Scaffolding As A Means Of Enhancing Learner Motivation In A Reading Class

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Abstract: *The study aims to present the use of scaffolding in improving learners' reading proficiency. The study of developing reading skill is quite various and incessant conducted. However, the learners still lack in reading performance. The study, therefore, conducted to present another alternative to apply in reading classrooms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, it cannot be denied that reading is defined as an essential gateway to learning for both L2 and EFL learners. Especially for language learning, written texts greatly serve the readers a variety of purposes enhancing language acquisition by providing good models for introducing new vocabulary, grammar, idioms and topics for discussion. For decades, many L2 and EFL learners often have reading as one of their most important goals for information, pleasure, careers or study purposes. Harmer (2007) indicates that reading is beneficial not only for pleasure, study and careers, but also for language acquisition. This shows an interesting issue that the lack of reading skill may bring down the learners' proficiency.

A recent survey made by Chulalongkorn University, covering 5,865 people in 13 provinces, a focus group of 156 people and 191 people who are either passionate about reading or hate it, reveals that some respondents spent up to 18 hours a day reading, while others did not read a single sentence. Furthermore, not many of respondents spent more than nine thousand baht a month on books, while most of respondents did not spend a single baht on reading material. The crisis demonstrates the need of development of Thai learners' reading skill and a challenging task for teachers. Thai students need to be motivated and implicitly provided with systematical strategy. According to the previous problems stated, one possible solution is that Thai students should be urgently scaffolded.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scaffolding is perceived as the strategy used by the teachers to facilitate learners' transition from assisted to independent performance (Cooper, 2000; Gibbons, 2002). The philosophy underpinning this approach is substantially explained in the writing of Brunner built from the works of Piaget and Vygotsky (Pinter, 2006). Scaffolding is used to bridge between students' independent and supported operating levels. Scaffolding is recommended to be done in five ways: *offering explanations, inviting students' participation, verifying and clarifying students' understanding, inviting students to contribute clues and modeling of desired behaviors* (Roehler and Cantlon cited in Hogan and Pressley, 1997). Following these five stages, the students will be empowered to monitor themselves. Scaffolding is temporarily provided and it is gradually removed bit by bit as the learners become more competent independently (Yu, 2004; Cameron, 2001). Another aspect of intervention of scaffolding in a class was suggested by Ellis and Larkin (1998). They suggested that the entire class is successfully scaffolded by following four steps; *the instruction does it, the class does it, the group does it and the individual does it.*

In agreement with Dickson, Chard, & Simmons (1993, p. 12), they said that "the instruction with a scaffold is "the systematic sequencing of prompted content, materials, tasks, and teacher and peer support to optimize learning". Incorporating scaffoldings in the classroom supports students' learning environment. This is because in a scaffolded class, the students are comfortable to ask questions, provide feedback and support their peers to learn new things

where the instructor becomes more a facilitator of knowledge. This teaching style provides motivated environment for students to take more active role in their own learning. The process of scaffold is not only systematic, but also used in a variety of content areas and across age and grade levels.

3. RATIONALE

For Songkhla Rajabhat University, most of students are mainly from local Islamic schools, especially from three borderline provinces including Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. During high school life, the students are guided to read and learn everything only relating to their religion. This leads to the limitation of choice in learning and decrease a motivation of reading. Also the typical process of reading class, the students are often given with the authentic texts from several sources and finished individually with comprehension checks by teacher. The result of the process is most of students are failed because of less cooperation and their lack of vocabulary and reading ability. From the early problems, the teacher firstly needs to try a strategy which increase the students' reading motivation and develops the students' reading ability.

According with the previous researchers, the scaffolding process really enables students to acquire motivation and engagement in reading. This is because the scaffolding process consists of teachers and students jointly engaging in an activity, with teacher contributions prevailing at the outset and students assuming increasing responsibility for complete performances (Guthrie, Wigfield, Perencevich: 2004). One significant study relating to using scaffolding in increasing the students' motivation was made with three grade 4 classrooms in Frederick County. The finding indicates that two classes received scaffolding activity demonstrated the higher engagement in learning and gained more in reading comprehension than another traditional class (Lutz, Guthrie, Davis: 2006). As the similar situation, scaffolding is very challenging to the students in our campus.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does a series of four scaffolding activities over the course of one semester facilitate students in improving their motivation for reading?

2. Does scaffolding activity impact the students' reading comprehension?
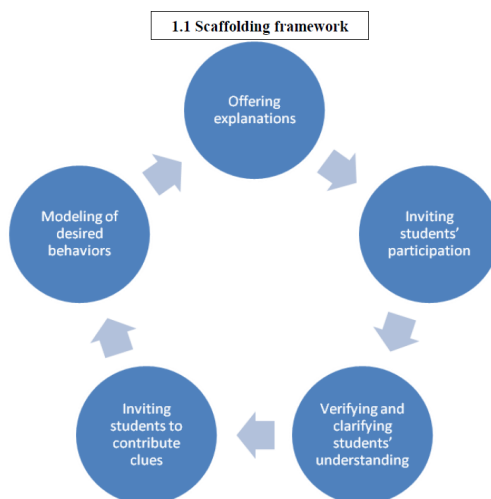
5. RESEARCH SAMPLE SIZE

The sample of project consists of a total of 25 undergraduate in their 2nd year English major students, mixed gender and reading proficiency. They were all involved in the course of strategies in paragraph reading, so this is the second time of their reading course. During the course, the students were never given with any extensive readings. According to the semi-interview, most of them spend their free time on surfing the Internet, some spend on listening to music, playing computer games and playing sports. All of them are quite weak in reading comprehension and have low motivation in reading.

6. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

There are three ways of collecting data:

1) 8 quizzes on reading comprehension

2) Pre- and post-questionnaire for motivation plus five questions related to scaffolding activities

3) a focused group discussion of four students on satisfaction with scaffolding

Data was collected during the first semester of the 2013 academic year from June to September. The study was conducted in the class of Discourse Approach in Reading, which occupies three consecutive hours a week. Each 3-hour session was divided into three sequential stages of KWL technique—what you know, what you want and what you learnt, divided in five steps; offering explanations, inviting students' participation, verifying and clarifying students' understanding, inviting students to contribute clues and modeling of desired behaviors as the following framework.

Discourse Approach in Reading is a reading course focusing on discourses in general texts. Discourses also include conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, pronoun references, prepositions of time and place etc. The study includes eight units of reading of the semester: four times with scaffolding and four times without. In the class of scaffoldings consisted of four contents including; *content and function words, pronoun reference, signal words of listing pattern and signal words of sequence pattern*. In the four weeks of study, the students were weekly scaffolded five steps of teaching following the framework. At the last step, the students are often assigned to produce a short paragraph or sentences that the weekly content applied to check their understanding and the quiz also lunched weekly to check their reading comprehension.

At the first week of the semester, the motivation questionnaire including the items of scaffolding was launched as pre-questionnaire. The students were not informed about the meaning of scaffolding activities even trained the process of the project to avoid students' anxiety and bias. At the 8th week, the motivation questionnaire was launched again to compare with the previous questionnaire.

For a focused group discussion, the questions were built for students to express their satisfaction on activities. The students were randomly selected from their name lists in a box. The discussion of four students held in the last week of teaching. The students were sit together and shot questions at the same time. The questions were all as followings:

- Do you like reading? How is reading important for you?

- What do you think about scaffolding activities in the class? Do you like it? Why?

- Can you see the difference of eight weeks of teaching? Which part would you prefer? Why?

- What do you mean by motivation?

- Can scaffoldings motivate you to read continuously? Why?

- Do you learn effectively with activities or without? Why?

7. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study aims at investigating whether four scaffolding activities over the course of one semester facilitate students in improving their motivation for reading. Pre- and Post-questionnaires about activity and motivation of 25 students were analyzed using a paired sample t test. The finding reveals that there were statistically significant improvements of their motivation in reading.

The scores of weeks of regular and scaffolding quizzes also compared. Quizzes based on the weekly content to check the students' implication and comprehension. Although the contents are different, the process of teaching is controlled. The comparison of two sessions shows that the scores from scaffolding classes are higher than regular classes not only the scores gain from quizzes but also the implications in writings. The students enlarge their

knowledge they learnt on their writing from the class of scaffoldings. After the week of final examination, the students were failed less than another group in the previous semester.

To answer the 2nd research question, four students were randomly selected to discuss on several open-ended questions. One of four students is an excellent student who gets 3.50 of GPA. The results demonstrate that the 3 of 4 students prefer to read through scaffoldings because of the systematical process. Moreover, scaffoldings effectively increase their motivation to read both Thai and English texts. However, 1 of 4 students recommends that the title of texts can be a factor in increasing or decreasing her motivation.

8. CONCLUSION

The results of the study obviously revealed the improvement of students' motivation in reading. Motivation often comes after the preference of doing something. The students satisfied the interactive class with supportive learning environment. In this study, scaffolding is a useful tool to provide students with the systematic learning. Systematic teaching gears the students to systematic reading that facilitate them to learn more effective and understanding of all contents leads the students to read more and more.

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