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ROLE OF SCAFFOLDING ACTIVITIES IN ENHANCING ENGLISH READING SKILLS AMONG FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

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SUMMARY

So far, the scaffolding activities are still considered as a tool to support in reading comprehension texts of English. In fact, the scaffolding is a process through which teacher helps students develop to function in the zone of proximal development as necessary. Although the scaffolding activities are now still being used to teach students to learn English at colleges and universities, these activities have improved English reading comprehension abilities for students, the role of these activities have not been studied.

From the fact of English teaching activity at the College of Economics and Techniques, this article refers to clarify some main contents of scaffolding activities applied to improve English reading comprehension abilities for students.

Key words: *guided reading, partner read - aloud, reciprocal teaching, scaffolding, shared reading*

INTRODUCTION

For many decades now, English has been seen as an international language, which is used as a mother tongue in many countries and as a second or foreign language in many more other countries all over the world.

In Vietnam, English has been used as a foreign language for years and recently has been considered an important and international tool of communication. Realizing the importance of English, the Ministry of Education and Training has introduced English into the school curriculum from junior level. In the past, grammar translation method applied in teaching English to students. Recent years have observed the coming of the communicative teaching approach which has been seen as effective and appropriate in teaching and learning the language. Although speaking ability is now seen as the main focus of practice in an English class, the role of reading is still realized.

At College of Economics and Techniques, English is a compulsory subject which students learn for two years. However, English teaching in the college follows a traditional way in which teachers play the role

of the knowledge provider and the students are the passive knowledge receivers. Among the four skills in learning English, reading requires students' much attention and effort as proficient reading depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. If word recognition is difficult, students use too much of their processing capacity to read individual words, which interferes with their ability to comprehend what is read. Readers may use their knowledge of semantics and syntax, grammatical rules context clues to identify the meaning of unknown words. Readers then integrate the words they have read into their existing knowledge to derive the meaning of the text. Consequently, students at College of Economics and Techniques have problems comprehending reading documents in English although they learnt English from a very young age. They often have problems with decoding and recognizing the words in a fairly difficult text. They see the text as a tangle rather than something meaningful. That is why such students have a tendency towards disliking reading. The type of instruction that a student receives also affects reading comprehension. As a result, these students do not have sufficient opportunities to develop the language skills and strategies necessary for becoming proficient readers. Seeing the

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problem, the researcher of the study proposes and will evaluate the use of some scaffolding activities in improving students' reading skills at College of Economics and Techniques.

ROLE OF SCAFFOLDING ACTIVITIES

A scaffold is a support, like those used as a temporary frame that supports workers when they are in the process of constructing a building. In education, it is the temporary support children receive from adults such as parents, and teachers, as well as more advanced peers, to build on skills and knowledge to a higher level of thinking and communicating. In school, it is what teachers do to help students complete a task, they could not complete without assistance. According to theorist Lev Vygotsky, adult support helps children to function in the "Zone of Proximal Development." [4]. This is the place between what a child is able to do without help and what the same child is able to accomplish with assistance. In fact, scaffolding is a process through which a teacher helps the student in his or her ZPD as necessary, and removes this assistance as it becomes unnecessary, much as a scaffold is removed from a building during construction.

Reciprocal scaffolding, a method first coined by Holton and Thomas, is a method that involves a group of two or more collaboratively working together. In this situation, the group can learn from each other's experiences and knowledge. The scaffolding is shared by each member and changes constantly as the group works on a task [3].

Background of the study

Reading is an essential part of language instruction at every level because it supports learning in multiple ways. An authentic text provides students with vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and discourse structure. Thus, students learn how to combine different elements of a language together to make a meaningful text. In addition, an authentic text can give students insight into the lifestyles and worldviews of the people whose language they are studying.

It should be understood that the students at College of Economics and Techniques are of unequal levels of English proficiency. Some students have a fair command of English, a number have little knowledge of the language while most of the students gradually lose interest in English as they found it difficult to deal with. With regard to reading, some students may do reading tasks quickly with good understanding of the text while many other struggle with it. Some students may lack vocabulary, have problems understanding sentence structures and discourse structures while other may lack the background knowledge for the topic they are reading. Difficulty in reading leads to the fact that students lose their self-efficacy beliefs, which discourages them in doing reading tasks.

In order to meet the needs of these diverse learners, teachers need to provide a variety of opportunities to practice and learn about reading. Reading researchers have been promoting the use of a variety of pre-reading, during reading, and after reading strategies for more than 30 years since the publication of the Directed Reading and Thinking Activity [2].

Scaffolding, in basic terms, is the process by which teachers can assist students in learning. In construction, a scaffold supports a building site; in education, a teacher supports her students. Scaffolding is a popular instructional technique and can be very effective in helping new readers begin the process of becoming better readers.

It has been proved that scaffolds and the procedures for using them provide teachers with many ways to think about how to help students learn cognitive studies. Such concepts as modeling, thinking aloud, using cue cards, anticipating errors, and providing expert models can also be applied to the teaching of well-structured skills. The scaffolding instruction method has better direct and transferring effects than general teaching methods [1].

In this study, the researcher will investigate use of scaffolding activities in teaching

reading to first year students with purpose of helping learner find possible, effective ways and means to improve and develop the reading skills. Hopefully, the use of scaffolding activities may minimize, if not totally eradicate, reading problems.

Statement of the problem

This study experimented the use of scaffolding activities in teaching reading for first year students at College of Economics and Techniques. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What scaffolding activities in reading can be developed to enhance the reading skills of the college students?
2. Is there a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents?
3. Which of the scaffolding activities are the most preferred by the college students?

Scope of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the use scaffolding activities in improving the reading skills of first year students at College of Economics and Techniques, academic year 2016-2017.

Null Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested:

There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents.

Significance of the study

This study will provide information about the use of scaffolding activities in teaching reading among first year students. Furthermore, it may be helpful for Students, English teachers, Administrators and Researchers who are interested in enhancing reading skill.

Students. It will increase the students' interest in reading and overcome reading difficulties. Besides, students will be aware of the importance of reading and find out the appropriate reference reading materials. They will be able to get higher marks in their reading test.

Teachers. The result of this study can help teachers develop better techniques, methods and approaches on how they can effectively teach reading English and help students to develop reading skills.

Administrators. The result of the study can serve as a source of information from which administrators can issue suitable supports to teachers and students. Furthermore, they may give instructions to material developers to create appropriate reading materials for students.

Researchers. This study may be a source of information for researchers and educators who want to study and find effective activities to improve reading skills.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for clear and better understanding of the research.

Guided Reading. The teacher works with a small group of students who have similar reading processes. Books are carefully leveled. Teachers select and introduce new books and support students as they read the whole text to themselves. Based on close observation of students' reading, teachers make relevant teaching points during and after the reading.

Partner Read-Aloud. Students read in pairs. They are seated next to one another and facing each other. Students read aloud to one another in turn. The listener follows along in the text. If needed, the reader can ask the listener for help with a difficult text.

Post-test. It is the test administered to the students of both experimental group and control group after using scaffolding activities.

Pre-test. It is the test administered to the students of both experimental group and control group before using reading scaffolding activities.

Reading. It refers to a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols for the intention of constructing or deriving meaning.

Read aloud is a teaching context in which students are actively listening and responding to an oral reading of a text.

Reading skill. Reading skills are specific abilities which enable a reader to read the written form as meaningful language, to read anything written with independence, comprehension and fluency, and to mentally interact with the message.

Reciprocal Teaching. In this form of paired or group reading, readers participate in a dialogue about the text. Each person takes a turn as "teacher," reading a short passage and asking questions about it to the group. Turns may rotate after a paragraph or a longer section.

Scaffolding. It refers to providing contextual supports for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modeling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning.

Shared Reading. After initial read-aloud, the class or group reads together from a shared text. Teachers use the content of the text to discuss ways to unlock meaning from text, literary concepts, background or content-area concepts, vocabulary, grammar, and conventions of print.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method types of research were used in this study:

Locale of the study

The study was conducted at College of Economics and Techniques, Thai Nguyen province, where the researcher is a full-time teacher of English.

Research design

In order to find out students' reading level and the impact of scaffolding activities on students' reading achievement, the study used non-experimental method using one group with pretest and posttest treatment.

Population and sampling

The study was conducted to test the use of scaffolding activities in teaching reading among first year students.

The main respondents in this study were sixty students taken from four hundred first year college students from six different classes, each class chooses ten students using the cluster random sampling.

The study was conducted from September to November, 2016. Pre-test and post-test were designed to test students' reading skills and compare the significant difference between the scores of students using current activities and scaffolding activities. Lessons were planned to teach reading to students using scaffolding activities.

Research instrument

The lesson plans for teaching reading using scaffolding activities were designed. The researcher prepared reading texts and tasks to be used as the instrument. The texts were taken from internet sources and increased in length and difficulty from lesson 1 to lesson 10.

The tests consist of 2 reading texts with comprehension tasks which require students to do in 45 minutes.

After administering the tests to the respondents, results from the tests were collected and evaluated.

Statistical treatment

The following statistical treatments and methods were used to interpret and analyze the relationship between the data to be collected.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study presents, analyzes and interprets the data collected from the students' results and pre-test and post-test scores. The data are interpreted in terms of mean of the scores, mean difference, standard deviation and t-value.

Pre-test, post-test scores of the respondents

It can be seen in table 1 that the mean pretest score of students is only 4.5 which indicates that students' reading ability is poor. While the highest score is 8, the lowest is only 1.

Table 1. Summary of values from students' pre-test and post-test scores

	Mean	SD	Df	$\bar{D}$	r	t	Remark
Pre-test	4.5	0.205	59	-2.1	0.81	-12.67	Significant 0.5 level
Post-test	6.6	0.189					

The mean score of 6.6 indicates the progress of students in reading comprehension ability after the experiment. Students moved from poor to fair level. The mean difference is -2.1 shows that after the application of scaffolding activities, students' scores moved 2.1 higher. The standard deviation values from the pre-test and post-test (0.205 and 0.189 respectively) mean that the post-test score ranges were closer to the mean than the pre-test score ranges. The correlation value of 0.81 shows the direction of students' development. The ones who did well in the pre-test did well in the post-test and the ones who did badly in the pre-test gained certain progress in the post-test.

The t-value of -12.67 at the degree of freedom of 59 and $p=.000$ is bigger than the critical t-value. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the respondents can be rejected. The result shows that there is significant development in students' reading comprehension skills after the application of the selected scaffolding activities.

The results from table 1 implies that the application of scaffolding activities in teaching reading to first year college students can enhance their English reading skills.

Scaffolding Activities Preferred by the College Students

Table 2 shows the preferred of the scaffolding activities among the respondents. The results point out that the most preferred scaffolding activities was shared reading with weighted mean of 3.51 with descriptive rating is the most preferred. The guided reading, partner reading and read aloud obtained weighted mean of 3.02, 2.56 and 3.08 respectively with the same descriptive rating of preferred. While the reciprocal teaching got the lowest weighted mean of 2.20 with moderately preferred descriptive rating. It may be

surmised that the college students preferred most shared reading. The explanation for this is that, at quite low level of reading comprehension ability, students have a lot of difficulty understanding an English text. Scaffolding does not leave the learner wondering why they are engaging in activities. The teacher explains the purpose of the lesson and why this is important. This type of guided instruction allows learners to understand how they are building on prior knowledge. It should be well understood that students need to be modeled and clearly defined the expectations of the activity to be performed. Therefore, there must be help from the teacher's side so that students can unlock the structures and obtain meanings from the language.

Table 2. Weighted Mean Distribution on the Preferred Scaffolding Activities of the Students

Scaffolding activities	4 MP	3 P	2 SP	1 NP	WM	DR
Shared reading	31	29	0	0	3.51	MP
Guided reading	25	22	13	0	3.02	P
Partner read aloud	21	13	15	1	2.56	P
Read aloud	24	20	13	3	3.08	P
Reciprocal teaching	9	9	27	15	2.20	Mop
Average Weighted Mean					2.93	P

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the aforementioned findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The scaffolding activity lessons may be adapted in teaching reading among college students.
2. Scaffolding activities can enhance the reading skills of college students.
3. The shared reading scaffolding activity is the most preferred by the college students.

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TÓM TẮT

VAI TRÒ CỦA HOẠT ĐỘNG GIÀN GIÁO TRONG VIỆC LÀM TĂNG KHẢ NĂNG ĐỌC HIỂU TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN NĂM NHẤT**Hoàng Thị Lý****Trường Cao đẳng Kinh tế Kỹ thuật – ĐH Thái Nguyên*

Cho đến nay hoạt động giàn giáo vẫn được coi như một công cụ để hỗ trợ việc đọc hiểu tiếng Anh của sinh viên. Trong thực tế, giàn giáo là một quá trình mà qua đó người dạy giúp đỡ người học phát triển vùng tư duy là cần thiết. Mặc dù hiện nay hoạt động giàn giáo vẫn đang được áp dụng để dạy tiếng Anh cho sinh viên tại các trường đại học và cao đẳng, và hoạt động này đã làm tăng khả năng đọc hiểu tiếng Anh cho sinh viên nhưng việc nghiên cứu về vai trò của nó chưa được tiến hành.

Từ thực tế hoạt động giảng dạy tiếng Anh tại trường Cao đẳng Kinh tế - Kỹ thuật, bài báo này góp phần làm rõ một số nội dung chính của hoạt động giàn giáo và áp dụng để làm tăng khả năng đọc hiểu cho sinh viên.

Từ khóa: *Hướng dẫn đọc, đọc – to, giàn giáo, kỹ năng đọc, chia sẻ đọc.*

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