



University of Kashan
Faculty of Humanities
Department of English

Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate studies office

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for M.A. degree in
Teaching English as a Foreign Language, (TEFL)

Title:

**The Impact of Teacher's scaffolding on High School
Students' Reading Comprehension**

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May,2011

I hereby declare that the present thesis is the result of my own sincere work and original research and that it has not been submitted elsewhere; it is by no means Plagiarized in any way.

Nahid Ghanbari

May,2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere appreciation is given to my supervisor, Dr. Ali Rahimi whose help, stimulating suggestions and encouragement helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. My colleagues from Iran-Australia Institute supported me in my research work. I want to thank them for all their help, support, interest and valuable hints.

Last but not the least, my family and the one above all of us ,the omnipresent God, for answering my prayers for giving me the strength to plod on despite my constitution wanting to give up and throw in the sponge ,thank you so much Dear Lord.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my late father, Mohammad Ali Ghanbari. Since his passing, he has missed many of our family's milestones, and I know he would have been here to share in the celebration of my thesis. He always helped me to appreciate all of life's

blessings and taught me to place my faith, my family, and other relationships above all else. He also helped instill in me a sense of pride, dedication, devotion, and compassion, and I am forever grateful for his impact on my life.

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ABSTRACT

English language learners are one of the largest groups of students who struggle with literacy in general and comprehension in particular. What makes scaffolding so effective is that it enables a teacher to keep a task whole, while students learn to understand and manage the parts, and presents the learner with just the right challenge.

In so doing, it helps students to cope with the complexity of tasks in an authentic manner (Pearson, 1996). This study is conducted in order to understand to what extent Iranian high school teachers' scaffolding has an effect on learners' reading comprehension. First-grade high school teachers were selected, in order to be observed for answering the first question. Teachers' experience in a high school setting ranged from 9 to 17 years. High schools were selected from district one in Tehran.

In order to answer the second question, ninety first-grade high school students from both genders were considered among a pool of 150 students through a homogenizing test. These two teachers contributed in a one day workshop training session. Each teacher will teach thirty students based on scaffolding skills in reading comprehension. Results show a significant effect of teachers' scaffolding on learners' reading comprehension.

Key words: Scaffolding's strategies, Reading comprehension, High School Students and English Teachers

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1. Overview

Learning to speak a second language is a complex task. Learning to read and comprehend fiction and non-fiction texts in the new language is more complicated. The skills and knowledge acquired as precursors to reading are often referred to as emergent literacy. Unfortunately, too many adolescents are unable to read with the proficiency necessary for success in reading classes. In the most recent implementations of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (Lee, et al., 2007), One in four adolescents were not even able to read at the basic level. These students could not read with comprehension or make simple inferences. Only one-third were consistently able to draw conclusions, analyze meanings, make connections between what they read and their experiences or world events, or support their ideas with meaningful evidence.

English language learners are one of the largest groups of students who struggle with literacy in general and comprehension in particular. Often, the language experience and skills of English Language Learners (ELLs) are heterogeneous. The prior knowledge, home literacy practices, language skill, language flexibility, and language proficiency of each learner varies considerably (Au, 1993) and influences learning and instruction. Thus teachers are faced with the challenging demands of planning instruction geared toward this highly diverse group of language learners. Teachers can scaffold-provide needed support or accommodations for the comprehension skills that will help English language

learners to better understand what that are reading.Scaffolding has become one of the major issues with the work of Lev Vygotsky, with modern educators and researchers interested in continuing its development and application. Langford (2005) claimed that Vygotsky “coined the term scaffolding” (p.141).This statement, although figuratively defensible, is not literally accurate .The concept of scaffolding was related to, but not directly taken from, the writings of Vygotsky. however, did not use the metaphor of scaffolding.

Kaye (1970) planted the seeds for the concept of scaffolding by claiming that a child’s problem solving is often assisted and supported by others who are more skillful. Wood and Middleton(1975) strengthened this argument:”...it is our contention that any process of rule induction or problem solving on [the child’s] part can ,and indeed often must, be facilitated by the intervention of another who is more expert in the situation than [the child] is “(p.181). Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) were the first to use the term scaffolding in elaboration of the role of tutoring on problem-solving behavior. They argued that the social context of tutoring goes for beyond modeling and imitation and “...involves a kind of “scaffolding” process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts.” (p.90).

While scaffolding and Vygotsky are now virtually synonymous, most authorities in the field are unsure of who first made the connection between them. The implicit connection would favor Bruner who was actively involved in the original scaffolding research and also a leading American Vygotskian scholar

having written the introduction to the first English translation of Vygotsky's (1962) *Thought and Language*. Stone (1998) argues that Cazden (1979) first made the explicit connection between scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in an unpublished technical report. Relatively little is known regarding Iranian high school teachers' use of specific scaffolds that may be important for students who are struggling to acquire language and literacy concepts.

1.2. Statement of the problem

These are the voices of 14- and 15-year-olds, boys and girls, who struggle to read the textbooks they encounter in their language classes at high school. Reading is a complex, multi-faceted activity, involving a combination of both lexical and text-progressing skills that are widely recognized as being interactive. Second language teachers have sought meaningful and effective ways to incorporate reading activities into the high school language classroom. As an English teacher who has taught both beginner and intermediate learners at the high school level and beginner and intermediate learners in institutes, I have often wondered what the best approach is to teach students to read in English. Scaffolding as a teaching strategy is a term that Iranian high school teachers know little about it and its effect on learners' reading comprehension. Recent studies of classroom reading instruction have found that, although scaffolding is widely used by some of the best teachers (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole, 2000), it is not characteristic of most teachers (Taylor et al). Taking into consideration all of the above points

concerning L2 reading and focusing on scaffolding strategies that would help students to read for meaning successfully is a challenge.

1.3.Objectives of the study

Reading instruction is made up of many different elements that teachers use in an attempt to meet the needs of their students. According to Cazden, Rosenshine and Meister, and Sweet, scaffolding is touted extensively as being a useful instructional tool. Teachers who scaffold reading instruction with using different scaffolding strategies have been shown to be effective (Pressley, 2002). Though scaffolding can be useful in many different instructional settings. In this regard, this study focuses specifically on Iranian high school English teachers in order to understand the extent they use scaffolding strategies during reading sessions.

What makes scaffolding so effective is that it enables a teacher to keep a task whole, while students learn to understand and manage the parts, and presents the learner with just the right challenge. Scaffolding integrates multiple aspects of a task into a manageable chunk and permits students to see how they interrelate (Rogoff, 1990). In so doing, it helps students to cope with the complexity of tasks in an authentic manner (Pearson, 1996). So, this study is also conducted in order to understand to what extent Iranian high school teachers' scaffolding has an effect on learners' reading comprehension. By so doing, I hope to help teachers construct

a deeper understanding of scaffolding, use it more frequently in their classrooms, and thereby improve students' comprehension.

1.4. Research questions

The study focuses on answering the following two questions:

1. To what extent do Iranian high schools English teachers use scaffolding strategies during reading session?
2. To what extent teachers' scaffolding has an effect on learners' reading comprehension?

1.5. Significant of the study

The study will help readers gain a broader perspective of the different roles they can play in using various forms of scaffolding; more frequently employ scaffolding in their classrooms, and thereby improve students' comprehension. The study also encourages teachers to add scaffolding to their instructional repertoire. It is a highly flexible and adaptable model of instruction that supports students as they acquire basic skills and higher order thinking processes, allows for explicit instruction within reading and writing, and enables teachers to differentiate instruction for students of diverse needs. In summary, scaffolding invites students and teachers to collaborate as students become increasingly active readers and thinkers.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

2.1. Overview

Reading comprehension research has a long and rich history and teaching reading comprehension to students today as an educational technique has been regarded as a very important research subject for scholars and researchers. Teachers need to focus on innovative comprehension instruction with all students, not just successful readers. There is much that we can say about both the nature of reading comprehension as a process and about effective reading comprehension instruction. Among different instructional techniques of teaching, scaffolding has proven one of the most recommended, versatile, and powerful technique (Clark & Graves, 2004).

The concept of scaffolding has its origin in studies in early language learning. During the recent two decades, many famous authors such as Stone (1998), Wells (1999), Hammond (2002) and Daniels (2001) refer to the concept of scaffolding as a main element to describe and explain the role of adults or more knowledgeable peers in guiding children's learning and development. Scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy originates from Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, a Soviet psychologist, and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Lev Vygotsky's works were suppressed after his death in the 1930s and were not discovered by the West until the late 1950s. His sociocultural theory proposes that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition.

Vygotsky "...theorized that learning occurs through participation in social or culturally embedded experiences." (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). Vygotsky defined scaffolding instruction as the "role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next stage or level".(Raymond, 2000, p. 176).

Other scholars such as Pearson (1996) points out that scaffolding allows teachers to provide cueing, questioning, coaching, corroboration, and plain old information to help students complete a task before tackling it independently. Scaffolding in this sense, is frequently considered by Davis and Miyake as among the most effective pedagogies available for teachers who say and do to enable students to grasp a text that they could not completely understand alone. Gillies & Boyle, (2005) , on the other hand state that scaffolding can support teachers to bridge a gap between what students know and can do, versus what they don't know or can't do, but intended to know and do.

Yet recent studies on scaffolding reading have claimed that the best teachers can do to foster students' comprehension is far from complete. When employed, it typically supports word recognition (Fournier & Graves, 2002); comprehension instruction of any kind draws much less frequent attention (Roehler, 1997). Thus, this thesis sets out to investigate how teachers scaffolded their students' textual understanding and reading comprehension of English texts.

In this chapter , before reviewing the main aspects of scaffolding and its detailed substructures in reading comprehension instruction, we need to review the

concepts of reading and reading comprehension briefly(in sections 1 & 2) and then focus on the scaffolding in this chapter (in section 3).

2.2. Section One: Reading

Many, but not all, learn to read as children. Some children and adults need additional help. Yet others learn to read a second, third or additional language, with or without having learned to read in their first language. Reading instruction needs to take into account different types of learners and their needs. Research has shown that there is a great deal of transfer from learning to read in one language to learning to read in a second language. (Pang et al, 2008)

Comprehension entails three elements:

- The reader who is doing the comprehending
- The text that is to be comprehended
- The activity in which comprehension is a part.

Theses three elements are also interrelated in dynamic ways that vary across pre-reading, reading, and post-reading.(Figure-1)(Penny et al-2008)

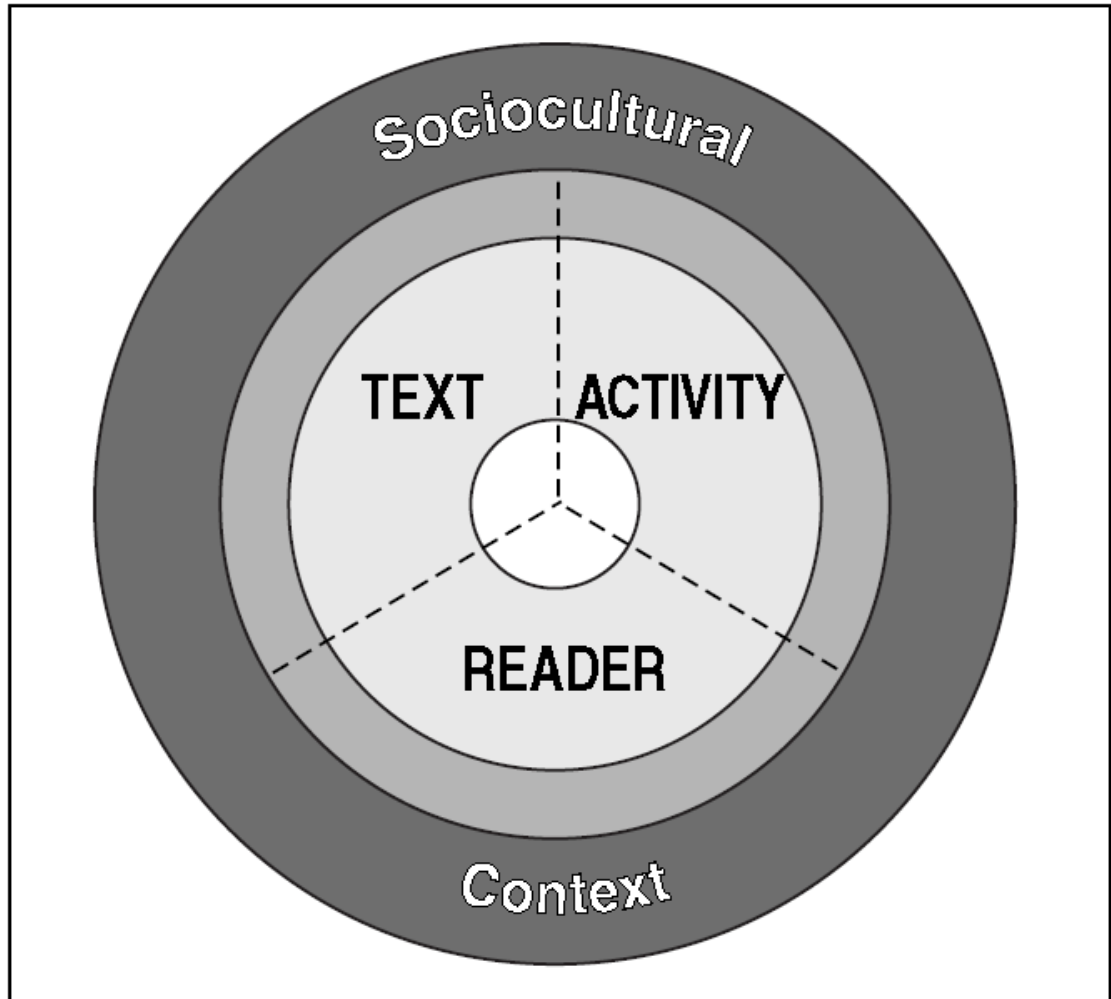


Figure1: three elements of Reading

2.2.1. Important aspects of reading

To comprehend, a reader must have a wide range of capacities and abilities. Each act of reading is potentially a microdevelopmental process and much of what we know about reading is based on studies conducted in English and other alphabetic languages. In high schools and mostly in universities, reading of historical texts, scholarly articles, popular press books, and/or Internet publications is a common assignment for students. But Royse (2001, p. 127) believes that many