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Employing Scaffolding Strategy to Facilitate Students With Different English Learning Circumstances

Adesti Komalasari, S.Pd., M.A.
Yogyakarta Respati University
adestikomalasari@gmail.com

Yuseva Ariyani Iswandari, S.Pd., M.Ed.
Sanata Dharma University
yuseva.iswandari@gmail.com

Abstract

English learning circumstances and English learners' proficiency in Indonesia vary from time to time due to their supporting elements like the quality of English teachers, the facilities in learning English, and the exposure of using English of students. Those elements determine the improvement of students' English ability. With this range of learning situations, scaffolding strategy is beneficial and constructive to be applied among students with different learning circumstances. English learners that are surrounded by modern and updated facilities might assist English learners who are not supported with the same facilities. This study tries to examine the implementation of scaffolding strategy among students of writing subjects in English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University and students of reading subjects in Respati University. The objectives of the study are to figure out the significance of scaffolding strategy among students with different learning situations in reading and writing subjects and to find out how scaffolding strategy is implemented effectively. Classroom Action Research and Library study would be employed in conducting this research, especially references relate to scaffolding strategy, teaching writing, and teaching reading.

Keywords: EFL Learning activity, English Learning circumstances, Scaffolding strategy, Teaching Reading, Teaching Writing

Introduction

English language has been one of the media to communicate with people all over the world and it is still important to learn. English learning strategies and methodologies are various in order to accommodate the wider range of English ability of each learner. English learning experts always try to innovate and develop English learning strategies that might fit and improve the learners' English ability. Following the development of technology, the access to get English materials nowadays is much easier. English learners can get English materials more easily like English workbooks, articles, journals, other references from internet or the closest book stores, or they can have the materials as software that is compatible with their communication devices. These free or easy access materials enable learners to have independent learning and this learning situation might lead to a faster improvement. However, the learners are likely facing difficulties since there are no feedbacks obtained. They would not know whether they already learn English correctly or not, and whether they use proper English that meet the standard requirements. The independent learning tends to be one-way learning, where students are the party who learn without knowing what they should improve.

In Indonesia, English learning circumstances still face challenges like the English ability of the tutors and the learners, the level of independence, and somehow the
learning facilities. These elements determine the learning circumstances and the speed of learning that the learners might have. Despite the facts that the learners are also exposed to the advancement of technology, they still need a great assistance in order to use English more properly. A good assistance, from peers or from their tutors, has positive influences in the progress of the learners’ learning process. Various strategies have been applied in order to enhance the progress of learning and one of them is scaffolding.

Scaffolding strategy was initially coined by Lev Vygotsky (1978), who introduced the conception of a zone of proximal development (ZPD). The theory appeared from the fact that there is a gap between the learner's current developmental level as determined by autonomous problem-solving ability and the learner's potential level of development as determined by the ability to solve problems under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Lev Vygotsky views interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. He suggests that teachers use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skillful peers - within the zone of proximal development. The appropriate assistance will give learners enough boosters to achieve the task. The term “scaffolding” came from Wood et al. (1976) who observed that some elements of tasks might be initially beyond the learner's capacity and the interaction among learners with various capacity levels empower them to master those particular task. He also mentions that once the learners master the tasks, the scaffolding can then be removed and the learners will be able to complete the task on their own.

In this research, scaffolding strategy is implemented to observe whether learners with different English Learning circumstances could assist one another in activating their prior knowledge on something. Learners could be feeling frustrated, intimidated, or discouraged when attempting a difficult task and scaffolding strategy would give learners assistance, direction, or understanding, presuming that it would reduce the negative emotions and self-perceptions that learners may experience in completing particular tasks or lessons. The objectives of the study are to figure out the significance of scaffolding strategy among students with different learning situations in reading and writing subjects and to find out how scaffolding strategy is implemented effectively to those students in reading and writing subjects. The scaffolding strategy applied in this research involves 29 (twenty nine) students of English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University and 9 (nine) students of English Literature Department of Yogyakarta Respati University. The English learning situations in these Universities are different, knowing that English Language Education in Sanata Dharma University is a more established study program, with more complete facilities and achievements. English Literature Department in Yogyakarta Respati University was only established three years ago and is still struggling to obtain more students and more supports in order to be more recognized among other English Departments in Yogyakarta. The learners’ English capacities are also various, ranging from basic to intermediate and few of them are still struggling with defining vocabularies items, let alone the struggles to communicate their ideas. Looking at the learners’ capacities, Reading and Writing Courses are chosen as the outlet to implement this strategy. The processes and steps in scaffolding strategy are more evident, the learning outcomes are more tangible, and the progress of learners are more perceivable. Even most of the learners from both Universities are capable in solving their learning difficulties and in coping with their weakness; they need assistance that will eventually lead them to a more prominent independent learning.
Methodology
Research Participants
There were nine (9) students of Yogyakarta Respati University Students, consisting of four (4) male students and five (5) female students. They have been learning English for six (6) until 10 (ten) years and their English ability is ranging from basic until intermediate. Watching movies in English with or without subtitle, Listening to songs in English, and reading references in English have been helping them in improving their English abilities. Even though those media gave them good assistances in learning English, they did not have other parties that tell them and gave feedback and responses whether their learning was on the right path. Besides the situation, the number of students was only a few, and the facilities provided from the University like the library or laboratories did not support the learning activities. They relied on handouts, workbook, references, and other media provided solely by the lecturers. From the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of Sanata Dharma University, there were 29 students in Paragraph Writing class where the researchers conducted this research. Among those 29 students, the researchers decided to choose 15 students as participants because they completed all of the steps required. The participants consisted of 9 (nine) female and 6 (six) male second-semester students. In general, they have been learning English for about 10 – 12 years through some similar media, such as: watching movies, listening to English songs, etc. Unlike Yogyakarta Respati University students, however, ELESP students got a few choices of assistance when facing difficulties in English learning.

Research Method
This research was conducted for 13 weeks, starting from February 10th to May 10th, 2014. This research is a qualitative research. The researchers used questionnaires, follow up interviews, and samples of students’ letters, emails, and facebook inbox to gather data in order to answer the formulated problems. In order to find out how scaffolding strategy is implemented effectively to those students in reading and writing subjects, the researchers used questionnaires and analyzed their letters and emails. Open-ended questionnaires and follow up interviews are used to figure out the significance of scaffolding strategy among students with different learning situations.

Discussion
In an EFL setting like Indonesia, English Language Learning varies from time to time, from one area to other areas and from one university to other universities. There are many elements that determine whether a learning situation is effective and efficient in improving learners’ English abilities. Several different methods and strategies have been generated and implemented in any possible learning circumstances in order to get an effective and efficient learning process. One of the strategies is Instructional Scaffolding Strategy, a learning strategy that allows learners to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal through a gradual detachment of outside assistance. Scaffolding strategy has been considered as one appropriate method to give learners a great assistance in their independent learning process to be effective and efficient. According to Benson (1997), in the process of scaffolding, the language tutor helps the learners master a task or concept that the learners are initially unable to grasp independently. The tutor offers assistance with only the skills that are beyond the student’s capability but they have to let the learners to complete as much of the task as possible, unassisted. The tutor only attempts to help the student with tasks that are just beyond his current capability. Student errors are expected, but, with the tutor’s and the learners’ peers feedback and prompting, the learner is able to achieve the task or goal. When the learners are able to take

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responsibility for or masters the task, the tutor begins the process of "fading", or the gradual removal of the scaffolding, which allows the learners to work independently. "Scaffolding is actually a bridge used to build upon what students already know to arrive at something they do not know. If scaffolding is properly administered, it will act as an enabler, not as a disabler" (Benson, 1997).

The model of Scaffolding that fits best the research steps conducted in this research was proposed by Frey, Fisher, and Everlove (2009) and is described in the picture as follows:

This model clearly promotes independent learning at the end of the process, with the initial tutors or teachers' supervision. Frey, Fisher, and Everlove (2009) state that an effective teaching framework provides a balance of teaching strategies, instructional groupings, and a balance of types of learning activities. Four key instructional strategies in an effective classroom program would include whole group, shared learning, guided learning and independent learning opportunities. In each of these components, assessment and instruction have mutual relations. The tutor observes the learners as a part of assessment and by doing so, the tutors would discover the prior knowledge the learners bring and at what level of independence they can demonstrate their understanding and knowledge. This gradual release model is often not a linear process. The tutors and learners will shift up and down this instructional model as students strive to master a concept of learning. The learners demonstrate their learning through what they write and read and the assessment should focus on what learners can do for their individual and group learning. The tutors respond by providing appropriate scaffolding to facilitate instruction as the learner shifts to his or her next step in the gradual release.

Scaffolding strategy in this research was implemented to 15 (fifteen) Paragraph Writing students of English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University and 9 (nine) Reading II students of English Literature Department of Yogyakarta Respati University. Reading II and Paragraph Writing are compulsory subjects in the two Universities and both subjects are offered in the second semester. Reading II and Paragraph Writing are chosen to be the fields to conduct the research because reading and writing could be the outlet to process the second language learners'
cognitive aspect in which readers or authors interact with the language that they learn in a form of texts. Krashen (1984) claims that reading, which builds the knowledge base of written texts, helps second language learners acquire necessary language constructs such as grammatical structures and discourse rules for writing, and facilitates the process of language acquisition. Therefore, both subjects bring critical phase for EFL learners to process their learned language acquisition. Tsai (2006) states that reading to write is based on the notion that reading supports and shapes second language learners' writing through acquisition of language input when students are performing reading tasks. Reading is not merely helpful for enhancing second language learners' writing ability in a general sense. In addition, through reading, students are given opportunities in writing classrooms to acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, or rhetorical features of texts.

On the other hand, writing to read serves as a technique that changes the goals of teachers' instruction from helping students answer comprehension checks correctly to encouraging students' meaningful interaction with written texts, and supporting students to experience reading as a composing process. Writing in reading classrooms can take place in a variety of forms such as underlining portion of texts, making comments, raising questions, or even scribbling some marks or pictures that are only comprehensible to readers themselves. The concept of the reading and writing connection can be manifested in many instructional activities and with regard to this facts, the scaffolding strategy is plausible to be implemented effectively.

In this research, the implementation of scaffolding strategy is highly achievable. The Paragraph Writing students started to send their compositions to the Reading II students and the Reading II students would reply the compositions. The compositions were sent and replied for nine times, using three different media: handwritten letters, e-mails, and Facebook inbox. The Reading II students of Yogyakarta Respati University wrote the responses in order to assess their understanding of the compositions and the Paragraph Writing students of Sanata Dharma University replied. Reading the responses of the Reading II students gave the Paragraph Writing students wider opportunities to analyze the paragraphs in terms of topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentences and minimum requirements as important elements of writing. The steps conducted in this research are described on the picture below:
**FIRST STEP:**
The lecturers gave the detail instructions of what they were going to do such as course objectives, course outlines, and topics.

- The letters were checked by the lecturers in order to make sure the students followed the instructions.
- The responses were also checked by the lecturers in order to make sure the students followed the instructions.
- The letters were checked by the lecturers to see the progress of the scaffold process; whether the students with higher ability level assisted those with lower ability level.
- The letters were checked by the lecturers to see the progress.
- The lecturer gave some feedback for the issues in scaffolding process.
- The students discussed their feelings of having distant scaffolding attempts.

All participants met in person after sending the letters back and forth.

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The Paragraph Writing Students sent the First e-mails

• The e-mails were checked by the lecturers in order to make sure the students still followed the instructions.

The Reading II Students sent the Responses of the First e-mails.

• The responses were also checked by the lecturers in order to make sure the students still followed the instructions.

The Paragraph Writing Students sent the Second e-mails, as the responses of the Reading II Students' Replies.

• The lecturer gave some feedback for the issues in scaffolding process

The Reading II Students sent the Second Responses to the second e-mails.

• The letters were checked by the lecturers to see the progress

The Paragraph Writing Students sent the Third e-mails, as the responses of the Reading II Students' Replies.

• Feedback and Evaluation

The Reading II Students sent the Third Responses to the Third e-mails.

• Interview and Questionnaire Part Two

The Paragraph Writing Students sent the Second “Facebook” Inbox.

• The “Facebook” Inboxes were no longer checked by the lecturers, assuming the students already built the better knowledge of meaningful composition.

The Reading II Students sent the Responses of the First “Facebook” Inbox.

• The “Facebook” responses were no longer checked by the lecturers, assuming the students already built the better knowledge of meaningful composition.

The Paragraph Writing Students sent the Second “Facebook” Inbox, as the responses of the Reading II Students’ Replies.

• Interview and Questionnaire Part Two

The Reading II Students sent the Second Responses to the second “Facebook” Inbox.

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The steps in this research show that the language tutors or the lecturers only act as facilitators. They gave the instructions at the beginning of the steps. This is done to avoid misunderstanding in the process of scaffolding strategy and the learners knew what to do in every step of the strategy. The researchers prepared the research instruments and made the research timetable before implementing this strategy. In the first meeting, both researchers informed their students about the research and how they were going to participate. After introducing students to the topic of what a good paragraph is, the Paragraph Writing lecturer of ELESP asked the students to write a paragraph about “Best Friend”. The focus was on how to develop a good paragraph with a good topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. The paragraph was expected to be a good passage model for UNRIYO students. Afterwards, the students consulted the writing to the lecturer and, after revising it, they rewrote the paragraph and submitted to the lecturer. The Paragraph Writing lecturer gave the letters to the UNRIYO lecturer to be distributed to her students.

After reading the letters from the ELESP students, UNRIYO students wrote back to the ELESP students. They wrote about the same topic. The focus was on providing ELESP students with good examples of paragraphs to be analyzed in terms of idea organization and minimum requirements. After the first topic, UNRIYO students visited the ELESP students. They were given great chance to have conversation and to know each other better. Besides, they exchanged their email address for the next activity designed for this research. The next step was the same as the previous one. However, the media was through email. The ELESP students sent an email first and the topic was describing one of the traditional markets that they visited. The researchers, then, collected all of the letters and emails.

In order to answer the second question, which is related to the significance of scaffolding strategy among students with different learning situations, the researchers used open-ended questionnaires and follow-up interviews. As for Paragraph Writing students, the result showed that there were two significant influences resulted from the reading models provided by Respati University. First, the reading models served as good sample paragraphs to be analyzed. Based on the questionnaires, it was found that some paragraphs had good paragraph structures with a good topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a good concluding sentence. From these kinds of models, students really learned how to develop the controlling idea into good supporting sentences and how each supporting sentence is connected to the next supporting sentence. However, not all paragraphs were well developed. Some of them did not have a clear and specific topic sentence. As a result, the supporting sentences were not constructed and arranged clearly. Another case was that some others did not even have a concluding sentence. The ability to analyze the paragraphs written by the Respati students helped the ELESP students produce good paragraphs of their own. The second significance was on the ELESP students’ awareness of minimum requirements, such as agreements, verb group, tenses, punctuation, and spelling. The reading models written by the Respati students provide both correct and incorrect models of minimum requirements. Given these kinds of exposures, students became more aware of what is correct and wrong. They, therefore, became more sensitive and careful toward mistakes related to minimum requirements.

The UNRIYO students stated that the letters from the ELESP students improved their vocabulary size, gave them meaningful information, and made them aware of the language use and the context of the reading passages. The UNRIYO students also increased their reading comprehension by being able to respond to the paragraph writing students’ letters and their language awareness by trying not to make mistakes when they
responded. They sometimes corrected the grammar mistakes of their pen pals since they expressed that some sentences made them confused and they got the feedback from the ELESP students. The scaffolding strategy in this process had been implemented well under the lecturers’ supervision, and the next activities would be without supervision and the learners would have their independent learning.

Conclusion
Like any other learning strategies, there are challenges and benefits to educational scaffolding. The benefits of implementing scaffolding in this research are that this strategy gave learners more opportunities to stimulate the use of their prior knowledge through particular activities and let them conduct their cooperative learning by themselves with their peers. The role of the lecturers faded away at the end of the learning process so that the learners could learn independently. However, there are some limitations of this study that have implications for future researches in the same field. First of all, students’ active participation is really needed in order to complete all steps required. Some students did not attend the class several times and, therefore, they did not write letters to be sent to the students of the corresponding university. As a result, exchanging peers are unavoidable. The second limitation is due to the lecturers’ lack of time in assisting each student to check the writing product before it was sent to the other students from the other university.

References