



USE OF SCAFFOLDING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY TO IMPROVE READERS' COMPREHENSION ABILITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper investigated use of scaffolding instructional strategy to improve readers' comprehension ability in English language. Scaffolding instructional strategy is a technique which allows the teacher to model a desired learning strategy. It is an effective strategy that focuses on the improvement of the learning outcome of the learner comprehension is a vital skill in any academic exercise which gears towards accurate interpretation of what is read by the reader. The article discussed the variables of reading comprehension, comprehension strategies, instructional scaffolding, types of instructional scaffolding, teaching comprehension skills. The recommendation and conclusion of this study were drawn in line with the ideas discussed therein.

Keywords: *Scaffolding, instructional, readers and comprehension.*

Introduction

Reading comprehension plays a prominent role in man's lives. It is part of our everyday living that one can hardly imagine a life without it. In the age of the Internet and Information Technologies, reading retains its importance as an essential skill for learners of any language (Alderson, 2019). Reading is amongst the most crucial determinants in developing an individual's vision that shapes his or her personality and that makes him or her become closer to other individuals. Reading makes individuals truly free and protects them from ignorance and false beliefs (Unal, 2020). Also, skills in reading enable individuals to benefit from educational activities, and to participate fully in the social and economic activities in which they take part (Nambi, 2021).

Reading comprehension has been described in a variety of ways to explain the process of what happens when one reads and how one comprehends a text. However, a widely accepted explanation of reading is not found in the literature (Dubin, Eskey and Grabe, 1986). According to Allen and Bruton (2020), reading is a complex process of making meaning from a text, for variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts. Jennings (2019:12), on the other hand defined reading as “The art of transmitting the ideas, facts, and feelings from the mind and soul of an author to the mind and soul of the reader, with accuracy and understanding”. Reading is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs (Goodman, 2018). The common characteristics of definitions relating to reading are that it is an activity that is realized through comprehension. Reading is not an activity that takes place individually but one that encompasses many events and situations (Unal, 2020). A large number of reading specialists view reading as an interactive process (Barnett, 2018). This means that the reader's mental processes occur at different levels and he or she engages themselves in an interaction with the print to create meaning (Eskey, 2021).

Because reading is a complex and multifaceted activity and it is a complicated skill since it requires the combination of attention,

memory, perceptual processes, and comprehension precedes. Thus, reading involves both comprehension and interpretation of a text by using questions formulated by the reader (Grabe, 2019) and various levels of cognitive processes are required for efficient reading process. Reading cannot be regarded as a set of mechanical skills to be learned once and for all, but rather as a complex process of making meaning from a text, for variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts (Allen and Bruton, 2021).

In the reading process, readers use their background knowledge about the text's topic and structure along with their linguistic knowledge and reading strategies to achieve their purpose for reading. As Goodman (2018) states reading is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs; there is thus an essential interaction between language and thought in reading. In this sense, reading not only includes encoding the language or the written word, it also goes beyond the information in relation with the world.

Reading comprehension is a complex process that has been understood and exported in a number of ways. Adala (2022), states that comprehension is “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language”. Duke (2023) added “navigation” and “critique” to her definition because she believed that students actually move through the text, finding their way, evaluating the accuracy of the text to see if it fits their personal agenda, and finally arriving at a self-selected location. A common definition for teachers might be that reading comprehension is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. As these different definitions demonstrate, there are many, interpretations of what it means to comprehend text.

In comprehension strategies, teachers organize passage reading, vocabulary knowledge, read aloud, listening strategy and the world

knowledge of the students into categories and systems that make retrieval easier. When a key word or concept is encountered, readers are able to access this information system, pulling forth the ideas that will help them make connections with the text so they can create meaning.

Comprehension is affected by a reader's culture, based on the degree to which it matches with the writer's culture or the culture espoused in the text. Readers also read in particular ways depending on the purpose for reading. Students are likely to apply more strategies taught to them by the teacher and work harder at building meaning. Less motivated students are not as likely to work hard as others, and the meaning they create will not be as powerful as if they were highly motivated (Eskey, 2021).

Scaffolding is an instructional technique whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy or task and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students (Winsler, 2020). This type of interaction is consistent with Vygotsky's (2020) belief that learning is a social process and not an individual one, and it occurs when students interact with their teacher and with one another in the classroom. Although Vygotsky (2020) did not use the term scaffolding, it does have a theoretical basis in his description of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He defined the ZPD as the distance between the actual development level of the learner, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under teacher guidance and interaction and collaboration with more capable student peers (Doolittle, 2019). The ZPD is represented in a model with four stages (Tharp & Gallimore, 2018). This model illustrates the scaffolding process and it represents the relationship between teacher and student interaction in group settings.

The use of instructional scaffolding in teaching English language has been shown to be an effective method for providing differentiated instruction in the classroom (Akpe, 2021) and teachers' ability to provide differentiated instruction helps in improving students' academic performance. Students within classrooms demonstrate a wide range of behaviours, as some

who come from low-income backgrounds experience a multitude of limiting factors in language learning (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2021). This diversity among students indicates the necessity to investigate effective ways in which their different learning needs can be supported. One of these ways is the use of instructional scaffolding to support students' diverse learning ability. Wertsch (2021) states that, instructional scaffolding derives its theoretical support from Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which a students' ZPD is defined as the difference between a students' actual and potential abilities. Vygotsky theorized that in order to cultivate students' learning; adults must provide children with mediated assistance, or social guidance, at a level beyond independent learning yet within their ZPD (Bruner, 2018; Vygotsky 2020; Wertsch, 2021). In 2022, Wood, Bruner and Ross drew upon Vygotsky's idea of ZPD and coined the term scaffolding. According to these researchers, scaffolding describes the process of temporarily providing support to a learner within a social context and then gradually withdrawing this support as the learner becomes capable of independence in performing tasks.

In the classroom, instructional scaffolding is a process by which a teacher provides students with a temporary framework for active learning (Lawson, 2019). When scaffolding is done correctly, students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness. As students gather knowledge and increase their skills on their own, fundamentals of the framework are dismantled. At the completion of the lesson, the scaffolding is removed altogether and students no longer need it. Walqui (2020) maintained that scaffolding can be thought of as three related pedagogical scales:

- Providing a support structure to the students to enable certain activities and skills to develop.
- Carrying out particular activities in the class.
- Providing assistance in moment-to- moment interaction.

Instructional scaffolding can be used most effectively in the early childhood classroom to teach English language. In investigating teachers'

use of instructional scaffolding, it is important to note the complexities involved in the successful use of such strategies. Challenges to scaffolding for early childhood teachers include the necessity to consistently adjust methods to accommodate the learning and teaching process for each child (Bodrova & Leong, 2018). Thus, effective scaffolding interactions require teachers to have a well developed knowledge of both the curriculum and of students' ability (Hosbaum, Peters, & Sylva, 2019; Pressley, 2019).

Reading Comprehension

Comprehension is the ability of readers to get meaning from text. How does this happen? By asking adult good readers to think aloud as they read, researchers have determined that these readers actively coordinate a number of conscious processes before, during, and after reading (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Good readers are aware of how their reading is going and why. They know, for example, when a text is difficult to read because it contains many new ideas and when it is difficult to read because it is poorly written. They are adept at using their prior knowledge as they read to make predictions about what might happen next and to understand ideas as they encounter them (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 2021).

Reading is a highly strategic process during which readers are constantly constructing meaning using a variety of strategies, such as activating background knowledge, monitoring and clarifying, making predictions, drawing inferences, asking questions and summarizing. Strategies are used in combination to solve problems, to think about text and to check understanding. Consequently, teaching comprehension strategies should focus on thinking (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), problem solving and monitoring understanding. "Being strategic is not a skill that can be taught by drill; it is a method of approaching reading and reading instruction. Much more is required than knowing a strategy; becoming strategic calls for coordinating individual strategies. This coordinating involves altering, adjusting, modifying, testing, and shifting tactics as is fitting, until a reading comprehension problem is solved". (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002, p. 186)

Reading strategically is higher order thinking. It involves transforming information and ideas. For example, summarizing requires evaluating and synthesizing information; making predictions involves combining facts and ideas and making inferences to formulate a type of hypothesis; making connections necessitates making generalizing; and clarifying require identifying problems and developing solutions.

Good readers are often selective, focusing their attention on the parts of the text that are most appropriate to their goals. Effective readers go beyond the literal meaning of text, interpreting what they read by filtering ideas in the text through their prior knowledge. Such interpretations often include an evaluation of the quality of the ideas in the text. Often, such associations are carried out intentionally by thinking about how the ideas in the text seem vaguely familiar and then recalling where similar ideas were presented or encountered. Readers also make predictions and form hypotheses about what will happen next, or what ideas the text will advance. In addition, readers continuously evaluate these predictions and hypotheses and revise them as the reading warrants. As they read, good readers vary their reading speed, sometimes skimming and sometimes rereading a section of text that is especially relevant to the reading goals. As they encounter new ideas during reading, they update their prior knowledge. Good readers make conscious inferences, such as determining the author's intentions for writing the text, clarifying the meaning of unknown words, and filling in information if they perceive gaps in an argument. They create mental images. If, for example, they are reading fiction, they create mental pictures of settings and characters. Good readers are strategic.

Comprehension Strategies

Comprehension strategies are conscious or intentional plans that people use in order to achieve a goal (Roit, 2019) and are used deliberately to make sense of text. Readers use strategies consciously to make sense of the text, remember critical ideas and integrate new learning into existing schema or prior knowledge. Students need to learn how to use strategies

independently, to recognize and solve problems, and to delve deeper into text to make connections and inferences.

Often the terms comprehension strategies, skills, and activities are used interchangeably. Comprehension strategies are used consciously by the reader to monitor and check understanding, to clarify confusion, and to process text. Strategies are situational and are used intentionally by readers (McEwan, 2020). In contrast, once skills are learned, they are used unconsciously, i.e. decoding words or breaking words into syllables. Skills are also the tools readers use to organize the structure of text, e.g., main idea and supporting details, compare and contrast, sequencing, etc. Activities such as charts like KWL (McEwan, 2020) or terms such as “click and clunk” and “get the gist” are not comprehension strategies themselves but instructional devices to encourage students to use comprehension strategies as they read. Props such as strategy character puppets may catch children’s interest but they may also take students’ attention away from the strategies themselves.

In contrast, skills are applied automatically rather than deliberately and yield a high level of performance with minimal effort (Dewitz, 2019). Learning skills requires practice in order to become automatic. Decoding is a skill that when it becomes automatic results in fluent reading. Readers read most words without ever thinking about the sounds and spellings. Similarly, fluency is a skill that develops over time, allowing readers to access text with automatically so they can focus their mental efforts on making sense of what is being read.

Simply put, comprehension strategies are the cognitive processes and procedures that readers bring to the content of reading; comprehension skills are the procedures they use to grasp the organizational structure of the text. Readers employ various comprehension strategies before, during, and after an initial reading of a text. Comprehension skills, however, are best employed as readers reread a text and do close reading. Why is it important to provide students with instruction in comprehension skills? The most persuasive answer is given by Pearson and Camperell (2021): When we identify a variable,

including a text structure variable, that looks like it might make a difference in comprehension, we ought to adopt a frontal assault strategy when considering its instructional power-teach about it systematically and make certain students have a chance to practice it. Research states that the ability to identify and use text structure can make a difference in students’ text comprehension: Good readers are able to use structure, whereas poor readers are not. Therefore, teaching students the skills necessary to use text structure is another way to improve their reading comprehension.

A very practical way to understand both the distinction between strategies and skills and their interaction is to think about the sport of basketball. Players practice different types of shots - three-point plays, hook shots and dunks; they work on different types of dribbling from pull back to crossover to behind the back. All of these skills become automatic with practice, just as reading skills become automatic. . But skills are not sufficient to win the game. Players also learn to: play strategically by looking at where players are positioned, where a shot can be made, and which shot makes the most sense. Reading the court and players is key to knowing which play to make. The same is true with reading. The foundational skills of reading are necessary but not sufficient. Skills must work in partnership with strategies. Skills are used automatically; strategies are used thoughtfully and intentionally. Like basketball shots, main idea, sequencing, compare and contrast and other reading skills need to be learned and practiced. They are foundational skills that enable the reader to use comprehension strategies effectively. For example, understanding the concept of main idea underlies summarizing.

Effective readers are constantly monitoring their understanding, assessing their understanding, and identifying when comprehension breaks down. They are metacognitively aware or in control of their own thinking throughout their reading. Luke (2021) compares this metacognitive or self-regulatory behavior to a foreman who oversees - monitors - all the parts of a project. When the project is moving along smoothly, there is no need for intervention. Depending upon the problem, the

foreman may need to stop the project to take some action. And this is exactly what proficient readers do. When reading comprehension is moving along smoothly, skilled readers do not need to stop. However, when reading challenging or complex text, these same readers recognize when comprehension is interrupted, identify the cause or problem like unfamiliar words or confusing referents or inconsistent ideas, and use strategies to clarify and resolve the problems. They also use strategies such as predicting and making connections to increase engagement and promote deeper meaning.

Novice and struggling readers seem to lack awareness of thinking about what is and is not making sense as they read. They are often unaware of when they do not understand what they are reading. This is painfully evident when a struggling reader turns two pages instead of one and continues on the wrong page even though it does not make sense. They often are focused so much on reading the words that they cannot think about how the words connect to create meaning. Good readers, on the other hand, are aware of when their comprehension breaks down or if they are confused by the text and have “fix up” strategies to resolve their problems. As readers interact with a text, they continually relate what they are reading to their prior life and reading experiences. Readers' interest in what they are reading influences the links they continue to build in their schema which is one reason why motivation increases comprehension.

The relationship between prior knowledge and reading is obviously reciprocal. Prior knowledge enhances comprehension by enabling readers to comprehend text better, to make connections, to predict, and to develop inferences as they are reading. As readers learn more from reading, they are also expanding their knowledge, which is then stored in memory and connected to schemata, which are activated at a later time as background or prior knowledge.

Activating background for proficient readers happens quite naturally as they preview a text before reading, browsing through the text, reflecting on the author, and noting information in the book jacket or other visuals. What do I already know about this topic or type of text? What have I

experienced or read about this topic?

Making conscious what is already known helps the reader link new information with what is already known - make connections, increase the ability to make inferences, improve recall of content, view and reconcile conflicting information, interpret text and absorb new information (Kujawa, 2022). For students with limited background knowledge, it may be necessary to help them build background prior to reading.

Instructional Scaffolding

Instructional scaffolding is a supportive approach for learner's convergent developmental area (Lerikkanen, 2019). It lies on a controlled support or assistance offered by an expertise person to remove the difficulty faced by a learner when they are not able to solve problems at their own. This type of support is totally temporary and is removed intelligently whenever the situation demands it. Also Scaffolding is regarded as a key element of cognitive apprenticeship, where students become problem-solvers with the help of the given guidance from teachers who scaffold students through teaching, providing assignments, and hints, without clearly giving students the ultimate answers.

According to Alake (2021), instructional scaffolding is a learning process specially designed to promote a deeper levels of learning and understanding. It is the support given during the tuning process which is implemented according to the needs of the learners, with a keen intention of helping the learners to achieve their learning goals. An important element of scaffolding is that, it supports students' learning of how to do the task and also why to do the task, in the practices and conceptualizations in the way which support the building of knowledge that is recognized as learning. Another study suggests that as learner progresses through a task, teacher can use different types of scaffolds to accommodate students' level of knowledge. A complex task also requires more than one scaffold to help the student to master the content (Alibali, 2019). It is also revealed that students taught in scaffolding conditions performs significantly better than students taught in no scaffolding

condition also scaffolding enhance inquiry and their performance, especially when students are made to access and make use them.

Scaffolding approach is an appropriate practice to employ students in learning, especially in learning Slope Deflection and Moment Distribution methods in Structural Analysis subject (Alake, 2021). Instructional scaffolding is a highly effective and important instructional strategy in the domain of English. Therefore, for students' performance in the subject to be improved, English teachers should take in the spirit of regular use of instructional scaffolding in the classroom. Students should on their own establish a sense of competition in the classroom so as to effectively utilize the teachers' instructions through scaffolding.

Types of Instructional Scaffolding

Assisting the reading comprehension of the learners' in the second language class can be done in many different ways. Six main types of instructional scaffolding are especially salient: modelling, bridging, contextualisation, building schema, re-presenting text and developing metacognition.

Modelling

Students need to be given clear examples of what is requested of them for imitation. When introducing a new task or working format, it is indispensable that the learners be able to see or hear what a developing product looks like. From that point of view, walking students through an interaction or first doing it together as a class activity is a necessary step. As one 10th of the student noted: In my English class, I can always do well because the teacher first demonstrates an experiment, then we try a similar one. Then he asks us to write down the procedure and the conclusions in groups of two or four. I can do it. I can even use the new words because I know what they mean (Walqui, 2020).

Teachers of English learners should seriously consider keeping the examples of students' work for demonstration purposes. Such examples may serve not only to set performance guidelines or standards, but also to encourage and stimulate students by the evidence of past students' progress in the accomplishment of similar tasks. In

addition to modelling tasks and activities and sharing examples of student work, it is important to model appropriate adjectival use for the performance of specific academic functions, such as describing, comparing, summarising, evaluating and so on. Bookmark structures for students a way to practice the clarification of adjectival concepts and language as they interact in dyads. One side of the bookmark makes explicit to students what they should do as they clarify ideas or seek clarification for them. The other side provides students with some concrete examples of adjectival phrases they may use as they engage in clarification activities.

Teaching Comprehension Skills

As with comprehension strategies instruction (Smith, 2021) instruction in comprehension skills progresses logically:

- a . Teachers introduce each skill through explanation and modeling. As part of rereading a text, teachers identify a skill that can be applied, explain how the skill can be used to read the text, and finally model how to employ the skill through thinking aloud.
- b . After introducing each skill, teachers remind students to use it on their own, providing prompts and hints about when its use is appropriate.
- c . Teachers gradually decrease their prompts and hints, allowing students to assume more and more responsibility for employing the skills on their own.
- d . Teachers limit the number of skills to one or two that can be identified clearly in the selection. Trying to have students concentrate on too many skills will confuse them and make it harder for them to use any of the skills successfully. If a selection has good examples of several different skills, teachers can return to the selection several times over a span of days.
- e . Teachers solidify the reading/writing connection by having students incorporate different text structures into their writing. As they use specific organizational structures in their writing, students develop a clearer understanding of how to identify them as they read.

- f. Teachers remind students often that the purpose of any skill exercise is to give them tools to use as they read and write.

Instructional Scaffolding and Students' Reading Comprehension

Although there are challenges involved in using scaffolding in the classroom, the significance of teachers to be instructed with the use of scaffolding strategies cannot be over-emphasized. Hogan and Pressley (2020) suggest that:

- i. Instructional scaffolding has strong influence on students' reading skills development given that language is an essential component of the teacher-student interaction during scaffolding.
- ii. The use of scaffolding strategies has been applied to language intervention and research suggests that scaffolding strategies is beneficial in the teaching of English language.
- iii. Instructional scaffolding helps students with language delay learning ability.
- iv. Theorists further support the importance of the relationship between social contexts, language and learning of reading comprehension. Vygotsky (2018) argued that language is the bridge between humans' social and mental worlds and the most significant milestone in students' cognitive development. Bruner's (2018) investigations of language learning showed that as infants construct meaning, they use each new experience to think how to reorder and expand their knowledge. Therefore, through the use of instructional scaffolding students use language to analyze, generalize and represent experiences in reading.

Challenges of Using Instructional Scaffolding in Teaching

The first challenge is that teachers do not always have access to high quality materials and representations to be used in the classrooms when teaching reading comprehension. More important than simply having materials available, teachers also need professional learning in using representations and materials to effectively illustrate particular concepts. This implies that on-going professional development should be

provided on appropriate representations and materials for the more complex concepts encountered in secondary schools.

As Sowell (2009), suggested effective use of materials and representations relies on the teacher, both the teacher's familiarity and persistence with the materials and their knowledge of how and when to use them to effectively scaffold learning. Halford (2022), found that materials and representations that illustrated concepts were more effective than others when scaffolding the learning of the low-attaining target students. Information is needed for teachers regarding the kinds of materials and representations that illustrate particular concepts. Halford (2022) found that missed opportunities for scaffolding where the teacher did not recognise or respond to the students' prior knowledge were crucial. Without tasks that fell within the students' Zone of Proximal Development, scaffolding could not take place. Without the task being adjusted in some way, students struggled unproductively. An initial implication for teachers is to find out what the students' prior knowledge is for the concept to be taught. Armed with this knowledge, tasks can then be adjusted depending on student needs.

In any lesson there are many decision points for teachers, one of which is when and how to respond to scaffolding opportunities. Responding effectively during a lesson depends very much on a combination of the teacher's knowledge, beliefs and professional judgment (Muir, 2018). Addressing key factors such as appropriate materials and representations and student prior knowledge before the lesson might assist teachers in responding more effectively to scaffolding opportunities as they arise.

Conclusion

Generally, students at the secondary school level in Nigeria education system lack appropriate reading comprehension strategies in English language. Most students merely read without understanding and do not apply any strategies. In fact, reading in English is an unnecessary 'burden' done only to carry out the tasks during the English lesson. It is not an enjoyable activity. The results of the study show that only three strategies are

used quite extensively by the students. These are the personalizing, learning with others and the understanding and using of emotions strategies. These are probably popular strategies as they are generic to the learning of languages. If students can apply the strategies of predicting, discussing, reflecting, and comparing, they would be able to improve in their reading ability. Thus, these activities should be included and stressed upon in the teaching of reading comprehension. This would be the first step towards improving their achievements in reading comprehension in English. One way to do this would be to introduce the teaching and learning of appropriate reading strategies especially in reading comprehension in English. These, however, have to be carried out in creative ways, as weak students have little attention span.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to promote reading comprehension.

- 1 . Different writers should learn how to use simple diction while writing especially in writing comprehension.
- 2 . Teachers must acknowledge the importance of reading skills and must plan an effective programme of reading instruction with a focus on promoting reading culture among secondary school students in their schools.
- 3 . School authorities should introduce informal education on readiness for reading. Non-structured reading instruction should be introduced and the child's ability to respond to the reading materials be observed.
- 4 . Parents should provide a stimulating reading environment for their children and wards. They should encourage their children to read at home. Books should be provided for them to improve their reading. They should also encourage their children to watch children's educational television. This will go a long way in improving their phonetic and vocabulary development. They should cultivate the habit of using their leisure to read for pleasure.
- 5 . Government at the federal, state, and local levels should provide appropriate materials for teaching reading skills. Libraries should

be provided for our primary schools, since the absence of libraries is a factor in the deficiency in reading skills. There is a need to resuscitate the mobile library in schools and make it compulsory for all students to register with a token fee in order to have access to service provided by this mobile library.

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