

Summary Teacher–child interaction in early second language (L2) classrooms plays a fundamental role in children's language development and active participation. These scaffolding methods often helped transform simple IRE exchanges into more extended interactions (e.g., Initiation–Response–Prompt–Response sequences), where children could engage more deeply and develop their linguistic competencies. Drawing on a sociocultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978), this study by Koyuncu, Kumpulainen, and Kuusisto (2024) examines how teacher scaffolding shapes young children's participation in Finnish early childhood education settings. Three essential features of scaffolding were emphasized: contingency (adjusting support according to the child's performance), fading (gradually removing assistance), and transfer of responsibility (encouraging children to assume more control over tasks). The study focuses on understanding the communicative patterns that emerge during classroom interactions, the strategies teachers use to scaffold learning, and how these elements either support or limit children's active engagement in L2 practices. In countries like Finland, early L2 education emphasizes child–centered and playful approaches, promoting active participation through games, songs, and interactive tasks. While playful learning has been suggested to foster engagement and motivation, empirical studies documenting how teacher–child interactions and scaffolding strategies operate in these environments are limited.

Teachers' Scaffolding Strategies Teachers used a variety of scaffolding techniques to enhance children's participation: Questions and Probing: Teachers asked open–ended questions to stimulate thinking and encourage multiple responses. The findings support the view that strong teacher professionalism -- including sensitivity, flexibility, and creativity -- is vital for successfully implementing playful and participatory L2 learning environments.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research This research highlights the importance of small–group teaching, scaffolding strategies, and playful learning contexts in promoting young children's active participation in L2 classrooms.

Findings: The Nature of Teacher–Child Interaction Analysis revealed that classroom interaction was predominantly teacher–initiated, especially in whole–class sessions, where 62.7% of interactions were started by teachers versus 37.3% by children. Conversely, small–group sessions allowed for richer exchanges, with teachers more frequently using strategies that encouraged children's initiatives, opinions, and experiences. Second, moving beyond rigid IRE structures towards more open–ended, playful, and child–initiated interactions proved essential for fostering real communicative competence.

Introduction to the Context and Need for the Study Previous research highlights the importance of scaffolding and active classroom participation for successful language learning. Teachers employed both verbal strategies (e.g., simplifying language, questioning, feedback) and procedural strategies (e.g., using gestures, waiting time) to scaffold children's participation. The lessons observed combined whole–class and small–group sessions, allowing researchers to examine how interaction patterns varied by group size. Teachers followed different pedagogical approaches, including communicative, task–based, and natural approaches, using English frequently while allowing Finnish to ensure comprehension and emotional comfort.

Audio–Visual Materials and Real Objects: Integrating songs, games, toys, and realia created meaningful and motivating contexts for language use.

Conceptual Framework: Sociocultural Theory and Scaffolding The research is grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, especially the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding