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Effects of Teacher's Scaffolding on Students' Reading Comprehension: Sire Secondary School Grade Nine Students in Focus

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Abstract

This study was aimed at examining the effect of teachers' scaffolding on reading comprehension of grade 9th students at Sire Secondary School. In this study quasi-experiment design was used. To this effect, grade nine students were classified into treatment group and control group. 46 students were taken from section D as a treatment group and as a control group, 46 students were selected from section A. As a data collecting tool, pre-test and post test reading comprehension was used for both treatment group and control group students. In order to compute the finding paired samples t-test and independent t-test were used. Both groups of students have an equivalent level of performance in reading comprehension prior to the intervention. Treatment group students were taught reading comprehension through instructional scaffolding techniques throughout the treatment period. On the other hand, control group students were taught reading comprehension in a traditional way. No special treatment was provided for this group of students and the pre-test and post-test was given at the same time interval with treatment groups. After intervention, there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control group and treatment group on the reading comprehension performance on the post-test scores. The finding revealed that students who were taught reading comprehension with scaffolding strategies outperformed the control group students. The scaffolding mechanisms which were provided for the treatment group were much more conducive and beneficial to EFL learners' reading comprehension improvement. Therefore, it can be concluded teaching reading comprehension passage through scaffolding strategies enhanced the students reading performance. Thus, it is recommended that teachers have to look into how better to help their students by implementing these strategies as frequently as possible.

Keywords: Teachers' scaffolding; Reading comprehension; School

Introduction

Reading comprehension is one of the most important skills that enables learners cope with more sophisticated texts and tasks and deal with them efficiently, quickly, appropriately and skilfully (Ur, 1996:147). Pardo (2004) further elaborated reading comprehension as a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with the text through the combination of prior knowledge and experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. More importantly, reading comprehension involves knowledge of vocabulary, understanding of sentence structure and syntax and ability to interpret the intentions of the writer (Flowers, 2013). Harris and Hodges (1998) define reading comprehension as the linguistic process of reconstructing the intended message of a text by interpreting its lexical and grammatical information into meaningful units that can be integrated with the reader's knowledge and cognitive structures. Reading and comprehension are closely interrelated in that students cannot recognize and interpret the written material without comprehending and understanding it. Hence, it can be understood from the literature that reading

comprehension is an interactive process that occurs before, during and after a person reads a particular piece of writing.

With its underlying significance, it is highly valued by students because it enhances the process of language acquisition and helps them to read for a variety of purposes. In fact, in most EFL academic situations, students ever want to acquire and may comprise their most crucial goal. An area of inquiry which traditionally received great attention in L2 acquisition in general and L2 reading comprehension in particular is the study of the effect of teaching reading strategies on reading comprehension development of the EFL/ESL learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996; Purpura, 1999).

Research has shown that giving the necessary attention to reading strategies becomes important factor as learners reading' comprehension level is assumed to be low. Narmeen (2015) argues that learners' comprehension may be hindered due to the inappropriate and inflexible use of reading comprehension strategies by them. Thus, he highlighted that the explicit instruction in comprehension strategies can be an effective way to help them overcome difficulties in understanding texts.

Hence, the present study intends to tackle this important issue and examine the effectiveness of using scaffolding strategies for improving students' reading comprehension. Accordingly, Narmeen (2015) explains variety of comprehension strategies used by learners simultaneously and sometimes specific strategies applied deliberately to help them in their comprehension specially with challenging texts. Familiarity with reading strategies is crucial for improving and overcoming the reading comprehension problems. These strategies are the techniques deliberately employed by learners to achieve particular goals, for example to assist acquisition or to learn a second/foreign language (Oxford, 2001).

The comprehension strategies suggested have different psychological foundations. The first view is concerned with behaviourist principle that views reading as a perceptual activity in which the reader is a passive recipient of information from text (Alexander & Fox, 2004: 33-68). From this perspective, meaning exists in the text and the reader has to reproduce it to understand its meaning. The behaviourist position was criticized for being mechanistic which focused on recitation. For instance, Vygotsky (1962) cited in Attarzadeh (2011) criticized behaviourism as being isolated, specialized, too narrow, and intrapersonal in stand point. On the other hand, cognitivist pays more attention to memory, information processing approaches, attention and noticing. Likewise, the information-processing approach was criticized as being overly reductionist in its analogy of computer and mind (Mayer, 1996). Both approaches failed to reflect either the active role of the learning agent or the influence of the social interactive contexts in everyday educational settings. Their mechanistic underpinning by an orderly, predictable, and controllable view of the universe proved inadequate to capture the active and social characteristics of learners (Phillips, 1995).

Constructivism, on the other hand, focuses on the social factors in the process of learning, stating that learning is not an individualistic process rather it needs to be learned in a social context with the help of capable peers, parents or expert teachers (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Chanyalew Enyew & AbiyYigzaw). Researchers state a very useful strategy to optimize student learning by providing supportive environment that facilitates student independence. This assistance strategy is known as scaffolding, which is a Vygotskian metaphor for teacher support of a learner through dialogue, questioning, conversation, and nonverbal modeling in which the learner attempts literacy tasks that could not be done without that assistance. However, after proper scaffolding strategy use, they can apply new skills and strategies independently (Bassiri, 2012, Haghparast& Mall-Amiri, 2015).

It is believed that students' reading comprehension is improved when they interact with capable adults, parents,

teachers or peers. In this theory, therefore, scaffolding is a prerequisite for reading development to take place appropriately (Lantolf, 2006). Recent research results recommend the use of scaffolding strategies as having a facilitative role when it is connected and practiced with reading comprehension. So, the relationship between teacher scaffolding and student reading comprehension in EFL classrooms has increasingly attracted the attention of experts in recent years (Fitzgerald and Graves, 2004; National Reading Panel, 2000). However, in EFL classroom setting reading comprehension seems scant in primary grades; scaffolding students to read successfully is thus imperative.

Reading comprehension plays a significant role to support learners in attaining the desired expectations. Williams (1984) stresses that the most important part of teacher's job is to support students develop appropriate strategies for reading. In other words, the teacher is responsible to empower students to create their own meaning by combining linguistic and cultural components and drawing meaning from their experiences while reading a text. To this end, teacher scaffolding which is intentionally designed and carefully taught seems to be fundamental so that students can become independent and self-regulated life-long readers. In scaffolded instruction, assistance is presented reasonably and systematically and is adjusted to the students' level of competence to promote cognitive development (Chi, 2007; Donovan & Smolkin, 2002).

Reading comprehension continues to be a problematic area for EFL learners. Due to this fact, there have been some studies on teaching and learning strategies in the context of EFL aimed at improving the students' reading skills which enable them to comprehend what they read. Some studies examined the use of scaffolding in the teaching of reading in an EFL context. The results show that there is a significant effect of scaffolding in improving reading comprehension. For instance, Attarzadeh (2011) investigates the effect of scaffolding on reading comprehension of diverse text types. Participants of this treatment study were EFL Iranian learners with different levels of proficiency. In addition to this, Safadi (2012) conducted a research on title "the Effect of Scaffolding Instruction on Reading Comprehension Skills." The result indicated an improvement in the students' reading comprehension scores which could be attributed to the influence of the scaffolded cooperative classroom environment.

Pishghadam and Ghadiri (2011) examined the effect of two types of scaffolding on reading comprehension within groups that worked cooperatively in symmetrical and asymmetrical conditions. Safadi and Rababah (2012) found that scaffolding was effective in assisting students in increasing reading comprehension achievement in the EFL

classroom context. They compared two scaffolding groups as treatment groups and two other groups taught by a conventional method, as control groups. They found that scaffolding instruction improves reading comprehension achievement and skills related to finding main ideas, drawing inferences, critical thinking, and vocabulary. Similarly, Safadi and Rababah (2012) found that scaffolding was effective in increasing reading comprehension achievement and improving skills related to finding main ideas, inferencing, critical thinking and vocabulary. Specifically, Poorahmadi (2009) found that scaffolding provides a significant immediate and transfer effect on the student's achievement in reading comprehension achievement as indicated from the improvement scores over the time. Furthermore, Poorahmadi (2009) conducted an treatment study to measure the effect of scaffolding strategies and classroom tasks on reading comprehension in 130 Iranian EFL female freshmen learners. The study found that scaffolding has a strong effect on the students' achievement in reading comprehension.

As far as the knowledge of the researchers is concerned, despite the great many research studies at international level, there are virtually limited local researches conducted on this area. For instance, Chanyalew Enyew and AbiyYigzaw (2015) conducted a study on 'Effects of Teacher Scaffolding on Students' Reading Comprehension' with a focus on grade four students. Their finding revealed that scaffolding reading strategy instruction is effective in improving students' passage reading comprehension. This research was conducted at high school level because students' inability to comprehend texts is also seen at secondary school level. The researchers' teaching experience at high school can be a witness that most

secondary school students encounter difficulty in dealing with comprehending English texts. Thus, the study has attempted to respond to the following research question.

- Is there any significant difference between reading comprehension of students who are given support (treatment group) and that of the students who are taught reading comprehension through the non-scaffolding strategy?

Specific Objective

- To examine the significant differences between the reading comprehension of students who are given scaffolding and that of the control group students who are taught reading comprehension through the conventional method.

It is hoped that the findings of the study are expected to give a contribution for the teachers in teaching reading comprehension through SRE so that the teacher can apply and implement this strategy in teaching English especially in teaching reading comprehension. It is useful for the students to be able to increase their reading comprehension by identifying general information, finding specific information, recognizing textual meaning, and textual references of the text.

Methodology

In this study, a quasi-treatment design was used to examine the effect of scaffolding on students' reading comprehension. To this effect, participants of the study were categorized into treatment group who were taught reading comprehension through scaffolding which involves a series of trainings before students read the text given. On the other hand, the control group students were taught through the traditional method.

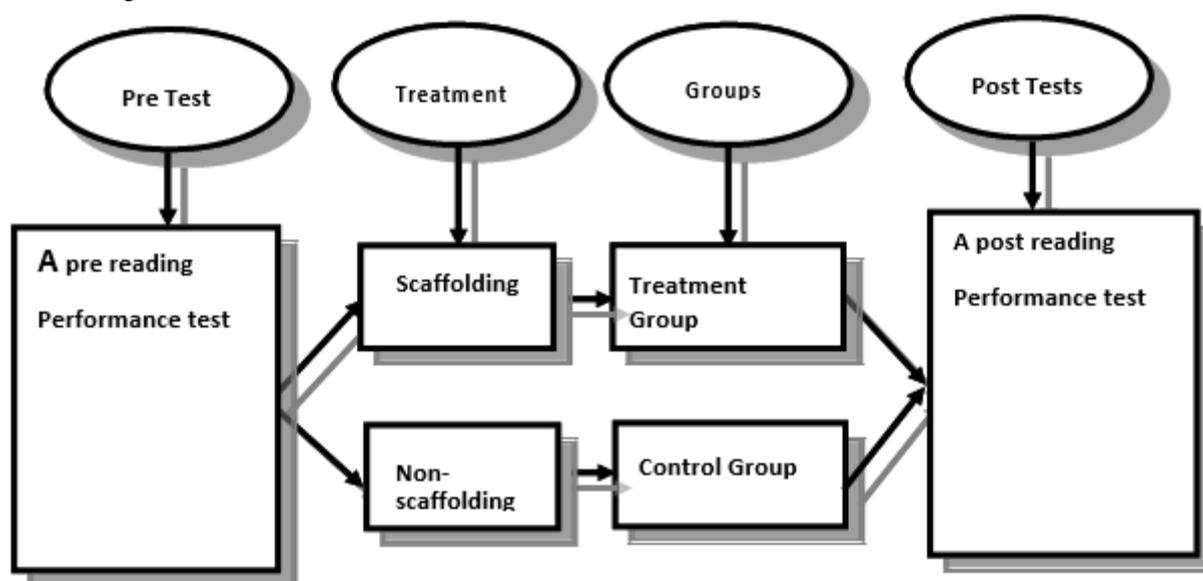


Fig. 1: Research design

Instruments

Reading Comprehension Test

As this study aimed at investigating effects of scaffolding reading strategy on the students' reading comprehension of grade 9 students, a reading test was used. However, as far as the knowledge of the researcher is concerned, he did not come across the standardized reading comprehension test for different particular level especially for secondary school students. However, for the purpose this study, the scaffolding instruction techniques are adapted from Yanti (2013) who classified it into pre-reading while reading and post-reading phases. Hence, reading comprehension test for the control group and the treatment groups was prepared. These tests were administered to students at the beginning of the intervention (pre-test) to determine their reading comprehension ability status. In developing reading comprehension test, three passages were taken from various sources that could match the reading text from the students' textbooks in terms of level of difficulty. The reading tests have been prepared by the researcher. The number of words in the selected three passages ranged from 350 to 480 words. Ten items were prepared with each item having one point. The nature of the items in terms of recognizing main ideas, vocabulary knowledge, and inferring was the same for all passages. These texts were selected on the basis of suitability of content in terms of students' interests, the length and level of difficulty in terms of structure and unknown words.

It was piloted in section C to determine the reliability of the test through Cronbach alpha formula which was about 0.79 which was suitable for the purpose of this study

Participants in this study were grade 9th students who are attending their education at Sire Secondary school in 2017/2009. There are 290 (197 male & 93 female) students who are distributed in five sections. Section A has 53 students and that of section B is 59. Section C accommodates 58 students whereas there are 60 students both in section D and E. But, only 46 students properly attended the training prepared for treatment group students and for the sake of computer analysis the pre and post-tests of 7 students were dropped.

In order to intervene effectively and properly manage the effects of reading instruction, the researcher used simple random technique which gives equal opportunity for all sample studies to be part of the study. Hence, the researcher randomly chose Section D as a treatment group whereas section A was selected to be the control group of the study. Throughout the duration of the experiment, the researcher taught the treatment group through scaffolding to see the effect of scaffolding on students' reading comprehension. On the other hand, the control group received the traditional

method by their regular classroom teacher which included the following steps:

The teacher assigns a topic for reading from Student's textbook to read. The students are provided with either notes or questions to answer. It is decided that the researcher should teach the treatment group for two reasons: first, to have better control over the study variables. Second, to make sure that the different scaffolding strategies were carried out effectively.

Implementation Strategy

Preparing a teacher's guide that contains the teacher's scaffolding strategies and how they can be taught. The plan consisted of standard competence, indicators and learning objectives (refer appendix A). To control variables before implementing the experiment, the results of the writing pre-test was subject to statistical treatment to find whether there is a statistically significant difference between the control group and the treatment groups in terms of the overall reading performance improvement. Four week reading scaffolding strategies were employed for treatment groups. During this period, no intervention was provided for control group and they were taught in the traditional way.

To determine the students' reading achievement after continuous intervention, post-test was provided for both treatment and control groups. To avoid confusion on the part of the students, they were well oriented with respect to the purpose of the testing as it has nothing to do with the kind of decision made about their classroom result. The same questions, formats and the numbers provided at the same time.

Methods of Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, this research design is explanatory in nature. Hence, the data obtained through the quasi-experiment were analysed quantitatively. This means paired and independent t-test was computed from, SPSS software to see the significance difference of the reading comprehension of the research participants due to the teacher's scaffolding.

Results

To investigate the participants' reading comprehension performance after the intervention, another independent-sample t-test was run. The posttest scores were used to see whether the difference in the mean scores of the control (15.88, SD=2.56512) and treatment (18.76, SD=2.89010) groups is meaningful or not (table 4.4). To compare the mean scores of the control group/students who were taught reading comprehension in a usual method and the students who are taught reading comprehension with the scaffolding reading experience (SRE), independent samples t-test was used. The above table (4.4) shows the mean score of the control group in the post-test was reported to be 15.88

(SD=2.56512) with calculated t- value (-5.056) at ($\alpha \leq .05$) level. The table also depicted the same number of students (46) took reading comprehension test after a series of reading lessons on various topics. The calculated mean value has increased to 18.76 (SD=2.89010) at ($\alpha \leq .05$) level (p-value=.000). When it is read from the table the result is statistically significant. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the treatment group and the control group in reading comprehension performance on the post reading performance test in favor of the treatment group.

In other words, the mean difference and the meaningfulness of the difference show that the scaffolding mechanisms which were provided for the treatment group were much more conducive and beneficial to EFL learners' reading comprehension improvement. The above findings, therefore, indicate that students who are taught reading comprehension with scaffolding strategies outperformed the control group students. This result is in line with the finding of Safadi (2012) who asserted scaffolding in reading tended to influence the students' reading comprehension scores. Owing to this, the teacher has a vital role in teaching the students starting from choosing the appropriate text up to the final stage (post reading) of reading.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to examine the effects of teacher's scaffolding on the students' reading comprehension with special attention to grade nine students at Sire Secondary School in 2017/2009. In doing so, the quasi-treatment design was used. At the end of the intervention period, post-test was given for both groups of students to check whether the teacher's scaffolding has brought improvements on students' reading passage comprehension. The results of the present study showed a significant statistical difference between the treatment group and the control group in reading comprehension on the post reading performance test in favor of the treatment group.

Treatment group students who received scaffolding reading strategy outperformed in reading comprehension when compared to control group students who were taught

reading comprehension in a usual manner regardless of the scaffolding strategy use. Table 1 shows the control group students' mean score was 15.88 (SD=2.56512) whereas that of treatment group was 18.76 (SD=2.89010). It reveals that the scaffolding techniques cater for reading comprehension by far improves the students' reading comprehension. In other words, scaffolding has the power of easing even difficult texts when it is applied effectively and instructively. Analyses of students' oral classroom participation and response during each lesson also indicated that students have demonstrated gradual and steady improvement in their reading passage comprehension. These findings are in accordance with previous studies Chi, (2007) and Safadi (2012) who investigated the effect of scaffolding in fostering the reading comprehension skills of EFL students. Their finding indicated scaffolding reading strategies are more conducive and facilitative for reading comprehension than the traditional method. There are some plausible reasons for the accounts of this fact. First, the treatment group has acquainted themselves over control group in reading comprehension and reading strategy achievement. They got exposure to more practical reading tasks that are designed in meaningful way and the implementation was done accordingly. Second the teacher closely follows and monitors the students and provides them feedback. Finally, students got access to greater variety of activities and opportunities in doing the tasks, which may have raised the interest of the students.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine the effects of teacher's scaffolding on the students' reading comprehension with special attention to grade nine students at Sire Secondary School in 2017/2009. Students who received scaffolding reading strategy (treatment group) outperformed in reading comprehension when compared to control group students who were taught reading comprehension in a usual manner. It is an evidence for the previous findings that have shown scaffolding has the power of enhancing students' reading comprehension. The level of scaffolding will be reduced on the basis of the progress students are making in reading comprehension.

Table 1: The treatment and the control group post reading performance score

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. err Mean	t-value	Df	Sig. 2tailed
control	46	15.8804	2.56512	.37821	-5.056	90	.000
treatment	46	18.7609	2.89010	.42612	-5.056	88.749	.000

**p<0.05

The result of reading comprehension post test provided for control and treatment marked two things. Firstly, treatment group students benefited a lot from the scaffolding technique the teacher has applied as t-test has indicated that there was significant difference between the mean scores of the control and treatment group students on the reading comprehension performance on the pretest and post-test scores. Secondly, the reading comprehension mean value score of the control group students showed no significance difference since they received no intervention as the teaching process has been conducted in a previous situation. This low mean score has an implication for teachers that the way we traditionally teach reading comprehension might not result in the required level of students reading comprehension performance.

In order to examine the significance difference between the reading comprehension before and after the intervention, Paired samples t-test was calculated in table 4.5. Hence the students mean score during post test has shown a significant that lead to the conclusion that scaffolding reading experience has the power of increasing passage reading comprehension skills of students. Therefore, reading lesson presentation has to be conducted in an effective manner thereby students would by far perform better in reading comprehension.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following major issues were recommended that would alleviate the existing situation.

- It was noted that reading comprehension is highly significant not only for understanding a particular text but it is also significant to maximize students' global understanding. To this effect, EFL teachers need to make the required responsibility of using scaffolding reading techniques that would enhance students' reading comprehension.
- Students tended to exhibit a reasonable improvement in reading comprehension performance when the intervention was conducted. Therefore, it is good for teachers to revisit the method through which reading comprehension is delivered and they need to apply scaffolding reading strategies in accordance with the task difficulty.
- Teachers have to select reading comprehension passage that could engage students in a meaningful way.

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