



Scaffolding Academic Writing for First-Year EFL University Students: A PRISMA-Guided Systematic Review and Thematic Synthesis

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Artikel History: Received: 26 October 2025 Revised: 20 December 2025 Published: 30 January 2026</p> <p>Keywords: First-year university students; Scaffolding strategy; Writing ability; EFL; Systematic literature review</p>	<p>Background: First-year EFL university students frequently encounter significant challenges in developing writing skills, necessitating effective instructional support. Although extensive research exists, gaps persist in understanding the impact of scaffolding strategies on writing abilities in higher education. Objective: This systematic review investigates scaffolding strategies for enhancing writing skills among first-year EFL students, focusing on (1) definitions and theoretical foundations, (2) strategies that improve writing ability, and (3) perceived challenges and benefits from both educators' and students' perspectives. Method: A systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with PRISMA guidelines across Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar (2019–2024). The search utilized keywords such as "scaffolding strategy," "teaching writing," and "writing ability." Of 1,148 initial records, 60 studies met the inclusion criteria after rigorous screening. Data were analyzed through thematic synthesis, and study quality was evaluated using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Results: Scaffolding strategies were identified across various writing stages: post-writing revising (80.0%), while-writing drafting (78.3%), pre-writing planning (68.3%), and editing and proofreading (48.3%). Five categories of scaffolding emerged: instructional, peer, technological, metacognitive, and affective. Major challenges included diverse proficiency levels (72%), limited instructional time (65%), balancing scaffolding with learner autonomy (58%), and restricted vocabulary (60%). Reported benefits comprised improved writing quality (80%), enhanced learner autonomy (75%), increased motivation (70%), and more effective peer learning (65%). Conclusion: Scaffolding is a critical component of EFL writing instruction, with its effectiveness contingent upon teachers' ability to tailor strategies to student proficiency and integrate multiple scaffolding types. Limitations of this review include a focus on English-language publications and the exclusion of unpublished dissertations. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs, explore digital scaffolding tools, and investigate differentiated strategies across varying proficiency levels.</p>



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia provides English instruction from primary school through university, positioning the language as a critical tool for student communication. English is taught as a foreign language and is considered a core subject at all educational levels in Indonesia (Sri Andayani 2022). The prioritization of English education demonstrates a deliberate strategy to equip Indonesian youth for participation in an increasingly interconnected global society. The overarching goal of language acquisition is to achieve proficiency and accuracy in both oral and written communication in the target language. Therefore, students are expected to develop not only spoken English proficiency but also the capacity to express their ideas and emotions effectively in writing.

Within English language acquisition, writing is recognized as a fundamental academic skill that significantly contributes to student success. Writing enables students to communicate ideas, develop critical thinking, and foster language creativity. The development of writing skills equips students with essential tools for achievement in both academic and professional contexts. Consequently, writing holds a central role in language acquisition for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and is considered vital for attaining language proficiency (Chairinkam and Yawiloeng 2024). Taub et al. (2023) highlight that writing is an essential interdisciplinary skill required for incoming college students to complete coursework successfully, underscoring the need to provide first-year students with effective writing strategies from the beginning of their academic studies.

Higher education institutions expect students to quickly acclimatize to the rigors of academic writing through the various disciplinary discourses offered. The belief is that students will. Higher education institutions anticipate that students will rapidly adapt to the demands of academic writing across various disciplinary discourses. There is an underlying assumption that students have acquired foundational essay-writing skills during high school (Mdodana-Zide and Mafugu 2023). However, a gap often exists between institutional expectations and students' actual preparedness for academic writing. Institutions frequently expect students to be adequately prepared or to adjust quickly to academic writing requirements without explicit support. Acquiring academic writing skills is inherently challenging and necessitates support structures, including collaborative strategies among students, writing centers, and faculty (Mdodana-Zide and Mafugu 2023). Academic writing, which encompasses papers, journals, theses, and proposals, requires mastery of formatting and adherence to academic standards. Sentence accuracy is essential for achieving excellence in writing. According to Nabu and Pakaya (2022), academic writing is integral to foreign language acquisition, involving critical thinking, self-expression, and the application of paraphrasing and summarizing techniques to produce coherent written correspondence. Writing is a very complex productive skill that requires cognitive processes and thinking that goes through different stages, for example, pre-writing, writing, and post-writing. Valuable and successful writing very much requires many overlapping aspects such as punctuation, spelling, tense, organization, clarity, coherence and cohesion, capitalization, and content (Khan 2022). However, academic writing is a constant struggle for university students, especially in terms of consistency, cohesiveness, and critical analysis. Boshrahadi and Boud (2025) argue that rather than merely focusing on the generic or lower-order writing skills such as paragraphing, structuring and referencing, academic writing in higher education is embedded in the epistemological beliefs and practices of individual disciplines, which often force students into a new style and ways of writing that run counter to their prior experiences in high school. This disciplinary-oriented writing approach poses significant challenges to first-year students as they navigate the transition from high school to university-level writing expectations.

Despite ongoing efforts, the current state of English writing skills among Indonesian learners remains a concern. Multiple studies indicate that students continue to struggle to meet

expected writing standards, particularly given that English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia. Common challenges include limited vocabulary, confusion regarding word usage, and difficulties with grammar. These issues are reflected in students' final grades: the majority receive unsatisfactory marks, and only a small proportion achieve passing scores; attaining a perfect score in academic writing is considered unattainable. These challenges are attributed to factors such as insufficient practice, lack of motivation, and inadequate instruction in the writing process (Utami et al. 2024). Nguyen et al. (2024) report that Indonesian EFL students primarily struggle with vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and translation, with these difficulties being interrelated and impeding the construction of clear and coherent sentences.

Teaching writing in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context presents significant challenges for both teachers and learners, as it demands considerable effort and specialized strategies. Teachers frequently encounter obstacles that require patience and a deep understanding of learners' difficulties. Limited classroom instruction time, typically two to three hours per week, is often insufficient for students to develop strong writing skills.

Teaching writing necessitates substantial time, effort, and guidance. The need for autonomous learning in writing is a critical issue. The complexity of writing and the limited classroom time, usually two to three hours per week, hinder students' ability to develop strong writing skills. Effective writing instruction requires extensive practice, sustained effort, and continuous support beyond traditional classroom settings. Therefore, promoting students' capacity for independent learning is essential for achieving proficiency in EFL writing.

Most EFL students continue to face significant challenges in writing proficiency (Aripin and Hanim Rahmat 2021). Writing is widely recognized as a particularly difficult skill for foreign language learners to master. Students often struggle to generate content, develop ideas into coherent paragraphs or essays, and master paragraph development and essay structure. Additional difficulties include insufficient command of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and subordinate clauses, which collectively hinder writing quality (Zohrevandi et al. 2024). Deficiencies in grammar, syntax, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling further complicate the writing process (Idris et al. 2020). These obstacles impede students' ability to generate, organize, and express ideas effectively in writing. However, the development of writing skills can be supported through scaffolding, a pedagogical approach that provides temporary assistance. Huong et al. (2024) found that group-based scaffolding in academic writing effectively addresses students' evolving needs across pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing phases, with cognitive scaffolding being most prominent in the pre-writing phase and linguistic scaffolding central during post-writing as students refine language accuracy.

In educational contexts, scaffolding refers to the process by which teachers provide temporary assistance and guidance to students at the outset of learning, enabling them to develop knowledge and skills independently as support is gradually withdrawn (Mulatsih 2011). This approach involves offering initial guidance to facilitate autonomous learning, with the level of assistance decreasing as students demonstrate mastery. The concept is analogous to architectural scaffolding, which is removed once the structure is self-supporting.

Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic experiences by adopting multiple roles within the classroom. In academic settings, teachers facilitate learning by modeling examples and providing detailed explanations to enhance student understanding. Instructional scaffolding emphasizes that learning occurs within social and cultural contexts (Hasan 2020). When students encounter difficulties, teachers offer explanations, encouragement, and additional information to support problem-solving. According to Vygotsky's theory, teachers should act as More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) to guide students' learning. Arlinda (2020) identifies six strategies for evaluating the extent of teacher scaffolding. Boshwabadi and Boud (2025) suggest that

scaffolded pedagogical activities that focus on developing students' evaluative judgment can help alleviate assessment shock and better prepare first-year students for future writing tasks.

The first scaffolding strategy is modeling, in which learners are provided with clear examples to imitate, facilitating understanding of the content and enabling later adaptation for personal use. The second strategy, bridging, involves connecting learners' prior knowledge to new concepts, thereby making learning materials more relevant. Third, contextualizing brings learning closer to students' real-world experiences, often through sensory contexts such as manipulatives, images, films, or authentic materials, thereby enhancing comprehension and reducing cognitive demands. Schema building, the fourth strategy, organizes learners' knowledge and understanding, allowing them to process information from general to specific. For younger learners, this involves providing background knowledge before introducing new vocabulary or expressions. The fifth strategy, re-presenting text, requires learners to transform acquired knowledge into various text forms. Finally, developing metacognition involves fostering students' ability to monitor and evaluate their understanding, supporting problem-solving skills. Taub et al. (2023) emphasize that scaffolded support should target specific phases of self-regulation for different student groups, advocating differentiated scaffolding tailored to students' needs and writing development.

Teachers exert significant influence on students' educational experiences, particularly in the development of writing skills. By implementing scaffolding strategies, teachers can guide students through the complexities of academic writing, providing direction and fostering a deeper understanding of the writing process. According to Vygotsky's theory, teachers act as More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), facilitating learning within social and cultural contexts. Employing various scaffolding strategies, such as modelling, bridging, and contextualizing, enables teachers to connect new concepts to students' prior knowledge, making learning more accessible. Active scaffolding not only enhances students' writing abilities and self-confidence but also prepares them for more advanced academic work. This collaborative approach equips students with the necessary resources for academic and professional success. Accordingly, this literature review seeks to analyze and synthesize current research on scaffolding strategies for improving students' writing skills, with the aim of identifying areas for further investigation. Despite extensive research on writing instruction, gaps persist in understanding the impact of scaffolding strategies on students' writing development. While previous reviews have addressed scaffolding in general EFL contexts, few have focused specifically on its implementation in first-year university writing instruction. Veddayana et al. (2025) identified scaffolding as one of six core instructional strategies in technology-enhanced collaborative academic writing, noting that effective implementation requires deliberate integration of technologies and instructional designs aligned with pedagogical objectives at each writing stage. However, a comprehensive synthesis of recent empirical evidence on scaffolding in first-year EFL writing is still lacking. This gap prompts the following research question: What are the perceived challenges and benefits of implementing scaffolding strategies from educators' and students' perspectives?

METHOD

This literature review is done by searching several main database engines for publications. The consideration is (1) publication that addresses the published work that talks about scaffolding as the keywords since 2019 - 2024, which discusses what scaffolding is, why scaffolding is needed, and how scaffolding can be implemented in teaching writing related to the writing performance in higher education; (2) the use of English; (3) the availability of information on the notion and its types. Those aspects are reviewed based on information and data from relevant empirical studies and the recommendations for further research in the final part of the studies. The following methods

guided the review, including the first researcher conducting database searches to identify relevant studies about scaffolding strategies and writing skills. Keywords used in database searches included: scaffolding strategy, teaching writing, and writing ability. The databases searched for keywords included Connected Papers, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, ScienceDirect, Tandonline, ResearchGate, and Publish or Perish.

Research Design

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to ensure transparency and replicability in the selection and synthesis of relevant studies. The SLR approach was selected because it provides a rigorous and systematic framework for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research on scaffolding strategies in EFL writing instruction. This method enables comprehensive mapping of the current state of knowledge, identification of research gaps, and formulation of evidence-based recommendations for future research and practice.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across five major academic databases to ensure broad coverage of relevant literature: Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they represent the most comprehensive and widely recognized sources for peer-reviewed literature in education and language teaching. The search was limited to studies published between 2019 and 2024 to ensure currency and relevance, reflecting the most recent developments in scaffolding research. Keywords used in the search included: "scaffolding strategy," "teaching writing," and "writing ability," combined with Boolean operators (AND/OR) to refine the search results. Additional hand-searching was conducted by scanning the reference lists of included articles to identify any potentially relevant studies that may have been missed during the database searches.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

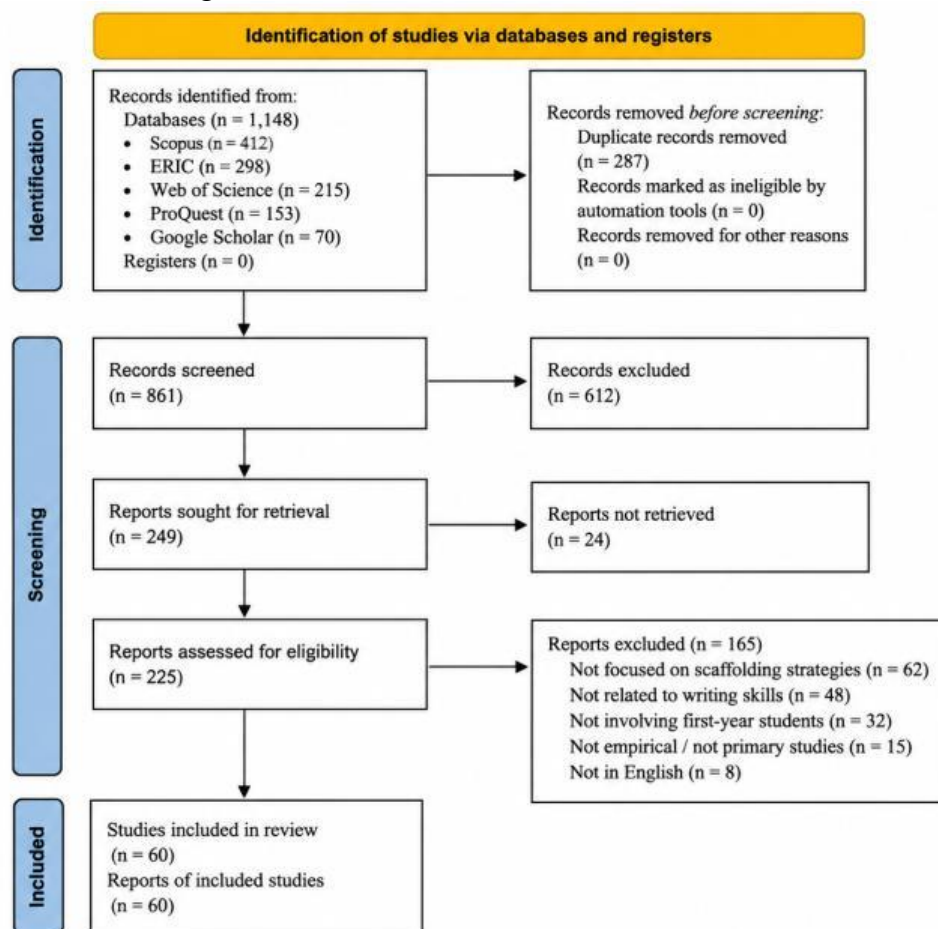
Studies were selected based on the following criteria to ensure that only relevant and high-quality studies were included in the review.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

No	Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
1.	Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings	Books, book chapters, dissertations, non-peer-reviewed articles
2.	Publication Year	2019 – 2024	Before 2019
3.	Language	English	Non-English
4.	Focus	Scaffolding strategies in EFL writing instruction	Scaffolding in other language skills (reading, speaking, listening)
5.	Participants	First-year university students	Other educational levels (primary, secondary, postgraduate)
6.	Research Design	Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method)	Non-empirical (conceptual, theoretical)

Study Selection Procedure

The study selection followed a four-stage process based on the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021), as illustrated in Figure 1.



Note. PRISMA flowchart adapted from Page et al. (2021).

Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart: Scaffolding Strategies in Writing Skills for First-Year Students: A Literature Review

The PRISMA flow diagram illustrates the systematic process of study selection. During the **Identification** stage, 1,148 records were identified across five databases: Scopus (n = 412), ERIC (n = 298), Web of Science (n = 215), ProQuest (n = 153), and Google Scholar (n = 70). No additional records were identified through registers or other sources.

In the **Screening** stage, 287 duplicate records were removed, resulting in 861 unique records for screening. Screening based on titles and abstracts led to the exclusion of 612 records that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Of the 249 reports sought, 24 could not be retrieved, leaving 225 for full-text eligibility assessment.

During the **Inclusion** stage, full-text reports were assessed against the inclusion criteria. Of these, 165 reports were excluded for the following reasons: 62 did not focus on scaffolding strategies; 48 were unrelated to writing skills; 32 did not involve first-year students; 15 were not empirical or primary studies; and 8 were not written in English. This screening process resulted in a final corpus of 60 studies included in the review synthesis.

Quality Assessment

The quality of each included study was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 (Hong et al., 2018). This tool was selected for its capacity to appraise empirical studies across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs. Each study was rated on five criteria: a clear research question, an appropriate methodology, adequate data collection, rigorous data analysis, and a clear presentation of findings. Studies scoring 4 or 5 out of 5 were included in the final synthesis. Two independent reviewers conducted the quality assessment to minimize bias and ensure reliability, resolving disagreements through discussion until consensus was achieved.

Data Extraction

Data from each included study were extracted using a standardized data extraction form to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness. The extraction form captured author(s), year, title, research objectives and questions, research design and methodology, participant details (sample size, educational level, context), scaffolding strategies used, key findings related to scaffolding and writing ability, and implications and recommendations. This systematic approach facilitated the identification of patterns and themes across the included studies.

Data were analysed using thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), which comprised three stages: coding, describing, and synthesizing. During the coding stage, relevant findings from each study were coded according to key concepts, including types of scaffolding strategies, perceived benefits, implementation challenges, and writing outcomes. During the describing stage, codes were grouped into descriptive themes based on observed patterns. In the synthesizing stage, descriptive themes were further analysed to generate analytical themes addressing the research questions. This approach enabled a comprehensive synthesis of the evidence, identifying both common patterns and divergent findings across the included studies.

Ethical Considerations

The Ethical Considerations review adheres to ethical standards for research synthesis. The review protocol was registered in the Open Science Framework (OSF) to ensure transparency and prevent duplication of effort. All sources are properly cited to avoid plagiarism. No conflicts of interest were identified. The PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) were followed to ensure transparency and reproducibility in study selection and reporting. The use of the PRISMA flowchart aligns with standard practice in systematic literature reviews to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Page et al., 2021).

Limitations of the Method





Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, restricting the search to studies published in English may introduce language bias and exclude relevant research in other languages. Second, limiting inclusion to peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024 may omit earlier foundational studies on scaffolding. Third, excluding unpublished dissertations and conference papers may introduce publication bias, as studies with significant findings are more likely to be published. Fourth, meta-analysis was not conducted due to heterogeneity in study designs and outcome measures. Fifth, reliance on self-reported data in many included studies may have introduced social desirability bias. Despite these limitations, the systematic approach employed in this review provides a reliable and comprehensive overview of current research on scaffolding strategies in first-year EFL writing instruction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This literature review synthesizes findings from 60 empirical studies published between 2019 and 2024 using a thematic approach. The analysis addresses three primary areas: (1) the distribution of scaffolding strategies across stages of the writing process, (2) the thematic categorization of scaffolding approaches, and (3) the development of a comprehensive thematic framework and conceptual model for scaffolding in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction. The synthesis adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability in study selection and synthesis. PRISMA provides a standardized reporting procedure that requires a minimum set of items to be included in systematic reviews. The PRISMA checklist encompasses all sections of a systematic review, including the title, methods, results, and discussion. Employing PRISMA facilitates clear, consistent, and comprehensive reporting, allowing readers to assess the quality of the review and replicate its methodology. The flow diagram, which delineates the phases of the selection process—identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion—presents essential information in a concise graphical format.

Distribution of Scaffolding Strategies Across Writing Process Stages

Analysis of the 60 included studies indicates that scaffolding strategies are implemented throughout all stages of the writing process, though their frequency varies. Scaffolding assignments involve dividing extended writing activities into shorter, manageable tasks, while sequencing assignments refer to the deliberate ordering of these tasks. The distribution of strategies across pre-writing, while-writing, post-writing, and editing stages is illustrated in Figure 2.

Writing Process Stage	Scaffolding Strategies (Examples)	Frequency (n = 60)	Percentage (%)
 Pre-writing (Planning) Generating ideas, understanding the topic, organizing thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorming Questioning Graphic organizers (e.g., mind maps, concept maps) Modeling (analyzing sample texts) Topic discussion 	41	68.3
 While-writing (Drafting) Developing ideas, writing the first draft, organizing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence starters Writing frames / sentence frames Vocabulary support Paraphrasing Guided writing 	47	78.3
 Post-writing (Revising) Reviewing, improving content, structure, language, and mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer feedback Teacher feedback Checklists / rubrics Revising guides Rewriting 	48	80.0
 Editing & Proofreading (Publishing) Editing grammar, mechanics, and finalizing the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grammar support Editing checklists Proofreading strategies Publishing platforms / portfolios 	29	48.3

Note. Percentages exceed 100% because many studies reported scaffolding strategies for more than one stage.

Figure 2. Distribution of Scaffolding Strategies across the Writing Process Stages

The data indicate that post-writing (revising) scaffolding strategies were the most frequently reported (80.0%), followed by while-writing (drafting) strategies (78.3%), pre-writing (planning) strategies (68.3%), and editing and proofreading strategies (48.3%). This distribution demonstrates that researchers and educators have prioritized support during the revision and drafting phases, whereas editing and proofreading have received comparatively less emphasis.

The high frequency of post-writing scaffolding strategies (80.0%) reflects the recognition that feedback and revision are essential for writing development. Boshwabadi and Boud (2025) note that first-year students often encounter difficulties transitioning from a generic high school writing approach to the disciplinary-oriented writing expected at university. The focus on peer and teacher

feedback, as well as rubrics in the post-writing stage, highlights the importance of developing students' evaluative judgment, defined as the ability to assess the quality of their own and others' work (Tai et al., 2018). This result aligns with Taub et al. (2023), who found that scaffolded support should target specific phases of self-regulation for different student groups, indicating that teachers should implement differentiated scaffolding approaches tailored to students' needs and writing development stages. Writing is a fundamental interdisciplinary skill required for successful coursework completion, and instruction in self-regulation for writing has become increasingly prevalent in writing curricula.

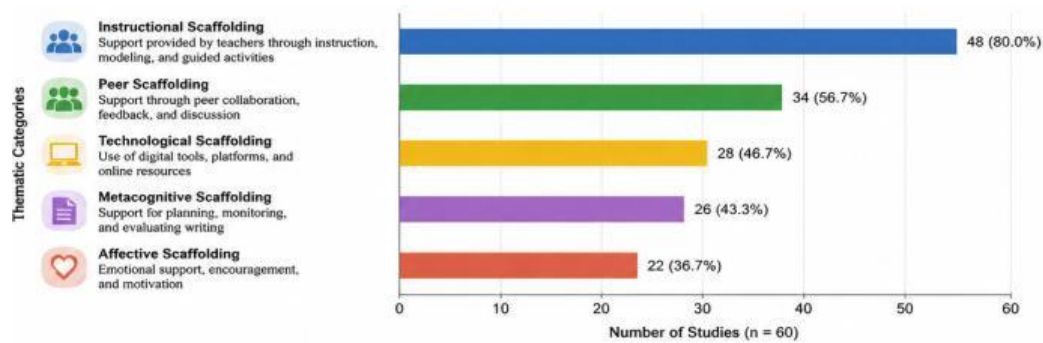
The while-writing stage (78.3%) was the second most frequently scaffolded, with strategies including sentence starters, writing frames, vocabulary support, paraphrasing, and guided writing. This finding is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2024), who demonstrated that group-based scaffolding in academic writing effectively addresses evolving student needs across all phases of writing. Their research found that cognitive scaffolding is most prominent in the pre-writing phase, while linguistic scaffolding becomes central in the post-writing phase as students focus on refining language accuracy.

The pre-writing stage (68.3%) was also highly represented, with strategies such as brainstorming, questioning, graphic organizers, modeling, and topic discussion. This result highlights the importance of supporting students in generating ideas and organizing their thoughts prior to drafting. Veddayana et al. (2025) identify scaffolding as one of six core instructional strategies in technology-enhanced collaborative academic writing, emphasizing that effective implementation requires deliberate integration of technologies and instructional designs aligned with pedagogical objectives at each writing stage.

The editing and proofreading stage was the least frequently scaffolded (48.3%). This result indicates a need for greater research and pedagogical focus on supporting students during the final stages of the writing process, when they refine language accuracy, check mechanics, and prepare their work for submission. Allagui (2024) found that scaffolding interventions improved self-efficacy in source-based writing, demonstrating that targeted scaffolding can address specific writing challenges. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2024) found that effective scaffolding is essential for supporting students' writing development in elementary instruction. Wendimu (2024) showed that teacher-student collaboration through guided writing instruction enhances students' writing outcomes, reinforcing the importance of structured support in writing instruction.

Thematic Distribution of Scaffolding Strategies

The thematic analysis identified five primary categories of scaffolding strategies used in EFL writing instruction: instructional, peer, technological, metacognitive, and affective scaffolding. Wright et al. (2023) observed that motivation and engagement in early writing are significantly shaped by the classroom environment, which corresponds to the affective scaffolding category highlighted in this review.



Note. Percentages exceed 100% because several studies addressed more than one thematic category.

Figure 3. Thematic Distribution of Scaffolding Strategies in Writing Skills for First-Year Students

Instructional scaffolding was the most frequently reported category, with studies highlighting the central role of teachers in delivering direct instruction, modeling writing strategies, and facilitating guided practice. This finding is consistent with Hasan and Rezaul Karim (2019), who demonstrated that scaffolding substantially enhances writing skill acquisition in EFL contexts by providing temporary support that enables students to complete tasks beyond their independent capabilities. Falardeau et al. (2024) investigated the impact of explicit, teacher-led writing instruction on the self-efficacy and writing performance of fifth-grade students, concluding that such instruction significantly improved both outcomes and underscored the value of teacher-led scaffolding.

Peer scaffolding was the second most prevalent category, reflecting an increased focus on collaborative learning in EFL writing instruction. Tinggie et al. (2023) reported that peer scaffolding among primary ESL learners facilitated idea generation and writing development through collaborative interactions, with questioning techniques and peer support fostering independent idea generation. Graham (2024) offered evidence-based recommendations for writing instruction among younger students, emphasizing the significance of peer collaboration and feedback.

Technological scaffolding has become an increasingly significant category, with research exploring the use of digital tools such as Grammarly, Google Docs, and online writing platforms. The adoption of these tools provides opportunities for personalized support and immediate feedback. However, Chairinkam and Yawiloeng (2024) found that some students were dissatisfied with technology-assisted collaborative writing due to limitations in the tools and unanticipated group dynamics. Wilson (2021) investigated elementary teachers' perceptions of automated feedback and writing instruction, highlighting both the advantages and constraints of technology in supporting writing development. Cognitive scaffolding was identified as a critical but under-researched category. This involves supporting students in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their writing. Found that scaffolding strategies foster learner autonomy in process writing, enabling students to become more independent and self-regulated writers. Taub et al. (2023) further emphasize the importance of investigating how students perceive their self-regulated writing behaviors, as evidenced by their real-time writing using multimodal data channels. They derived recommendations for scaffolding design based on the results of their empirical study, which imply that scaffolded support should focus on specific phases of self-regulation for different student groups. Zhu (2024) found that writing self-regulated learning strategies mediated the relationship between teacher feedback and English writing proficiency, confirming the importance of metacognitive scaffolding in writing development.

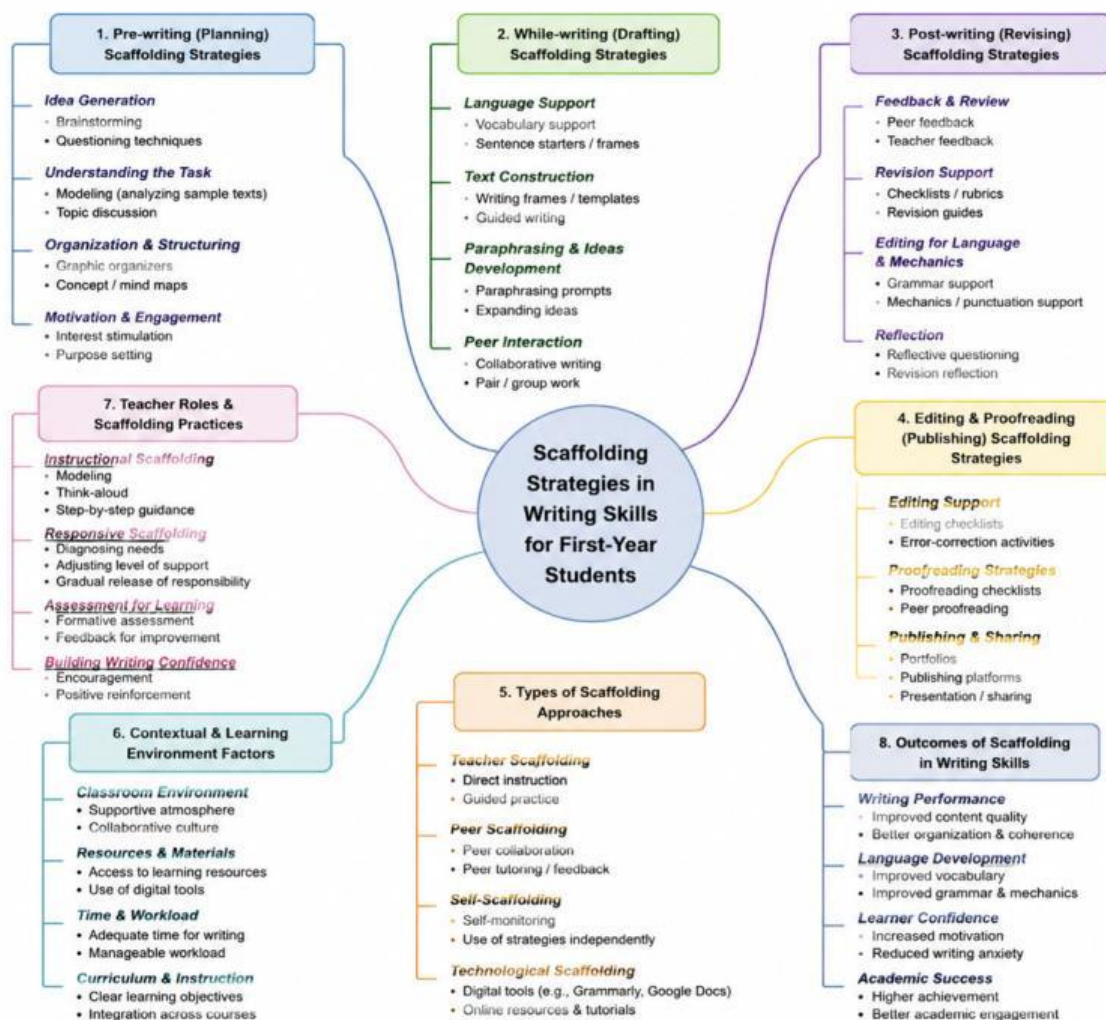
Affective scaffolding, though less frequently reported, was acknowledged as essential for addressing students' emotional needs, including encouragement, confidence-building, and anxiety reduction. Research indicates that motivational scaffolding positively impacts EFL learners' writing acquisition by enhancing their confidence and willingness to write (Hasan and Rezaul Karim,

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2019). Harris (2024) investigated the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) instructional model, which combines cognitive and affective scaffolding to improve writing outcomes. Salas et al. (2025) examined the long-term effects of SRSD interventions for primary school children and found that sustained scaffolding approaches produce lasting benefits for writing development.

Thematic Framework of Scaffolding Strategies and Supporting Factors

Based on the thematic synthesis of 60 studies, a comprehensive framework of scaffolding strategies and supporting factors was developed, as illustrated in Figure 4. This framework is adapted from Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory and incorporates scaffolding principles established by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) within the context of EFL writing instruction. The ZPD serves as a metric for determining the level at which a student can independently solve a problem and the subsequent level achievable with guidance from a proficient adult or more knowledgeable peer.



Note. The framework is developed based on thematic synthesis of 60 studies included in this literature review.

Figure 4. Data Analysis: Scaffolding Strategies in Writing Skills for First-Year Students

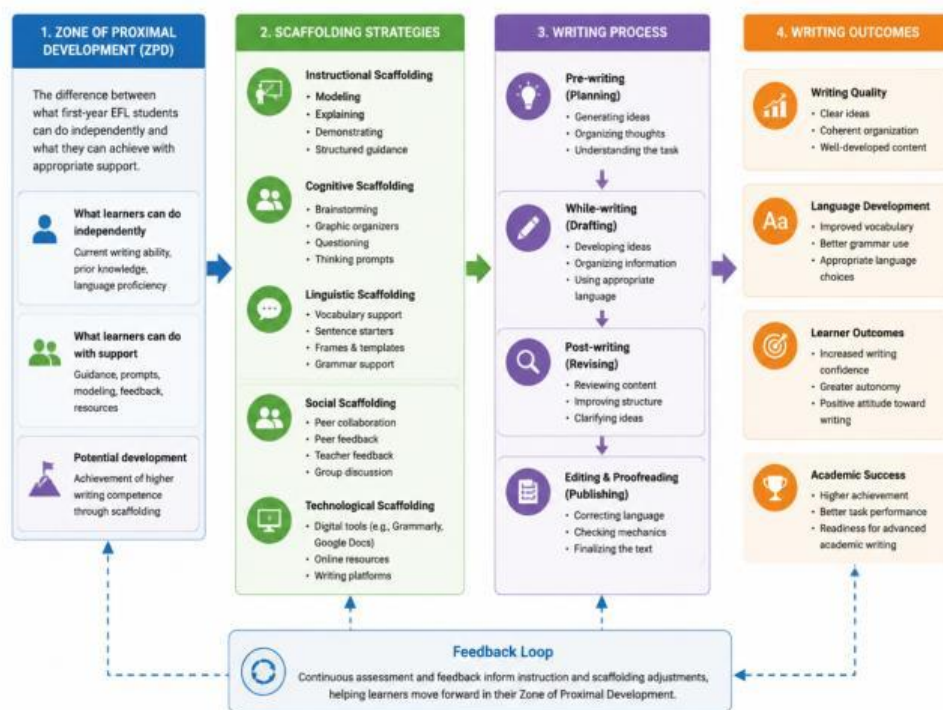
The framework demonstrates that scaffolding strategies function across multiple dimensions and stages of the writing process. It underscores the significance of considering the interplay among various types of scaffolding, contextual factors, teacher roles, and student outcomes. Furthermore, the framework advocates for a holistic approach to scaffolding that addresses cognitive, linguistic, affective, and social dimensions of writing development. Teachers may scaffold and sequence assignments by progressing from smaller, discrete tasks to more complex ones, and from concrete DOI article: <https://doi.org/10.23960/joaedu.v4i1.1282>

to reflective, abstract, and active tasks. For example, complex tasks can be scaffolded by assigning short, single-task papers before longer, multidimensional ones; requiring students to summarize a text before analyzing, interpreting, or critiquing it; and having students explain a basic concept before applying it to new problems or cases.

The framework aligns with findings by Huong et al. (2024), who reported that group-based scaffolding in academic writing effectively addresses students' evolving needs across pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing phases. Their study found that cognitive scaffolding is most prominent during the pre-writing phase, whereas linguistic scaffolding becomes central in the post-writing phase as students focus on language accuracy. This pattern is mirrored in the framework's differentiation of strategies across writing stages. Additionally, Sanchez (2025) investigated guided play in kindergarten classrooms and a teacher's inquiry into scaffolding play-based writing instruction, emphasizing the importance of adaptable scaffolding approaches.

Conceptual Framework of Scaffolding Strategies in EFL Writing

Drawing on the thematic framework and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, a comprehensive conceptual framework was developed to illustrate the relationships among ZPD, scaffolding strategies, the writing process, and writing outcomes (see Figure 2). This framework adapts Vygotsky's ZPD theory and incorporates scaffolding principles (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) within the context of EFL writing instruction. The Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes providing assistance to students, encouraging collaborative efforts to help them achieve their full potential and enhance self-efficacy. According to Vygotsky's theory, scaffolding is temporary support provided by a proficient peer or more skilled individual that enables students to accomplish tasks beyond their current abilities.



Note. This framework is adapted from Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory and drawing on scaffolding principles (Bruffee, 1984; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) within the context of EFL writing instruction.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Scaffolding Strategies in EFL Writing

The conceptual framework demonstrates the dynamic and cyclical nature of scaffolding in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is positioned as the central concept, representing the gap between students' independent

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capabilities and their achievements with appropriate support. The framework delineates five scaffolding strategies—instructional, cognitive, linguistic, social, and technological—that function across the four stages of the writing process.

The feedback loop within the framework underscores the significance of continuous assessment and feedback in effective scaffolding. This approach is consistent with Shakra's (2023) findings, which indicate that scaffolded feedback in second-language (L2) writing tasks is most effective when learners understand the assessment criteria. A lack of such awareness can reduce the effectiveness of feedback, underscoring the need for transparent assessment criteria and active learner participation in the assessment process. Additionally, scaffolding interventions have been shown to enhance self-efficacy in source-based writing (Allagui, 2024), while teachers' perceptions of feedback and writing instruction (Wilson, 2021) further influence the success of scaffolding practices.

Taub et al. (2023) highlight the importance of targeting scaffolded support to specific phases of self-regulation for distinct student groups. Their findings suggest that teachers should implement differentiated scaffolding tailored to students' diverse needs and writing development. The study identified variations in writing behaviors among student clusters and offered recommendations for providing scaffolded support aligned with these differences. Furthermore, research by Mdotana-Zide and Mafugu (2023) demonstrated that scaffolded learning significantly enhanced students' academic essay writing, resulting in improved organization, coherence, and critical analysis.

Discussion of Key Findings

1. The Role of Scaffolding in Addressing Writing Challenges

The findings of this review indicate that scaffolding strategies are essential for addressing the challenges first-year EFL students face in academic writing. The literature identifies specific challenges such as generating content, developing coherent paragraphs, and mastering language mechanics (Zohrevandi et al., 2024). The prevalence of post-writing scaffolding strategies (80.0%) demonstrates that educators recognize the significance of feedback and revision in supporting students. Well-designed writing assignments, aligned with core learning objectives, enable students to build on prior knowledge, apply key concepts from various instructional contexts, and prepare for future learning.

These findings align with Boshrabadi and Boud (2025), who contend that first-year assessments frequently emphasize immediate learning objectives to mitigate assessment shock, rather than equipping students for future writing demands. They propose that scaffolded pedagogical activities prioritizing the development of students' evaluative judgment can both alleviate assessment shock and better prepare students for subsequent writing tasks. Furthermore, a systematic, step-by-step approach to educational research reviews underscores the need for rigorous methodologies to synthesize evidence on effective teaching practices.

2. The Integration of Multiple Scaffolding Types

The thematic analysis demonstrates that effective scaffolding in EFL writing instruction requires integrating multiple scaffolding types, including instructional, peer, technological, metacognitive, and affective supports. This conclusion is consistent with Veddayana et al. (2025), who identified scaffolding as a core instructional strategy in technology-enhanced collaborative academic writing. According to their research, successful implementation depends on the deliberate coordination of technologies and instructional designs aligned with pedagogical objectives at each stage of the writing process.

The significance of peer scaffolding is corroborated by Tinggie et al. (2023), who found that collaborative interactions among primary ESL learners facilitated idea generation and writing development. Additional research confirms that peer scaffolding enhances writing development through questioning techniques and mutual support (Tinggie et al., 2023). Furthermore, explicit

writing instruction implemented by teachers has been shown to significantly improve students' writing self-efficacy and performance (Falardeau et al., 2024).

3. The Role of Technology in Scaffolding

Technological scaffolding has become increasingly prominent, with research exploring the use of digital tools to provide personalized support and immediate feedback. However, Chairinkam and Yawiloeng (2024) report that some students experience dissatisfaction with technology-assisted collaborative writing, citing limitations and unforeseen group dynamics. These findings indicate that technology should be applied judiciously, in combination with other scaffolding approaches, to optimize effectiveness. Wilson (2021) also highlights the need for a balanced approach to technology integration in writing instruction, grounded in elementary teachers' perceptions of automated feedback.

The integration of technology in scaffolding is further supported by Taub et al. (2023), who employed keystroke logging to analyze students' writing processes and developed design recommendations for scaffolding accordingly. Their findings indicate that scaffolded support should target specific phases of self-regulation for distinct student groups, suggesting the need for differentiated scaffolding approaches tailored to students' developmental stages and needs. Zhu (2024) also demonstrated that self-regulated learning strategies mediate the relationship between teacher feedback and English writing proficiency, underscoring the significance of metacognitive scaffolding in writing development.

4. The Importance of Affective Scaffolding

The recognition of affective scaffolding as a distinct category underscores the need to address students' emotional needs in writing instruction. Motivational scaffolding has been shown to enhance EFL learners' writing acquisition by increasing their confidence and willingness to write (Hasan and Rezaul Karim, 2019). Widiana and Husein As Sabiq (2021) further support this by demonstrating that students benefit from encouragement and guidance to comprehend the purposes and rewards of learning English. Additionally, motivation and engagement in early writing are significantly shaped by the classroom environment (Wright et al., 2023), and scaffolding interventions can improve self-efficacy in source-based writing (Allagui, 2024).

F. Implications for Practice

The results of this literature review yield several implications for effective practice in EFL writing instruction:

1. For Teachers: It is recommended that teachers employ a range of scaffolding strategies throughout all stages of the writing process, with particular emphasis on the frequently overlooked editing and proofreading stages. Integrating instructional, peer, technological, metacognitive, and affective scaffolding approaches can address the diverse needs of first-year students. Taub et al. (2023) emphasize that scaffolded support should target specific phases of self-regulation for different student groups. The principle of gradually releasing responsibility, in which teachers provide initial support that is systematically withdrawn as students gain competence and independence, is fundamental to effective scaffolding.

2. For Curriculum Developers: Writing curricula should include structured scaffolding at every stage of the writing process, with explicit instruction on editing and proofreading strategies. Prioritizing the development of students' evaluative judgment—the ability to assess the quality of their own and others' work—is essential (Boshrabadi & Boud, 2025). Sequencing assignments from smaller, discrete tasks to more complex, reflective, and abstract activities can further enhance student learning.

3. For Teacher Training: Both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs should incorporate modules on effective scaffolding techniques and their application in diverse classroom contexts. Teachers must be prepared to assess students' needs, adjust the level of support accordingly, and implement the gradual release of responsibility (responsive scaffolding).

4. For Technology Integration: The implementation of digital tools for scaffolding should be purposeful and aligned with specific pedagogical objectives. Technology is most effective when it complements, rather than replaces, other scaffolding methods. Evidence-based recommendations underscore the importance of integrating technology thoughtfully into writing instruction (Graham, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review of 60 empirical studies (2019–2024) demonstrates that scaffolding strategies are essential for enhancing first-year EFL students' writing skills. These strategies are distributed across all writing stages: post-writing revising (80.0%), while-writing drafting (78.3%), pre-writing planning (68.3%), and editing proofreading (48.3%). The findings indicate that revision and drafting receive greater emphasis, while editing remains underexplored. Thematic analysis identified five scaffolding categories: instructional, peer, technological, metacognitive, and affective. Integrating these categories is crucial for addressing students' challenges in content generation, coherence, language mechanics, and writing confidence. Key implementation challenges include diverse proficiency levels (72%), limited classroom time (65%), balancing scaffolding with autonomy (58%), and vocabulary limitations (60%). Despite these challenges, substantial benefits were reported, such as improved writing quality (80%), enhanced autonomy (75%), increased motivation (70%), and effective peer learning (65%). The conceptual framework, grounded in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, illustrates scaffolding's dynamic and cyclical nature across four writing stages, with a feedback loop that emphasizes continuous assessment and gradual support withdrawal. The findings have implications for teachers (adopting varied strategies), curriculum developers (structured scaffolding across stages), teacher training (effective techniques), and technology integration (pedagogically aligned digital tools). Limitations include English-language bias, exclusion of pre-2019 foundational studies and unpublished dissertations, and heterogeneous research designs that preclude meta-analysis. Future research should adopt longitudinal and experimental designs, investigate digital scaffolding tools, examine differentiated approaches across proficiency levels, conduct cross-cultural studies, and explore peer scaffolding mechanisms. Ultimately, scaffolding represents a pedagogical philosophy grounded in the belief that all students can succeed with appropriate support. This approach transforms writing classrooms from spaces of struggle into spaces of growth, provided teachers continuously adapt strategies to learners' evolving needs through reflective practice, thereby bridging the gap between first-year students' current abilities and the demands of academic writing.

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