group work into a venue for empathy, reflection, and shared responsibility. Ultimately, it underscores the critical role of classroom dialogue as both a tool for learning and a medium for cultivating collaborative, confident, and autonomous learners.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen peer scaffolding in collaborative learning environments. Teachers are encouraged to design structured group activities with clearly defined roles and equitable task distribution to prevent workload imbalance. They should also model and reinforce effective scaffolding techniques, such as questioning, clarification, elaboration, and feedback. Equally important is creating a psychologically safe classroom climate that minimizes emotional barriers by promoting empathy, encouragement, and respect. School administrators, on the other hand, are advised to support teachers through professional development programs focused on discourse-based instruction and collaborative pedagogy. Institutional policies may also be developed to recognize and assess both individual accountability and collective group performance as integral parts of classroom evaluation.

Students are likewise encouraged to engage actively in peer interactions by offering explanations, asking questions, and providing constructive feedback. Cultivating emotional openness, trust, and mutual respect can help overcome communication gaps and foster stronger collaborative relationships. Lastly, future researchers may extend the current study to different strands, grade levels, and learning modalities to validate and broaden its findings. Further exploration of nonverbal and emotional expressions in peer discourse, as well as the impact of online collaboration and long-term learning outcomes, is also recommended to deepen understanding of how peer scaffolding shapes student development.

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