

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Scaffolding and its impact on learning grammatical forms in tertiary Chinese EFL classrooms

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**Scaffolding and Its Impact on Learning Grammatical Forms  
in Tertiary Chinese EFL Classrooms**

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for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates how expert-novice scaffolding and peer-peer scaffolding may facilitate the learning of grammatical forms in tertiary Chinese EFL classrooms and attempts to illustrate the features of different modes of interactions. It was a classroom research study with a quasi-experimental design, in which Chinese tertiary level students from two intact classes in Hong Kong and Wuhan were both given a task of revising a student's writing, focusing on the learning of the relative clause in three interactional scenarios: student-student (S-S), teacher-student (T-S), teacher-student + student-student (T-S + S-S).

On the basis of the microgenetic analysis of classroom discourse complemented with quantitative results, the study has found that scaffolding in T-S + S-S interaction generates the most effective impact on learning the target form in the three settings, followed by T-S interaction and S-S interaction. The learner's Zone of Proximal Development (hereafter ZPD) could be promoted most effectively in T-S + S-S interaction due to high quality of scaffolding functions, whereas there is little evidence of extension in the learner's ZPD in T-S and S-S interactions due to a lower quality of scaffolding functions. Moreover, the effective use of the seven scaffolding functions, i.e., Recruitment, Simplifying the task, Direction Maintenance, Marking Critical Features, Frustration Control, Demonstration, and Feedback, in T-S + S-S interaction, seems to stretch the tertiary Chinese students' grammatical competence to a greater extent than in the other two settings. More importantly, the findings have highlighted the importance of helping students notice the gap in their knowledge, promoting self-regulated learning of target forms, and encouraging independent learning when the teacher provides appropriate support.

The study has both theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretically, it has shown that grammar learning in EFL classrooms does not happen through collaboration or combination of expert scaffolding and peer scaffolding in interaction haphazardly; rather it is the good quality of interaction and opportunities for self-regulation as shown in T-S + S-S interaction that can guarantee learning. Good quality of interaction is constituted of appropriate and proper use of scaffolding functions, support and guidance which allow learners to build blocks through self-regulation and promote their ZPD ultimately. Inadequate or excessive control or management of scaffolding strategies as shown in S-S and T-S interactions only impede independent learning. In addition, the study has ascertained the condition under which a learner's ZPD can be promoted in the classroom context. It answers the concern of what might constitute effective learning in an interactional context in sociocultural theory. Pedagogically, the

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