

# *Application of Scaffolding Instruction in Senior High School English Reading Teaching: A Case Study of Living Legends*

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**Keywords:** Scaffolding Instruction; Zone of Proximal Development; senior high school English reading; autonomous learning; collaborative exploration

**Abstract:** This study explores the application of Scaffolding Instruction in senior high school English reading teaching, aiming to enhance students' reading comprehension, autonomous learning abilities, and critical thinking. Based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding Instruction, the study employs a reading lesson from the People's Education Press *Senior High English Book 1, Unit 3 Sports and Fitness Lesson 2 Living Legends*, to demonstrate how scaffolding strategies—such as situational, structural, and peer scaffolds—facilitate students' progressive mastery of reading skills. Findings suggest that scaffolding instruction effectively bridges the gap between students' current and potential developmental levels, fostering collaborative exploration and independent problem-solving. This paper provides practical strategies for high school English reading instruction and looks forward to future research directions.

## 1. Introduction

In current senior high school English teaching, reading instruction faces persistent challenges, including students' limited comprehension of complex texts, passive learning habits, and insufficient critical thinking skills. Traditional teaching methods, which often emphasize rote memorization and teacher-centered explanations, fail to address these problems adequately<sup>[1]</sup>. To cultivate students' independent learning capabilities and deeper engagement with texts, Scaffolding Instruction—a pedagogical approach rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—has emerged as a promising solution<sup>[2]</sup>.

Scaffolding Instruction emphasizes the gradual transfer of responsibility from teachers to students through tailored support, collaborative activities, and contextualized learning environments. By integrating theoretical frameworks such as ZPD and scaffolding into English reading classes, teachers can design dynamic instructional activities that align with students' cognitive development levels<sup>[3]</sup>. This paper examines the theoretical foundations of Scaffolding Instruction, analyzes its application in senior high school English reading teaching, and provides a practical demonstration through a lesson design from the People's Education Press<sup>[4]</sup>. The study aims to offer actionable strategies for enhancing reading proficiency while fostering students' autonomy and collaborative skills, thereby contributing to the ongoing reform of English language pedagogy<sup>[5]</sup>.

## 2. Core Theories of Scaffolding Instruction

### 2.1 Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) proposed by Vygotsky (1978) is the theoretical cornerstone of scaffolding teaching.

ZPD represents the difference between a child's actual developmental level and their potential developmental level<sup>[6]</sup>. The child's ability to solve problems independently defines the actual developmental level, while the child's capacity to solve problems with the guidance of adults or in collaboration with more capable peers represents the potential developmental level (Vygotsky, 1978). This zone holds the child's potential awaiting stimulation<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, the gap between a student's problem-solving ability independently and with teacher guidance illustrates this disparity, which varies based on individual differences in learning ability, knowledge base, and learning environment.

### 2.2 Scaffolding Instruction

The scaffolding instructional model employs the metaphor of scaffolding to conceptualize teaching practice. It refers to teachers constructing temporary learning scaffolds based on students' existing knowledge levels and cognitive development needs, while creating contextualized learning environments to facilitate students' progressive advancement through ZPD<sup>[8]</sup>. Through the cyclical process of erecting scaffolds - adjusting scaffolds - gradually removing scaffolds, teachers guide students through developmental stages from scaffold dependency to collaborative inquiry, and ultimately to autonomous and self-directed learning<sup>[9]</sup>. This approach not only enhances learning efficiency but also cultivates students' self-regulated learning capabilities, ultimately empowering them to independently solve real problems.

According to He Kekang(1997), the scaffolding instruction model comprises five key components:

(1) Building the Scaffold: Establish conceptual frameworks aligned with the learning theme and ZPD requirements.

(2) Entering the Situation: Immerse students in problem-based scenarios.

(3) Independent Exploration: Facilitate self-directed learning through phased guidance. Initial instruction involves teacher modeling (e.g., demonstrating analytical processes for similar concepts), followed by gradual reduction of support. Teachers provide timely prompts to help students ascend the conceptual framework, progressively transitioning from guided practice to autonomous exploration.

(4) Collaborative Learning: Implement group consultations and discussions.

(5) Evaluation: Conduct multi-dimensional assessments including:

1) Self-evaluation of autonomous learning capabilities

2) Peer assessment of collaborative contributions

3) Verification of meaning construction attainment

## 3. Application of Scaffolding Instruction in Language Teaching

This theory was introduced in the late 20th century and has since been continuously deepened in terms of cognition and application, particularly in the context of senior high school English teaching. On one hand, attention has been given to the macro guidance of the theory on teaching practice. For example, it is emphasized that teaching should be integrated with the sociocultural environment to cultivate students' comprehensive language application abilities<sup>[10]</sup>. On the other hand, efforts have

focused on integrating it with traditional teaching methods to explore an English teaching model suitable for China's national context. For instance, the English teaching syllabus has been revised based on this theory to strengthen the cultivation of English application and problem-solving abilities.

In the field of senior high school English teaching, numerous scholars have widely applied ZPD and Scaffolding Instruction to various aspects of teaching, particularly in improving language acquisition. Gai Shuhua (2010) empirically verified the promoting effect of scaffolding teaching on students' lexical chunk acquisition within the zone of proximal development, providing a scientific model for vocabulary teaching in senior high school English classrooms. Li Danli (2012) focused on constructing teacher scaffolding in classroom interactions to ensure that teachers effectively support students' language learning in high school English contexts. Gao Yan (2008) clarified the role of teachers as guides for knowledge construction in second language classrooms, stimulating students' autonomous learning, which is also applied in high school English classes. These achievements have enriched the theory of second language acquisition and provided diverse strategies for high school English teaching, improving teaching efficiency and quality.

In senior high school English teaching, Scaffolding Instruction has shown fruitful results in writing and reading. Tian Hongjuan (2023) and Lu Chang (2022) emphasized its role in constructing frameworks, creating situations, promoting collaboration, and conducting multiple evaluations in writing, thereby improving students' interest and ability in writing in senior high school English education. Zhang Yifang (2024) pointed out that in reading, scaffolding can address teaching challenges by setting situational scaffolds before reading, cognitive scaffolds during reading, and evaluative scaffolds after reading, enhancing students' comprehension and expression in senior high school English.

#### 4. Design and Implementation of Reading Instruction Guided by Scaffolding Instruction

The following lesson takes the reading class design of unit3 Sports and Fitness Lesson 2 Living legends chosen from PEP Book 1 *Senior School English* as an example.

##### 4.1 Text analysis

The lesson topic—Choose Your Favorite Athlete—falls under the thematic context of Man and Society, specifically addressing subtopics such as sports activities, major sporting events, sports and health, sportsmanship, and individuals with outstanding societal contributions.

The author first introduces Lang Ping's achievements from three perspectives: as a player, a coach, and an individual. It highlights her leadership during the 2015 Women's World Cup, where she guided the Chinese women's volleyball team to victory despite challenges such as injuries to key players and the captain's withdrawal due to illness. This narrative underscores her qualities of trusting teammates and fearlessly confronting adversity. The section concludes with her 2016 Olympic triumph, reinforcing her legacy. As for Michael Jordan, the text begins by describing his extraordinary leaping ability and iconic Air Jordan nickname. While acknowledging his unparalleled basketball skills, it emphasizes that his true distinction lies in his never-give-up sportsmanship, which propelled his illustrious career. Beyond athletic achievements, the text details his philanthropic efforts, notably his 1996 establishment of The Boys & Girls Club in Chicago to share success with underprivileged youth.

By highlighting Lang Ping and Jordan's great achievements and great qualities, the author intends to tell readers Lang Ping and Jordan are living legends of sports, and they are examples readers are encouraged to emulate. What's more, the author conveys the moral value that it is not only great achievements, but also great qualities that make a person a legend, and readers should

learn from their remarkable qualities.

This is an introductory text, weaving an explicit narrative about Lang Ping's triumphant leadership of the Chinese team in 2015—demonstrating her conviction that adversity can be overcome—and Michael Jordan's uniqueness rooted in his formidable mental strength. Implicitly, it underscores the sportsmanship of embracing challenges and persevering. The language is concise yet elegant, enriched with rhetorical devices, parallelism, metaphor, hyperbole and quotation, which create vivid and dynamic descriptions.

## 4.2 Teaching objectives

Based on the analysis of the text and students, the teacher has formulated the teaching objectives of this lesson as follows:

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

(1) acquire and summarize the information about Lang Ping and Michael Jordan as living legends;

(2) analyze the passage about Jordan by distinguishing between the statements and the supporting details, identifying the linking sentence and appreciating the rhetorical devices such as parallelism, metaphor and quotation;

(3) conclude what makes a person a legend; recommend another living legend person orally, using the language, the organization and rhetorical devices they have learned.

In scaffolding instruction, teachers will customize appropriate reading objectives according to students' English reading ability, improve their reading speed and quick information retrieval and organization ability, and ensure that students can grasp the main idea of the article and the intention of the author.

## 4.3 Design and implementation of teaching activities

Following the establishment of teaching objectives, the design of teaching activities becomes critical. The effectiveness of instruction hinges on whether these activities align with learners' needs, address individual differences, and facilitate goal attainment (Wang Duqin, 2014). Scaffolding instruction—characterized by responsiveness, collaboration, immediacy, and differentiation—proves particularly advantageous in English reading pedagogy. It fosters students' reading engagement, enhances teacher-student and peer interactions, and ensures the effective acquisition of English language knowledge and skills.

### (1) Situational and Linguistic Scaffolds: Creating Immersive Language Contexts

Scaffolding reading instruction requires teachers to construct meaningful contexts on relevant topics on the basis of students' existing knowledge, so that students can communicate and express on what they have already known.

During the lead-in phase, the teacher plays a video featuring an AI-generated digital avatar, the Sports News Editor, who requests students' assistance: recommend living legends of sports in your eyes. Concurrently, the teacher poses guiding questions: What does legend mean? What kind of person can be a living legend? Students understand the meaning of living legends under the teacher's assistance.

By crafting a relatable, scenario-driven context, clarifying the meaning of legend and brainstorming, this approach provides students situational and linguistic scaffolds, arousing their interest. Besides, it activates students prior knowledge about the topic, leads them into the topic, and provokes student thought on what a legend person is.

### (2) Content, Structural, and Writing Scaffolds: Building Frameworks for English Reading

During the reading process, students are required to progressively deepen their critical

engagement and strengthen their exploration of the text's linguistic features, content, and thematic significance. Only through such layered inquiry can students achieve a holistic comprehension of the text. Teachers, in response, construct a cognitive framework to scaffold this intellectual progression, systematically bridging analytical exploration with interpretive synthesis.

Activity 1: Read the passage of Lang Ping and learn to analyze it.

1) The teacher guides students to say Lang Ping is a master in volleyball, then ask:

Q1: Why Lang Ping is a master in volleyball? Find reasons from the passage. (The first part: the three as)

Students find the three as and the teacher summarizes the three as are statements and provides the following questions to help them find the supporting details:

Q2: What did she do?

Q3: How did she lead?

Q4: Why is she so loved?

2) Students find the supporting details with the assistance of the logic line: challenge-solution-result and conclude Lang Ping's great qualities from the passage.

3) The teacher shares her favorite sentences with students, highlights the similar structure to give students hints and introduce parallelism to them.

The purpose of this activity is to develop students language ability of retrieving and summarizing information, promote their thinking capability of finding the logical connections between various information.

In this activity, the teacher constructs three types of scaffolds for students: content scaffolds (great achievements and great qualities), structural scaffolds (statements and supporting details), and writing scaffolds (parallelism as a rhetorical device).

These scaffolds lay the foundation for students to independently analyze Michael Jordan's passage, engage in oral discourse, and complete follow-up assignments(table 1).

(3) Encouraging Self-inquiry

After students have acquired a certain foundation of knowledge and skills, teachers should timely offer them opportunities for independent thinking to deepen their understanding. During the students' thinking process, teachers should provide appropriate assistance.

In Activity 1, students find the supporting details with the assistance of the logic line: challenge-solution-result and conclude Lang Ping's great qualities from the passage, which also belongs to self-inquiry.

Activity 2: Read the passage of Jordan and analyze it in pairs.

Students complete the sentences of parallelism to describe Jordan after learning this rhetorical device in the passage of Lang Ping on their own.

In this step, students have already known the basic structure of parallelism, and the teacher gives them the interrelated questions as scaffolds to smooth the process.

(4) Peer Scaffolding: Guiding Collaborative Inquiry

Scaffolding Instruction emphasizes student-centered teaching and encourages teachers and students to participate in and promote each other. This approach takes group learning activities, discussion and communication as scaffolds to help students internalize knowledge and improve their abilities.

Activity 2: Read the passage of Jordan and analyze it in pairs.

Group work: After students' writing of the sentences describing Jordan, and the teacher gives interrelated questions to guide students to find the supporting details:

Q5: How impressive his skills are?

Q6: What mental strength does he have?

Q7: How does he share with others?

During finding, students also have the chart to clarify what they need to do.

Table 1 Comparison Chart of Lang Ping and Michael Jordan in Reading Analysis

	Lang Ping	Michael Jordan
Statements	As a player, ... As a coach, ... As a person, ...	As a player, ... As a person, ... As a celebrity(名人), ...
Supporting details	In 2015, ... In 2016, ...	
Qualities	Determined; energetic; good team spirit...	
The linking sentence: ( Please underline it in the passage)		
My favorite sentence: ( Please underline it in the passage)		

Activity 3: Conclude and discuss

Students discuss in group about the criterion of living legends and also the question: The women's volleyball team was eliminated in the 2021 Olympics. Will they still be our living legends of sports? Why or why not?

Activity 4: Recommend a living legend in your eyes and share(table 2)

Table 2: Peer Evaluation Rubric for Living Legend Recommendation

<i>Share, listen and evaluate</i>				
I think this recommendation is		very good (all yes), good (mostly yes), OK (3 yes), not OK (less than 3 yes),		
because		Yes/No		Yes/No
Does it cover	great achievements		great qualities	
Does it include	statements		supporting examples/details	
Does it use	the linking sentence		parallelism hyperbole quotation	

The teacher draw a conclusion that recommendations should include contents ( great achievements and great qualities), use statements-supporting details structure, and try to use rhetorical devices like parallelism, metaphor and etc..

In the three aforementioned activities, the teacher strategically employs peer or group discussions to facilitate inquiry-based learning, and students could get inspirations from others' ideas, thereby constructing peer scaffolding for students. Additionally, in Activity 2, the teacher further develops writing scaffolding by introducing three additional rhetorical devices to students.

(5) Evaluation Scaffolding: Emphasis on Formative Evaluation

Scaffolding instruction emphasizes multi-dimensional mutual evaluation, incorporating



self-assessment, peer evaluation, and teacher feedback. Concurrently, teachers are tasked with providing timely and constructive feedback during the assessment process to stimulate students' critical thinking and meta-cognitive reflection.

Activity 4: Recommend a living legend in your eyes and share

Students make assessment on each other's recommendations based on the criterion table.

In this activity, the teacher provides students the criterion table as an evaluation scaffold. Through the assessment, students can clearly understand their own learning status, better find and correct their shortcomings, in order to achieve self-improvement.

## 5. Conclusion

The integration of Scaffolding Instruction into senior high school English reading teaching demonstrates significant potential in addressing the limitations of conventional methodologies. By systematically applying situational, structural, and peer scaffolds, teachers can guide students to progressively master reading strategies, analyze textual features, and construct meaning independently. The case study of *Living Legends* from Unit 3 *Sports and Fitness* illustrates how scaffolding strategies—such as pre-reading contextualization, collaborative discussions, and gradual withdrawal of support—enable students to navigate challenging texts while internalizing critical thinking and language skills.

This paper shows that Scaffolding Instruction can not only enhance students' reading comprehension but also cultivate their ability to transfer learned strategies to new contexts, a cornerstone of lifelong learning. Future research could further explore the long-term impacts of Scaffolding Instruction on students' academic performance, as well as its adaptability to diverse learning environments. Additionally, professional development programs for teachers should emphasize scaffolding techniques to ensure their effective implementation.

In conclusion, Scaffolding Instruction offers an innovative approach to senior high school English reading teaching, responding to the demands of the education reform oriented towards core competencies, and holds significant theoretical and practical value.

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