# Developing Early Literacy Skills Among Pre-Primary Children Through Scaffolding

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**Abstract**

Early childhood is a critical period for development of foundational literacy skills. Using secondary research, the study synthesises evidence on effective instructional practices that support the development of oral language, alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, print concepts, reading fluency and word recognition. The review identifies seven instructional techniques: materialisation, private speech, repeated interactive read aloud, joint writing activities, prompts and supports, expert-modelling and ongoing assessment. The findings suggest that the intentional and systematic application of these techniques enables children to function at the upper limits of their developmental potential. The study concludes that the effective scaffolding depends on teacher–child interaction, developmentally appropriate support, and continuous formative assessment to adjust instruction according to learners' needs. It further recommends embracing multilingualism, improvisation of learning materials, team teaching, and small-group instruction to address socio-cultural and contextual challenges in pre-primary education settings.

**Key words:** Literacy skills; pre-primary education; scaffolding; Tanzania; Zone of Proximal Development

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## Introduction

Early years of life, from conception to age eight, are critical for healthy physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development (Britto et al., 2017; Iruka, 2025). Research indicates that the quality of learning experiences acquired by young children during early years of life significantly determine whether they will excel in future academic or life in general (Al-Hassan et al., 2025). According to National Population projection from National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania has approximately a total of 16,524,201 children (8,328,142 boys and 8,196,059 girls) aged 0-8 years (i.e., 30% of overall population). This group deserves quality nurturing care, health services and early learning to reach their potential (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2024). Early childhood education not only provides a solid ground upon which other levels of education stand, but also serves as a reliable prediction tool for a country's socio-economic development. As such, the provision of quality early childhood education has been a global concern and commitment for

decades. Over the last ten years, Tanzania has witnessed unprecedented efforts and commitment to provide quality early childhood education and improve access to basic education. The Government has shown strong policy commitment to Early Childhood Development (ECD). The Education and Training Policy (ETP, 2014; revised 2023) requires one year of pre-primary education before Standard I (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2023). The implementation of the fee-free education policy has expanded access to pre-primary education. In this regard, the net enrolment in Tanzania's pre-primary education has increased from 35.5% in 2009 to 51.24% in 2024 (MoEST, 2024). Another commitment made by the government was the increase in recognition of the need for specialised teacher training for early childhood educators. For example, the number of qualified pre-primary teachers increased more than three times from 6,505 in 2013 to 20,270 in 2024 (MoEST, 2024). The government's commitment and interest in early childhood education has been a result of its increased recognition of the importance of quality early childhood education to children's later learning and development. Indeed, these efforts are also in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, Target 2, which lays particular emphasis on inclusive and equitable quality education to promote lifelong learning for every individual.

Despite these commendable strides, evidence shows that in many low- and middle-income countries, including Tanzania, children often enter pre-primary classrooms with wide disparities in language exposure, vocabulary and print awareness (UNESCO, 2022). These disparities are frequently linked to differences in home literacy environments, socio-economic status and access to pre-school education (Loye et al., 2022). Children who begin primary school without adequate cognitive, language, and socio-emotional readiness often struggle to meet early learning expectations. According to Britto et al. (2017), early developmental gaps tend to widen over time, leading to lower achievement**,** grade repetition**,** or early school dropout**.** As such, early childhood educators are challenged to identify and implement pedagogical strategies that can bridge these gaps and support every child's pathway toward literacy competence.

One of the most powerful and empirically supported frameworks for supporting early literacy learning is instructional scaffolding. The concept of scaffolding describes how adults or more capable peers provide temporary, structured support to enable learners perform tasks they could not accomplish independently (Smagorinsky, 2018). Scaffolding is therefore not merely assistance but a developmental mechanism that promotes internalisation of knowledge and gradual movement toward autonomous performance (Margolis, 2020). Through this process, teachers can tailor instruction to children's current levels of understanding and systematically adjust support as competence increases. In the context of early literacy, previous studies revealed that scaffolding serves as a bridge between emergent and conventional reading and writing abilities (Anisah, 2024; Justice et al., 2022; Vygotsky 1978). For example, Justice et al (2022) found that scaffolded literacy interactions such as guided writing, dialogic reading, and shared book experiences facilitate vocabulary growth, phonological awareness, print knowledge, and comprehension.

Scholars have made significant contributions to early childhood education in Tanzania. Studies have explored various aspects such as the role of play (Kejo, 2017), promotion of quality pre-primary education (Machumu, 2013) and the influence of policies on school readiness (Mtahabwa & Rao, 2010). Other researchers have examined teachers' knowledge of the new pre-primary curriculum (Shukia & Mabagala, 2019; Litinchi, 2018), quality of teaching materials (Tandika, 2015), and factors affecting literacy teaching, including teacher competence and home-school disconnection (John, 2017). Collectively, these studies

highlight individual, contextual, and systemic challenges influencing early reading development such as low parental involvement, large class sizes, inadequate resources, and limited teacher training. Despite its significance, few studies in Tanzania have systematically examined how scaffolding techniques are understood, adapted, and applied by pre-primary teachers in promoting early literacy development. This gap necessitates a closer exploration of scaffolding-based instructional practices that are developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant. This review, therefore, focuses on addressing one research question: *How and to what extent do the scaffolding instructional techniques enhance early literacy learning in Tanzanian pre-primary schools?* Understanding these practices is crucial not only for improving early literacy outcomes but also for informing teacher training and curriculum development aimed at achieving equitable quality education for all.

**Pre-primary education in Tanzania**

The pre-primary education was formalised and systematised in 1995 following the introduction of the *Education and Training Policy (ETP), 1995*. However, by then, such education was not compulsory until the policy was revised in 2014 and 2023 when the government declared a one year of pre-primary education as compulsory and fee-free for children aged 5 years. Following the declaration that pre-primary education is compulsory, each primary school in Tanzania is obliged to have a pre-primary class. Apparently, the structure of the education system in Tanzania is described as 1+-6-4-2-3+. This means 1 year of pre-primary school, six years of primary education, four years of ordinary secondary education, two years of advanced secondary education and three (or more) years of tertiary and/or higher education.

The overall aim of the pre-primary education in Tanzania was promote holistic development of the child cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally (Wizara ya Elimu, Sayansi na Teknolojia [WyEST], 2023). To realise the broad aim of pre-primary education, the 2023 revised curriculum redefined the pre-primary competences to promote communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, and patriotism (WyeST, 2023). These competencies are developed through five key learning areas: Culture, Religion, Arts and Sports; Languages and Communication; Early Life Skills, Health and Environment; Early Numeracy Skills; and Science and ICT Studies. Under each competence, the curriculum further stipulates the performance indicators which track the learning outcomes as per the existing assessment guidelines. Specific performance indicators for realisation of the ability to communicate effectively include listening to sounds, stories, songs; expressing oneself effectively; participating in conversations, reading pictures, pronouncing vowels and consonants; recognising and moulding shapes of vowels and consonants; holding writing materials properly, and drawing lines correctly (WyEST, 2023).

This review focuses on examining how pre-primary teachers can use scaffolding techniques to develop *early language communication skills* for three main reasons. First, it receives more instructional time than other competences, with five periods per week, each lasting 100 minutes (WyEST, 2023). Secondly, it is one of the frequently cited 21$^{st}$ century learning skills (Care et al., 2018; Schleicher, 2012). Thirdly, early literacy skills build a strong foundation for children's ability to communicate, a competence which is critical for successful children's learning upon entry to school and performance at higher grades and employment. As such, instruction in literacy skills can justifiably be considered the corner stone of education because achievement in all other students at higher grades is linked to reading and writing (Al-Hassan et al., 2025; Oghenekohwo & Frank-Oputu 2017).

**Essential components of early literacy skills development**

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2020), literacy encompasses a broad range of communicative practices that include speaking, listening, reading, writing, and engaging with both oral and written language in meaningful contexts. Literature has shown that the ability to read and write is a prerequisite skill for students' success in school and future career opportunities (Lennox, 2013; Thompson, 2015). Research has further indicated that children who have optimal literacy foundational skills tend to grow academically, while those with significant limitations in language skills are more likely to be left behind (Lennox, 2013) and considered to be academically at risk (Thompson, 2015). This is because language not only enables children to express their thoughts, ideas and emotions but also establishes their identity and takes control of their lives.

Scholars agree that to become literate is a complex, continuous and developmental process that should be viewed from the child's literacy perspective, considering both contextual and socio-cultural world (Brown, 2014). Due to the complex nature of literacy acquisition and the associated risk factors, Chapman and Tunmer (2011) opine that not everyone leaves the education system with a functional ability to read or write. Thus, as children learn how to be successful readers, they need to develop early literacy skills which serve as the base for later competence and proficiency. These early literacy skills include phonological or phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, oral language, print awareness, reading fluency, and word identification (Bayraktar, 2018). These skills stand as building blocks and are taught in a developmental sequence to enable the children develop higher-level skills and become proficient readers (Brown, 2014). The following sections describe the essentials of early literacy skills and how they are linked to children's language development.

***(a) Phonemic awareness***

Phonemic awareness (PA) refers to the ability to recognise, identify and manipulate phonemes in spoken words (Brown, 2014). It is an understanding that spoken words are made up of separate units of sound (phonemes) that are blended when words are pronounced. Research has found that this element of reading is the strongest indicator for a child's success at learning to read. Furthermore, research has shown that some children struggle to become successful readers because they have difficulty with phonemic awareness (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). Through this skill, the child acquires the ability to hear and produce separate sounds in words, segment words into their component sounds, blend separate sounds into words, recognise words that sound alike or different and manipulate phonemes in spoken words (Brown, 2014). For example, the realisation that the word *dog* has three sounds /d/ /o/ /g/ is an example of phonemic awareness skill. Thus, phonemic awareness is an important link between oral and written language; hence, it serves as the foundation for reading development among children at early ages (Brown, 2014).

***(b) Alphabetic knowledge***

Alphabetic knowledge (AK) is another early literacy skill which involves the ability to identify letter names and sounds, recognise letters in texts and produce letter forms (Jones et al., 2012). This means that with alphabet knowledge, children can use letters and their sounds to make phonemically correct representations of words when reading and spelling (Nicholson, 2005). Previous research has underscored the importance of alphabetic skills for the development of reading in early grades. A study by Jones et al. (2012) and NELP (2008) found alphabetic knowledge to be a strong predictor of literacy achievement. Children who are proficient in identifying letters, recognising beginnings and endings of word sounds at

entry into pre-schooling show stronger skills in phonological processing and word reading at the end of kindergarten and in first grade compared to their counterparts (Brown, 2014).

***(c) Oral language***

Oral language development is ECE has been demonstrated to be fundamental to children cognitive growth, social competence and later academic achievement (Xiao et al., 2025; West et al., 2024). Oral language (OL) is a term used to describe the development of knowledge and skills that allow children to understand, speak and use words to communicate (Brown, 2014). Scholars argue that pre-school and early primary school years are crucial moments for the development of children's oral language (Shiel et al., 2012). During this stage oral language contributes not only to listening, speaking, reading and writing skills but also to the structure of spoken words. Cregan (1998, p. 7) highlights three practical reasons as to why oral language should get greater attention and emphasis in a pre-school setting. First, oral language is the child's first, most important and frequently used structured medium of communication. Second, oral language is a primary means through which each child will be enabled to structure, evaluate, describe and control his/her experience. Third, oral language is a primary mediator of culture, the ways in which children locate themselves in the world and define their perspectives with it and within it.

***(d) Print awareness***

Print awareness (PA) is an important early literacy skill that children need to acquire in pre-school (Brown, 2014). It involves awareness that print is read from left to right, top to down (Bayraktar, 2018). It is also associated with print concepts (i.e., book cover, author, and text of book). With print awareness, children learn to recognise symbols and signs (i.e., letters, words, punctuation marks, logos, cautions, warning signs) (Bayraktar, 2018). They also learn the relationship between letters, words and sentences. In developing print awareness, a child begins to understand what print looks like, how it works, and the fact that print carries meaning and how written language is connected to oral language (Brown, 2014). The basic features of print include the following words from left to right, top to bottom, and page-by-page; recognising that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters; understanding that words are separated by spaces in print; recognising that letters are grouped to form words and differentiate letters from numerals (Brown, 2014). It is reported that books and other written and printed materials play an important role in helping children achieve print awareness skills (Bayraktar, 2018). Thus, awareness of the print concepts at early stages of language development is critical for enhancing the embedded language skills which form a strong base for learning outcomes at different levels of education.

***(e) Word recognition***

Word recognition (WR) is another early literacy skill which refers to the ability of a reader to recognise written words correctly and virtually effortlessly (Shiel et al., 2012). Emergent readers need to learn to identify words quickly and fluently so that they can focus on the meaning of what they are reading (Ehri, 2005). Effective word recognition instruction builds steadily on children's understanding and use of both spoken and written language (Shiel et al., 2012). Common features under word recognition include the ability to produce the primary sound of consonants and recognise one's own name and common signs and labels in the print environment (Shiel et al., 2012). As children are exposed to a print-rich environment they build up a network of connections between letter sequences, letter patterns and associations between words (Adams, 2011). This process tends to speed up word recognition hence, leading to more effective comprehension.

***(f) Reading fluency (RF)***

Reading fluency (RF) refers to the reader's ability to read connected text with automatic accuracy, at an appropriate speed**,** and with adequate expression (Rupley et al., 2020). Reading fluency is an important part of skilled reading without which readers may be impeded in comprehending what they read (Kennedy *et al*., 2012). For reading beginners, fluency can be viewed as developmental in nature, meaning that it first refers to letter reading, then word reading and finally the reading of phrases, sentences and passages (Kennedy et al., 2012). According to Kennedy et al. (2012), fluency in reading is an important emergent skill which heavily supports the development of reading comprehension. Generally, based on earlier review, the process of learning how to read and write is on a continuum whose instruction is supported by awareness of a wide range of skills which can be developed both at school and home settings depending on various supportive conditions and strategies. What remains unclear is how best teachers can scaffold early literacy skills in pre-school settings for improving learning outcomes and effective primary school readiness, a gap which has been addressed in this review.

**Methodology**

The study employed a narrative literature review as a methodological approach to examine how scaffolding techniques can be used to develop early literacy skills in Tanzanian pre-primary schools. The narrative review was selected to allow a comprehensive and interpretive synthesis of diverse sources such as empirical studies, theoretical papers, policy documents and guidelines related to scaffolding and early literacy. The review was guided by the Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework, which emphasises the role of social interaction and guided support in learning. Narrative and semi-systematic reviews have been recognised as effective research methodologies for conceptual development and evidence integration when a field is diverse and emerging (Snyder, 2019).

**Data sources, extraction and synthesis**

The authors conducted a comprehensive search of existing literature on early literacy development, scaffolding and pre-primary education through Google Scholar, ERIC and Research Gate sources. The search terms included a combination of keywords such as scaffolding*,* early literacy*,* oral language, emergent writing, pre-primary education *and* teacher support*.* The inclusion criteria were as follows: Population: Studies focusing on pre-primary or kindergarten-aged learners. Scope: Studies addressing teacher-mediated scaffolding, literacy, emergent writing, oral language, or instructional support. Timeframe: Empirical or review studies published within the last 20 years (up to 2025), with exceptions made for seminal theoretical works, and Language: English-language publications. To minimise selection bias**,** multiple types of sources (journal articles, policy documents, and guidelines) were triangulated to ensure a balanced representation of empirical and contextual perspectives. Additionally, two rounds of peer checking were conducted to verify the inclusion of relevant sources and the exclusion of non-pertinent materials.

**Analysis and interpretations**

The review employed a directed content analysis framework allowing existing theoretical concepts from the ZPD framework to guide the initial coding process while remaining open to new, data-driven categories. Three iterative stages were involved: Initial Coding (key concepts and instructional strategies were extracted), Categorisation (codes were grouped into broader categories representing forms of scaffolding and Thematic Synthesis**:** Patterns and relationships were identified to explain how scaffolding strategies facilitate progression

from assisted to independent literacy learning. Coding was conducted manually by the authors and later verified by a peer reviewer to enhance reliability and reduce subjective bias. The synthesised findings were organised to illustrate how scaffolding practices operationalise Vygotsky's ZPD in pre-primary literacy contexts and to highlight implications for teacher practice and pre-primary curriculum implementation in Tanzania.

**Ethical considerations**

The study was based exclusively on secondary data derived from published literature, policy documents, and publicly accessible academic sources. In accordance with ethical standards for secondary research, all sources were accurately cited to ensure proper attribution and academic integrity. Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to minimise selection bias and promote a balanced representation of perspectives. Furthermore, peer checking during the review and coding processes enhanced transparency, credibility, and overall methodological rigour.

## Findings and Discussion

### Scaffolding early literacy skills in pre-primary education: A Vygotskian perspective

The main aim of this study was to explore how do the scaffolding instructional techniques enhance early literacy learning in Tanzanian pre-primary schools. In 1976, Bruner coined the term "scaffolding" to describe the kind of assistance that is provided by an adult to the learner to perform tasks or actions that cannot be completed independently (Rahmiadji et al., 2023). In the context of this review, the term *"scaffolding early literacy skills" means a process whereby a teacher or an adult provides support to the child as he/she begins writing and reading*. It is used to describe how an expert or adult can facilitate the learner's transition from assisted to independent performance and learning (Shea, 2011). Anisah (2024) argues that the "scaffolds" provided by a teacher do not make the task easier, but rather make it possible for a learner to complete the task with support. Initially, the maximum amount of teacher assistance is needed to elevate the student's performance to its highest potential level. But, gradually, the level of assistance decreases, as the learner becomes capable of performing more independently (Thompson, 2013). Literature indicates that an integral part to scaffolding is the social interaction between the learner and instructor. Together, they develop a mutual understanding of the activity and its goals, thereby sharing ownership of the process (Belland et al., 2017). Through this, the instructor provides support and ongoing diagnosis of the learner's abilities by altering the scaffold to accommodate the learner's needs.

The concept of *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* is a Vygotsky's theoretical support for scaffolding young children from their present skill level to their next level of potential learning (Thompson, 2013). ZPD bridges the gap between what is known and what could be leaned under adult guidance or with collaboration with a more capable peer (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Thompson, 2015; Shea, 2011). Vygotsky used the term ZPD to locate skills that are on the edge of emergence and that can be enhanced by varying degrees of assistance. Vygotsky states that the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978). This means that as a new skill or concept is mastered, what a child can do one day only with assistance, soon becomes his or her level of independent performance (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

In ZPD, there are four different stages which support the learning process (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The first stage is the actual conversation accompanying some physical

activity from capable others. In the second stage, assistance is provided by the self, whereby the child regulates his activity through his own private speech. In the third stage, performance is developed, and the private speech becomes fully internalised and vocalisation is no longer required. This third stage would be similar to the level at which experts function when they appear to intuitively solve problems. Finally, is a stage of de-atomisation or recursion, where external speech is deemed necessary because of increased task complexity. At this point, the memory of the teacher's voice may be reactivated, private speech might occur, or interaction with a teacher might be sought. These are critical stages for the realisation of learning in children's zone of development. The following section describes the instructional techniques which can be deployed by teachers to scaffold emergent literacy skills.

***Materialisation and private speech***

Materialisation refers to the use of tangible or concrete objects and physical actions to guide the learning of mental action or concept. This strategy helps the child focus on the critical aspect of the concept or strategy that is to be internalised (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). For example, when children use small pieces of sticks, small stones or maize seeds to construct shapes of vowels and consonants it enables them to conceptualise a concept of letters. As the children work with concrete materials, they become clearer with the concept and the initial processes of writing. Another example involves the use of an age-appropriate word window where children will have a frame which represents a certain word based on the emphasised letters in the particular week or day. The child may be told to insert letters in that window to form a complete word. By doing so, the word window materialises the concept of that "word" and shapes the mental process of seeing words as distinct entities (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). If materialisation is applied correctly, it enables learners to function at the highest levels of their zones in performing tasks that are more difficult than ones they can perform without materialisation.

For materialisation to yield substantial performance gains, it must be accompanied by private speech that supports rehearsal, guidance, and self-direction during the task (Rivera Valdez et al., 2023). Private speech refers to silent, audible directions or self-talks which are used to guide one's task performance. Private speech not only assists the child in using the materialised actions and objects effectively, it is also a very common and necessary step in the transition from assisted to individual functioning (Shea, 2011). For example, in the early stages of learning to read, children may read aloud all the words, but even as they start reading "silently," they still occasionally revert to private speech when faced with a difficult or long word (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Research has demonstrated that the use of materialisation and private speech significantly increases children's early literacy skills. For example, Bodrova and Leong (2012) assert that when the child is talking to him- or herself (private speech) when they are writing, it first enables him or her remember the words from his initial message; second, it provides a print/speech match as the word is written on the line; and third, it allows the repetition of words and sounds until all the lines are filled. Moreover, a case study by Scott-Weich and Yaden (2017) revealed that scaffolded writing accompanied by the socio-cultural techniques materialisation, self-talk and adult assistance resulted in dramatic qualitative changes in the student's writing and spelling. Both techniques help the children to move within their zone of proximal development. The teacher may apply these techniques as temporary support until he/she realises that the mental actions are internalised by the children (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Although the existing literature strongly supports materialisation and private speech as tools for scaffolding early literacy (Vygotsky, 1978; Bodrova & Leong, 2015), a critical issue lies

in how effectively teachers integrate these strategies within context-specific classrooms. Adopting materialisation in under-resourced and large pre-primary classes is challenging (Piper et al., 2018). While resource and management barriers exist, innovative, context-based strategies such as using local materials, cooperative learning, and teacher training can make materialisation both feasible and effective (UNESCO, 2021; Osei-Poku & Gyasi, 2020). Strengthening teacher capacity and community involvement also remains key to ensuring that all children experience meaningful learning.

***Use of prompts and support***

Prompts and support are among the instructional strategies that enable the teacher enhance competence development in the process of teaching and learning (Xiao et al., 2025). Effective scaffolding entails the ability of the teacher to be a skilful observer of children's behaviours and determine the child's level of competence while offering and adjusting appropriate prompts and support (Hammond, 2021) in line with the child's level of performance on a task. As the teacher observes the child's behaviour during his/her interaction with the task, he/she makes decisions about the verbal prompts and supportive activities as per the child's level of independent functioning (Anisah, 2024). According to Brown (2014), when using prompts and support, children may answer questions based on a given story or text, identify characters, major events, compare and contrast stories, and retell similar stories based on live experiences. By doing so, the child builds vocabulary, oral language and develops concepts of prints, skills which are essential for literacy development.

Justice and Pentimonti (2010) provide several strategies under which prompts if effectively used by the teachers provide meaningful support to children's learning of new skills. These include the following:

i) Prompt children to produce a correct answer to a task through their completion of the task with another person – the teacher or a peer (i.e., co-participating).
ii) Prompt children to complete a task by reducing the number of choices of correct answers. *Is this a consonant or vowel?* (i.e., minimal choices).
iii) Prompt children to produce a correct answer to a task by providing an exact model of the ideal response. *The word 'cat' rhymes with 'hat'. Jose, what word rhymes with 'hat'?* (i.e., eliciting)
iv) Prompt children to extend the lesson content beyond the lesson itself – to past or future personal experiences. *Draw things whose names start with letter "w"* (i.e. generalising).
v) Prompt children to explain why something happened or will happen, or to explain why something is the way it is (i.e., reasoning). *When the rat saw the cat it cried; why do you think this happened?*
vi) Prompt children to describe what might happen next or to hypothesise the outcome of an event/activity (i.e., predicting). *For example, the child is told to predict the story based on the pictures on the top cover of the book*. Also, when learning alphabets, the child can *be given a letter card (m) and asked to name the letter*.

While prompts and support seem to be effective scaffolding tools, research shows that too many prompts can limit a child's autonomy, while too little support may cause disengagement (Van de Pol et al., 2019). In addition, teachers might find it challenging to adjust their prompts to match each child's ability level, a skill that is essential for successful literacy learning (Connor et al., 2022). The interactive nature of prompting reflects Vygotsky's idea that learning happens through dialogue, but this dialogue must be meaningful, flexible, and responsive to the child's needs. Overall, teachers need to find the

right balance between challenge and support to keep learners within their zone of proximal development without making them overly dependent.

***Use of joint writing activities***

Joint writing is an interactive guided writing activity between a child and a teacher, parent or an adult in the process of learning early writing skills. Research supports the importance of such collaborative writing experiences. For example, Oti (2023) and Aram et al. (2013) found that pre-writing skills improve when their teachers and parents collaborate with the child. Children with stronger writing skills in pre-school are likely to have more sophisticated letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and spelling competence, as well as larger vocabularies (Aram et al., 2013). Other scholars found that joint writing activities are strongly linked to basic literacy skills such as word recognition and phonological awareness (Rahmiadji et al., 2023). Similarly, DeBaryshe (2023) reported that children in classrooms participating in a professional development programme focused on emergent writing showed larger gains on uppercase-letter knowledge and emergent writing outcomes than peers in control settings. Also, studies of teachers' beliefs and writing practices underline that strong scaffolding and modelling of writing not only emphasise handwriting alone, they are also associated with higher quality early writing instruction (Papandreou & Tafa, 2023).

From an emergent literacy perspective, learning to read and write begins very early in a child's life. In this context, teachers and parents have an important role in scaffolding the children's emergent writing skill acquisition through varied joint writing strategies. Some of the guided joint writing strategies that teachers can apply may include holding and leading the child's hand to write the letters and words, writing a letter or word and encouraging the child to copy it, making an alphabet or number book, making an animal book, drawing different shapes, plants and animals, and drawing the pictures on the top cover of the story book together with the children. Overall, joint writing activities embody the essence of scaffolding in early literacy by positioning the teacher or adult as a collaborative partner in the child's writing process. Through shared authorship and guided demonstrations, children internalise critical print and phonemic concepts and achieve independence.

***Expert modelling***

Alfred Bandura, the father of cognitive psychology, in 1977, developed a *Social Learning Theory* which puts emphasis on behaviourism in explaining the occurrence of learning (David, 2016). The main premise of this theory is that people learn from interaction with others in a social context (David, 2016). According to Bandura (1977), in a social learning system, we acquire new patterns of behaviour either through direct experience or observation, imitation and modelling. Likewise, in society, children are surrounded by many influential models from which several behaviours can be modelled. In the context of the teaching and learning process, teachers serve as good models for various actions and behaviours. Learning of emergent literacy skills through expert modelling is one of the behavioural perspectives which might positively influence interactive learning in pre-school.

For example, a teacher or peer-expert may demonstrate how to hold writing materials properly, paper position, letter formation, book and picture reading strategies, moulding shapes of vowels and consonants, sing a song first then the children repeat, and pronounce vowels and consonants correctly. Moreover, through expert modelling, a student can blend phonemes to form real words, make a new word by replacing a specified phoneme with another and identify specific sounds at the beginning, middle, and end of words. The teacher may also welcome a fellow teacher or another pupil to participate in conversations so that the

children may imitate them. These modelling practices are very important to enhance the development of early literacy skills in pre-primary education. However, teachers need to be aware of the factors that might affect effective modelling of behaviour or actions during teaching and learning. These include reinforcement, child attention, memory, and motor skills (Bandura, 1977; David, 2016). Besides, it is important to note that simply observing a teacher's demonstration does not guarantee deep learning unless the child actively engages with and reflects on the modelled behaviour. Therefore, teachers should not only promote active learner participation but also incorporate multimodal modelling such as visual and auditory approaches to address the diverse needs of all learners.

**Repeated interactive read aloud**

The term *repeated interactive read-aloud* (RIRA) is a whole-group instructional context in which a teacher reads aloud a selected text to the whole class, occasionally and selectively pausing for conversation (Wiseman, 2011). Students usually think about, talk about and respond to the text as a whole group or in pairs, triads or quards. Literature shows that interactive read aloud are important learning opportunities for emergent readers (O' Fallon, Von Holzen & Newman, 2020). Wang et al. (2025) found that the frequency of text read aloud in kindergarten correlations positively with vocabulary growth, oral language development and early writing and listening comprehension. Before, during and after reading, teachers may use opportunities to incorporate dialogic strategies to enhance comprehension and vocabulary (Lennox, 2013). The interactive read aloud also create a space where meaning is constructed through classroom interaction, providing an opportunity for children to respond in a way that builds on their strengths and extends their knowledge (Wiseman, 2011). As children respond to texts, they are informed by their own lives and experiences, drawing from their own perspectives to build and create knowledge within the classroom (Lennox, 2013). Likewise, as teachers read aloud to children, the process itself not only reveals why we read for them and brings pleasure but also increases children's understanding of others, the world, and themselves (Shea, 2011).

According to McGee and Schickedanz (2007), repeated interactive read-aloud can effectively be done when the following steps are followed and managed. First, the teacher reads the storybook three times or more depending on the cognitive development of the child/learner. In the first reading, the story is introduced with a few questions which call for extended discussion. This stage goes with elaboration on a few key vocabulary items. In the next round of reading, the teacher capitalises on children's growing comprehension of the story by providing enriched vocabulary explanations and asking additional inference and explanation questions. The last phase is comprised of guided reconstruction of the story in which children recount information as well as provide explanation and commentary. In addition to these steps, to increase comprehension and language development, a teacher can also read several books on the same topic and invite children to play with objects related to the concepts or characters in the story and insert short definitions of few words while reading aloud. Whereas the efficacy of repeated interactive read-aloud is well-documented and emphasised, their success depends largely on the teacher's dialogic skills, language competence, class size, book selection, and capacity to engage children in meaning-making (Kindle, 2011). A key consideration is how teachers adapt their instruction to individual learners' developmental levels and within diverse classroom contexts. Use of stories from oral traditions, teacher-made big books and multilingual reading sessions is worth improving comprehension, vocabulary and cultural relevance.

***Ongoing assessment***

Use of ongoing assessment for individualised instruction has been cited to be potential for early childhood education (Akers et al., 2015; Pyle & DeLuca, 2013). For example, Gullo and Hughes (2011) assert that when teachers use ongoing assessment with developmentally appropriate and individualised instruction, it enhances students' learning outcomes. This is possible by reducing school readiness gaps for diverse children and adopting more effective instructional strategies (Akers et al., 2015). In the teaching and learning process, usually, ongoing assessment occurs continuously while considering children's functioning within daily routines. It entails the collection of relevant information about students' progress which in turn informs teachers' instructional decisions. According to Gullo and Hughes (2011), there are three key principles for pre-school assessment: (i) assessment should be a continuous process, (ii) assessment should be a comprehensive process with varied and multiple approaches or styles for individualised learning, and (iii) assessment should influence learning. According to Akers et al. (2015, *p*. 2) examples of ongoing assessment techniques include observation and documentation of a child's day-to-day tasks and routines through anecdotal notes, photographs, video and audio-recordings.

For example, a teacher may document pictures or a video recording of a student recognising letter sounds, matching first letters with real objects, or naming pictures or shapes. Documentation of children's actions and behaviour provides students with the opportunity to revisit their work which, in turn, provides teachers with the opportunity to make an informed decision whether the child needs further assistance or not. Other ongoing assessment activities may include examining samples of a child's work or playful moments and activities, such as drawings. Akers et al. (2015, p. 2) suggest that standardised probes and questions may be used by the teachers during individualised assessment. These might include asking a child, "When is your birthday?" "Where should I begin reading this book?" What do you see on the book cover? What will the story be like? While assessing, the teachers should frequently collect enough data to guide the child's expected progress while focusing on meaningful and developmentally appropriate behaviours, knowledge or skills of the child over a specific period (Akers et al., 2015). Besides, the teacher needs to make sure that the context for the assessment makes sense for the child and that the child understands the task at hand. This could be done in consideration of the amount of time spent on an activity with and without support. Generally, when teachers assess as they teach, they will not only have adequate knowledge regarding the learning goal and outcome of the students and required modifications, but also offer the necessary scaffolding skills based on students' needs.

Generally, the review supports the Vygotsky's assertion that learning is a socially mediated process shaped by interaction, collaboration, and language (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the findings also suggest that sociocultural contexts significantly influence how scaffolding unfolds in real practice. While the findings show that scaffolding strategies enable teachers to teach literacy skills in pre-primary schools, there are couple of contextual challenges which might affect its implementation as noted above. These include workload/large class size, inadequate resources, limited teacher's knowledge and children's varying language backgrounds which may limit comprehension and participation during interactive literacy activities. As such it is worth adopting context based solutions such as team teaching, peer tutoring, multilingualism and group scaffolding and make scaffolding more practical in Tanzanian context (Nakabugo et al., 2014). The findings loudly suggest that when effectively adapted, scaffolding supports differentiated instruction, promotes learner participation, and ensuring that children with varying abilities achieve literacy milestones at their own pace. However, the success of this instructional approach depends on continuous teacher capacity

building**,** policy support**,** and adequate resource allocation and or improvisation to ensure that the theoretical promise of scaffolding translates into tangible literacy outcomes for all learners. From the foregoing review, an illustrative model has been developed as a metaphor to show how early literacy skills can be developed towards building children's ability to communicate, as one of the key competences in pre-primary learning through the suggested instructional approaches (see Figure 1).

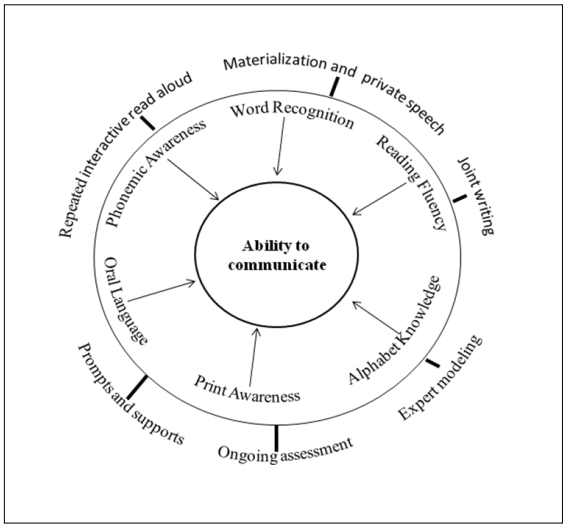


**Figure 1:** Instructional Strategies for Developing Early Literacy Skills in Pre-Primary Education

## Conclusion

Generally, based on the review, it is apparent that scaffolding is one of the fundamental approaches to early literacy teaching. In view of this, it can be concluded that children learn early literacy skills and become good communicators when there is a combination of the following instructional techniques, among others: materialisation, private speech, repeated interactive read-aloud, expert modelling, joint writing activities, ongoing assessment and prompts and supports. Therefore, teachers, through different stages of learning in the Zone of Proximal Development can scaffold the early literacy skills while considering the learning needs of the children. More importantly, based on these fundamentals of scaffolding, teachers may design relevant instructional intervention programmes for children with reading and writing difficulties at lower grades. However, teachers should be aware of the fact that upon their school entry, children might bring diverse levels of language acquisition such as spoken language, vocabulary, words, letters and sound recognition. As such, early childhood educators need to discern developmentally appropriate methods that work efficiently to maximally fulfil children's potential.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the article recommends three practical issues. First, teacher-child interactive experiences should be strengthened while facilitating learners' transition from assisted to independent performance and learning. Second, there should be ongoing, developmentally appropriate support and assessment of learners' abilities to enable teachers to adjust scaffolding in response to the diverse and evolving needs of each child. Third, continuous professional development for early childhood educators is essential. In terms of future research, the methodology used in this study suggests that primary qualitative approaches could be employed to provide greater depth and breadth in understanding the issues under investigation. Future studies might explore how scaffolding strategies function within diverse classroom contexts**,** including overcrowded, multilingual, and resource-limited environments. Additionally, researchers could examine the role of parental engagement and the integration of digital technologies in supporting and enhancing early literacy scaffolding.

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