

## A MODEL FOR SCAFFOLDING ACADEMIC IELTS WRITING TASK 2: MMPIPE

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**Abstract:** The study uses the theory of scaffolding and ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) as the guidelines to explain in what ways scaffolding can help the teacher to improve the EFL students' academic writing. To make it easier, the author formulates the scaffolding-based activity namely MMPIPE. It stands for Motivating, Modelling, Peer Brainstorming, Independent Writing, Peer Feedback, and Evaluation which are elaborated within theories of sociocultural framework. The model of MMPIPE scaffolding was used at the one-week Intensive Classes for IELTS Writing in Jakarta, Indonesia. The classes were for the EFL learners aged varied between 18 up to 28 years old coming from various backgrounds who want to continue studying at English speaking countries. The past results of applying the MMPIPE scaffolding writing have shown that the learners achieve the optimal Zone Proximal Development by successfully gaining the increased score band between 0.5 and 1.5 band scale. However, the MMPIPE model also has some limitations in ways that it may lead to the different results if the activity uses the different material sources. Furthermore, due to some considerations, it is only applicable to intermediate up to advanced level.

**Keywords** – **Scaffolding, ZPD, IELTS Writing, Academic Writing**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The learning activity uses scaffolding which was originated from Vygotsky's work in the studies of early language learning (Foley, 1994) and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Scaffolding has been recognised as one of the highly recommended, resourceful, and powerful instructional techniques of socio-constructivist teaching (Clark and Graves, 2004). Scaffolding is viewed as a component of a larger set of methodology in

activity-based learning consisting of modeling (demonstrating), coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration (Davis and Miyake, 2004). Some set of scaffolding writing techniques have also been developed (see Bodrova and Leong, 1995, 1996; Harris, 2006; Read, 2010; Schwieter, 2010).

The example of scaffolding writing can be found on Read's work (2010) formulated the IMSCI (Inquiry, Modeling, Shared, Collaborative, and Independent) writing model instruction that enables the teachers model either to the writing product (the genre of focus) or to the writing process. Another model was developed by Harris (2006) that focused on teaching abstract and critique writing through three steps: laying the foundation, communicating expectations and evaluation criteria, and scaffolding for success.

The successful outcomes of scaffolding can optimize the ZPD which is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". The writer simplifies it as the gap from being on some level into becoming on the higher level. Bransford et al (2000) outline the six features of successful scaffolding: engaging student interest in the task, simplify the complexity of the task, keep the learners motivated and focused on the goal achievement, differentiated between the students' solution and the desired solution, reducing the learner frustration and risk, and representing and defining an ideal solution to the task.

## **DISCUSSION**

The MMPIPE teaching model was once tested at the one-week Intensive Classes for IELTS Writing in Jakarta, Indonesia. The classes were for the EFL learners aged varied between 18 up to 28 years old coming from various backgrounds. Continuing higher education level at English speaking countries such as United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada is the main goal why the learners take the class. The classes are small of groups limited to 8 students. The learners have studied English for more than ten years and achieved 5.5 up to 6.0 IELTS Writing band are the requirements to enter this intermediate-level class.

This level consists of a total of 21 hours in 7 day. Each session was conducted within 3 hours. The intensive learning was mainly focused on IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 instead of IELTS Academic Writing Task 1 due to some reasons. First reason, it is usually considered as the most difficult section of the IELTS Academic test. It is because it

requires longer paragraph at least 250 words and takes longer time about 40 minutes of 60-minute allocated times for Academic Writing session. Another reason, it earns twice score (about 60%) to the final band for writing than to Task 1 that demands the test takers to express some opinions regarding to any topic given.

### ***Activity Source***

The activity uses the book written by Higgins (2012) entitled “Academic and General Task 2: How to Write at A Band 9 Level”. This book was used along with accessing the author’s Youtube video channel as well as the website on [ieltsielts.com](http://ieltsielts.com). The source was chosen by the author because it does not only deal with enhancing the writing skills through some tips and tricks but also deal with increasing the learner’s motivation to get the higher score.

### ***Activity Aims***

- To motivate the EFL learners to engage on IELTS academic writing
- To provide the depth-understanding of IELTS academic writing that enables the learner getting used to writing more academic before studying at English speaking countries.
- To create a collaborative learning environment.

### ***Procedure***

To make it easier, the author creates MMPIPE formulation in describing the procedure of the activity consisting of Motivating, Modelling, Peer Brainstorming, Independent Writing, Peer Feedback, and Evaluation.

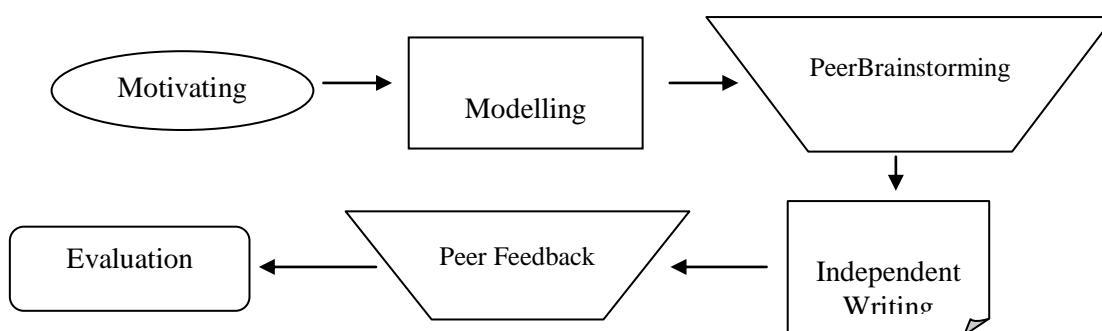


Image: *Procedures of the MMPIPE Scaffolding Writing Activity*

### **Step 1: Motivating**

The first steps consist of watching any motivational or success story of IELTS test-takers on Ryan IELTS channel. On this occasion, the students watch the Episode 22 on Ryan IELTS Youtube Video Channel “Vita Scores Band 8 With Only A Week of IELTS

Preparation” available on <https://youtu.be/CDNarwfUZXI>. The students take notes on tips, tricks, and strategies applied by Vita on achieving the scores band 8 especially on 8.0 scores band for writing section.

From the sociocultural perspective, the students can get some benefits of scaffolding in some ways such as managing the expectation and getting the quality of information that maximizes the learning activity because it makes the students get familiar (McKenzie, 2000). Therefore, the students will anticipate any elements of surprise and uncertainty in the future.

This motivational activity from watching the video can be related to six functions of scaffolding originally outlined by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976). First function is *recruitment* in which the video attracts the learner’s interest to engage in the academic writing task. Secondly, the video successfully breaks the complexity into simpler task in which Wood et al (1976) called it as *reduction in degree of freedom*. Third function of scaffolding is *direction maintenance* which is shown by the ways of the IELTS instructor share the successful story of test-takers to keep motivating the learners to pursuit the goal. Next function, *making critical features*, is implied on how the IELTS test-taker on video points out some relevant features on what mistakes that the test-taker has done and the possible strategies to avoid the similar disadvantages. Another function of scaffolding, *frustration control*, demonstrated through the motivational video is that it consists of some steps and tricks on how to keep calm and be relax during the test because any kind of stress and pressures will only decrease the concentration degree level that affects to the lower score that the learners may achieve. The last function of scaffolding through the video is the *demonstration* in which the instructor as well as the students on video gives the ideal model on how to get the perfect score for IELTS Academic Writing.

The successful scaffolding activity on this first stage can be measured on how the teachers can manage the complexity of the Academic Writing Task 2 to make the students be able to manage the frustration and risk in the problem-solving process and keep motivated to achieve the goal (Bransford et al, 2000).

### Step 2: Modelling

On this stage, the material book is explored by the teachers to give the demonstration on how to construct the IELTS academic writing task 2. The maximum assistance (Bodrova and Leong, 1998) is provided to give the learners the highlighted lines on how to compose the writing task 2 effectively based on the clear explanation on the material book.

The students will focus on planning the sentence structure with the specific genre of Task 2. On this occasion, the learning is focused on the most common type of IELTS Writing Task 2 question: agree or disagree. Based on the Higgins (2012) explanation, the students need to stand whether agree or disagree with the topic given. Then, the teacher shows on how to outline the paragraph structure as well as have the cohesion sentence level.

This demonstration stage mainly functions as the way to match the learning objective (Yellin, 2008) and give the maximum assistance to foster the autonomy of the learners (Crabbe, 1993).

### Step 3: Peer Brainstorming

As many students consider that one of the difficulties in dealing with IELTS Writing Task 2 is developing ideas, the teacher formulated the Peer Brainstorming to scaffold the students with three stages. As on this occasion, the learning activity focuses on the agreement or disagreement. The eight students are divided into two groups: the affirmative (agree) and the negative (disagree) sides on the topic given:

“Public transportation is a great way to travel, particularly within a metropolis. The metro is the most convenient way to get around the city. Do you agree or disagree?”  
(Higgins, 2012, p. 23)

Every team member whether in affirmative or negative side needs to come up with any idea to support arguments. The peer brainstorming is conducted on this procedure:

1. Alone (1 minute) – the student needs to come up with any idea to agree or disagree to the given topic based on the group side.
2. In pair (the same group) – the student shares the idea and in 1 minute discusses another possible idea.
3. In fours (2 affirmative group members and 2 negative group members) – the students compare and add other arguments.

The learners are scaffolded to elaborate ideas which involved the gradual transfer of responsibility between expert and novice in the concept of step-by-step formation (Galperin, 1969, 1985).

However, for some unfamiliar topics shared by the learners, the scaffolding occurs as novice and novice interaction (Swain and Lapkin, 2002) in which can extend the current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence (Donato, 1994).

The peer brainstorming is also relevant to what Lidz, C. S. (1991) points out as the components of assisted learning via scaffolding: share experiences that may stimulate new ideas and give the learners a sense of caring and enjoyment in the task.

This kind of brainstorming is somewhat similar with the “collaborative writing” concept of Gibbons (2002) which really helps the students to get benefits from the rehearsal of ideas before composing.

#### Step 4: Independent Writing

Scaffolding designs the teacher to facilitate the students ultimately to have independent performances (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bliss and Askew, 1996; Bodrova and Leong, 1998; Meyer, 1993; Palincsar, 1998) after giving the optimal learning assistance to complete the task which is progressively decreased (Bodrova & Leong, 1998; Elicker, 1995).

Thus, on this stage, the students independently write the IELTS Academic Writing Task 2 independently after catching some ideas from peer brainstorming step as well as recalling the modelled paragraph structure given by the teacher initially. According to Crabbe (1993), the scaffolding activity curriculum has to foster the learners’ autonomy through the teachers’ modelling at classroom and the actual design of tasks. In simpler word, the curriculum and activity design needs to model the independent learning procedures applied on this stage.

#### Step 5: Peer Feedback

This stage commands the students to provide feedbacks to other two students based on the band descriptor given (see appendix 3). The learner will give the feedback on the same group at first and then provide the feedback for the different member of the opposite group. After the students give as well as get 2 feedbacks from others, the learners need to reflect and assess their own writing based on the feedbacks given.

The peer feedback as Barnard’s study (2002) revealed that it can significantly impact the student writing as a result of developing skills and self-confidence to assess their own writing and at the same time improving others’ writing as well. Additionally, by getting used to give feedback with a set of writing techniques, qualities, and analytical/critical skills; the students unconsciously shape and improve their own writing skills (Paton 2002; Tang and Tithecott, 1999). It has been approved by some studies revealed that feedback can help writing getting improved with some additional revisions of the same essay (Chaudron, 1984; Connor and Asenavage, 1994; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1992; Mendonça and Johnson, 1994; Nelson and Murphy, 1993; Schwieter, 2010; Villamil and de Guerrero, 1996, 1998).

Furthermore, the peer feedback can lead into the active engagement in which the discovery and share of information, exchanging feedback, and lifting the confidence up occurs among the learners (Coterall and Cohen, 2003).

#### Step 6: Evaluation

On this last stage, the teacher takes back the main role as the central person at classrooms by giving the evaluation based on band descriptor rubrics. The evaluations are not only given to the individual work but also provided to the learners' feedback.

Coterall and Cohen (2003) suggests the teacher to give the evaluation in order to reinforce the uptake of ideas concerning on the content and the structure. It is important for the learners to get the teacher's evaluation because it will give the students the reflection on how they progress as well as help the students to not do the same mistakes which may potentially be fossilised if they do not receive any teachers' evaluation (Metcalf, 2003).

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The past results of applying the MMPIPE scaffolding writing have shown that the learners achieve the optimal Zone Proximal Development shown by 2 points of being into becoming. First, the students are moved from being less academic into more academic styles in writing. Another point is that the results of the test, from being 5.5- 6.0 into becoming higher around 6.0 – 7.5. All the students got the higher band for IELTS Academic Writing in average between 0.5 up to 1.5 bands which is supposed to take longer times, 200 hours to improve by one band (IELTS Handbook, 2002). In another word, the application of this scaffolding activity can be considered as the alternative way to improve the EFL learners' academic writing.

However, there are some limitations of this activity. First, the different material sources i.e. textbooks and videos may lead to different results because it is really difficult to find any sources which not only simplify the task but also motivate the learners like the sources used in this activity. Another challenge is that the English competence level of the students. This activity is most likely not applicable to the beginner levels because it requires at least intermediate level with some background knowledge of the linguistic features and the writing content. While at beginner level, the teachers need to firstly train the students to have a better competence in taking the Academic IELTS test.

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