

Exploring Strategies in Scaffolding Instruction in Senior High School English Reading Teaching: From Constructivism Perspective

Lianyi Qin

School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing
401331, China

Abstract

Traditional English reading teaching in senior high school is dominated by teachers' "teaching" and neglects the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability, which leads to the low quality of reading teaching. So it is necessary to adopt effective strategies to solve this problem. It is found that scaffolding instruction based on constructivism provides a good idea to solve the problem of teaching interaction. It is not only helpful to give play to students' subjective initiative, help them learn in the cultural context, but also reduce the burden of teaching and improve the quality of teaching. In the practice of English reading teaching in senior high school, teachers can adopt the following five progressive strategies to implement scaffolding instruction: providing reading scaffolding, entering reading situation, independent exploration, cooperative learning, and effect evaluation.

Keywords

Scaffolding instruction; Senior high school; Reading teaching; Teaching strategies.

1. Introduction

A general introduction would be present in this part, which contains the background, purpose, significance and the overall structure of the study.

1.1. Background

As a guide and standard of English, the National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2020: 2-6) (Edition, 2017) clearly points out that senior high school English courses have an essential function of educating students. The English curriculum should take into account the cognitive characteristics of senior high school students, develop their comprehensive language skills and autonomous learning ability. It can be seen that the development of students' independent learning skills is receiving increasing attention. The importance of reading teaching as a major way to help students strengthen their language application ability and independent learning ability is evident.

Due to the influence of traditional teaching mode, the current English reading teaching in senior high school is ineffective, the problems mainly in the following aspects: Firstly, the traditional teaching of English reading in senior high school is dominated by teachers' teaching and neglects the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability (Yan Xianfeng, 2018: 87-89); Secondly, classes are not very interesting and the teaching neglects the cultivation of students' emotional interest and comprehension ability (He Chenchen, Wang Songzhen, 2021: 125-128); Finally, the setting of teaching objectives and the arrangement of teaching contents can not fully take into account students' English foundation, which is not conducive to the deep development of students' thinking (Han Huiqing, 2019: 146-148). Therefore, it is necessary to change the

traditional reading teaching mode and move towards the goal of improving students' comprehensive quality.

1.2. Purpose and Significance

With the remarkable development of teaching theory, scaffolding instruction as a new teaching model emerged under the influence of constructivism. It positions students as the center of teaching and emphasizes that teachers should pay attention to students' zone of proximal development and build flexible scaffolding to help students exceed their existing developmental state level and gradually reach their potential development level. Combining it with English reading teaching in senior high school not only conforms to the requirements of educational autonomy and efficient teaching, but also provides a new idea for the reform of reading teaching.

In view of this, this study is try to explore the specific application strategies of scaffolding instruction with the help of the relevant theories of constructivism in systemic functional linguistics. It is expected to enrich and develop the research on the strategies of scaffolding instruction in senior high school reading teaching, and provide some practical references for senior high school English teachers' reading teaching.

1.3. Layout

The paper is composed of five parts. The introduction part generally illustrates the background, purpose and significance, and the overall structure of the study. The literature review can be divided into two sections. Firstly, the definition of scaffolding instruction are presented. And then the previous studies on scaffolding instruction in English reading teaching are reviewed. The theoretical basis illustrates the two branches of constructivism: cognitive and social . The next part is to provide some advice for English reading teaching in senior high school. The last part is the conclusion, which presents the significant, the limitation and research expectation for further research.

2. Literature Review

Scaffolding Instruction originated from abroad and was put forward by constructivism, which is in line with the concept of students' subjectivity advocated by education.

2.1. Scaffolding Instruction

The term scaffolding firstly appeared in construction industry in 1300, referring to poles and boards that are joined together to make a structure for workers to stand on when they are working high up on the outside wall of a building (longman contemporary English-Chinese dictionary, 1988: 1266). The concept of scaffolding instruction was first proposed in 1976 by Bruner and Wood (1976: 90), who used the term scaffolding in the construction industry as a metaphor for a framework that aids, supports, and guides students in constructing meaning and solving problems. After continuous research and application, scaffolding instruction was widely used in foreign language teaching in the 1990s. Scholars differ on the definition of scaffolding instruction, but in connotation they all emphasize that it is a process to guide and facilitate learners to higher levels of development. Some scholars view scaffolding instruction as providing students with temporary and adaptive support that enables them to complete tasks they would not otherwise be able to do (Pol, et al., 2010: 271-293). Rosenshine et al. (1990: 59-73) define scaffolding instruction as the process by which teachers or more capable peers provide support to help students solve problems that they can not solve alone.

The current definition, which is widely accepted by academics, comes from the European Community's Distance Education and Training Project (DGX III): Scaffolding instruction is a conceptual framework provided for learners to construct an understanding of knowledge. The

concepts in this framework are needed to develop learner's further understanding of the problem. Therefore, teachers need to break down complex learning tasks in advance before conducting instructional activities to facilitate learners' progressively deeper understanding of knowledge (Liu Jie, 2010: 66-70). In short, scaffolding instruction is a kind of teaching mode that guides learners to construct knowledge actively by providing scaffolding.

2.2. Researches on the Scaffolding Instruction

2.2.1. Researches on the scaffolding instruction abroad

The study of scaffolding instruction in foreign countries originated from 1976, which started from the study on children's language development. Relevant studies have shown that scaffolding instruction can promote children's cognitive development and learning ability, which also confirms that scaffolding instruction promotes the communication of language form and meaning (Bruner & Wood, 1976:89-100; Beishuzen, 2010: 271-293). Clark and Graves (2004: 570-580) found that the scaffolding set up by teachers and the help from peers in collaborative learning can improve students' reading skills, making them easier to construct knowledge. Gibbons et al. (2002: 103-104) proposed several types of scaffolding and explained how teachers should properly apply them in foreign language learning to enhance learners' learning ability. In addition, Hadwin et al. (2005: 413-450) researched college students from the perspective of social and cultural theory. The research results proved that scaffolding instruction was conducive to the development of independent learning habits. With the weakness of the scaffolding, students' self-learning habits can be gradually cultivated.

The application of scaffolding instruction has been well received in foreign teaching practice. Scholars have tried to apply this model to the teaching practice of different disciplines and have achieved fruitful research results. These research results also provided valuable experience for the development of scaffolding instruction research in China.

2.2.2. Researches on the scaffolding instruction at home

With the expansion of the influence of constructivism research, scaffolding instruction in the field of foreign education increasingly mature, domestic scholars have begun to pay attention to and put into the systematic study of this model. By combing and analyzing the domestic literature, the relevant literature can be divided into three research directions: ontology research, applied research and empirical research.

From the perspective of ontology research, many domestic scholars have made achievements in this field. For example, Professor He Kekang (He kekang, 1997: 74-81) is the pioneer in scaffolding instruction research in China. By sorting out foreign research on scaffolding instruction, he summarized five aspects of scaffolding instruction, which has made great contributions to the introduction of scaffolding instruction into China's actual classroom teaching. In addition, Cui Ying (Cui Ying, 2016: 45-48) interprets scaffolding instruction as a specific teaching model from the theoretical level, explaining the advantages of scaffolding instruction and the specific work of teachers in carrying out this kind of teaching activities.

From the perspective of applied research, as put by Li Danmei and Fu Yao (Li Danmei, Fu Yao, 2017: 64-67) that the application of scaffolding instruction can break the phenomenon of "one voice" of the teacher in the English classroom and fully improve the efficiency and quality of students' writing. Wu Dongmei and Wu Jingjing (Wu Dongmei, Wu Jingjing, 2015: 74-82) explored the application of various scaffolding strategies for eliciting learning motivation by combining the relevant theories of systemic functional linguistics.

From the perspective of empirical research, the current domestic empirical researches on scaffolding instruction are mostly discussed the feasibility of scaffolding instruction in teaching. For example, based on constructivism, Lu Jing and Yang Min (Lu Jing, Yang Min, 2020: 45-46) analyzed the effectiveness of scaffolding instruction in college English reading teaching with a

comparative experiment. In addition, some scholars tried to explore whether scaffolding instruction is universal for classroom teaching based on the analysis of the connotation, characteristics, theoretical basis and obstacles in application of scaffolding instruction (Liu Jie, 2010: 66-67; Yan Xianfeng, 2018: 87-89).

2.2.3. Summary

As can be seen from the above studies, many scholars from abroad and China have done a great deal of research. They have conducted experiments on the effectiveness of scaffolding instruction in many fields, which have provided a lot of theoretical support and guidance for the current research. However, there are still some shortcomings in the current domestic research on the scaffolding instruction in English teaching, which are mainly reflected in the following two aspects: First, the literature at hand show that scholars paid more attention to scaffolding instruction in colleges English teaching than in high schools; Second, most scholars put forward strategies of scaffolding instruction in senior high school English reading teaching from a macro level, lacking practicality and relevance.

Therefore, this study will focus on the specific application strategies of scaffolding instruction in senior high school English teaching.

3. Two Theoretical Foundation

Scaffolding instruction as a teaching model, mainly based on the following two points of view: First, children enter any educational setting with prior knowledge that is the basis for children's interpretation and mastery of new content and methods; Second, children increasingly develop a sound understanding of various concepts with appropriate adult assistance. And these two views are mainly derived from two branches of constructivism: cognitive and social.

3.1. Cognitive Constructivism

In the cognitive constructivism, emphasis is placed on the importance of learners constructing their own representation of reality to make their own, suggesting a more active role for students in their own learning than is typical in many classrooms (Slavin, 2003: 257-258). Such claims are rooted in Piaget's seminal work in the middle of the twentieth century.

Piaget is the earliest proponent of cognitive constructivism. In his view, children's cognitive structures are prearranged and developed gradually with the age (Brown, 2005: 12-13). From the perspective of the development mechanism of cognitive structure, Piaget emphasizes the initiative of the subject in the process of cognitive development, that is, the process of cognitive development is an active construction process of self-selection and self-adjustment of the subject, and the equilibrium is the psychological driving force of active construction. He believes that the development of cognitive structure is the result of children's active exploration and manipulation of the environment. Therefore, for teaching, establishing a wise environment, trying to stimulate students' interest, providing them with challenging materials and giving full play to their subjectivity is the true meaning of teaching (Wu Dongmei, Wu Jingjing, 2015: 74-82).

Piaget's cognitive constructivism emphasizes active discovery rather than passive acceptance, intrinsic motivation and experience-based learning situations, and creative and critical thinking, all of which are involved in scaffolding instruction, for example: (1) active discovery, which means that the teacher gives the responsibility for the behavior to students after the demonstration, the students thereafter engage in active discovery; (2) intrinsic motivation and experience-based learning situations refer to teachers providing scaffolding that enables students to develop and nurture their motivation; (3) creative and critical thinking means that students rely on themselves to form ideas and guidance after instructional scaffolding has been withdrawn.

3.2. Social Constructivism

Vygotsky developed another branch of constructivism—social constructivism, with special emphasis on the role of social interaction. According to Vygotsky, “social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development, and social interaction (of which scaffolding is an example) is essential to the child’s development as a learner (Brown, 2005: 12-13).” In his view, learning is strongly influenced by social interaction, which takes place in meaningful situations. Children’s social interactions with more knowledgeable or competent people and their environment have a significant impact on children’s thinking and interpretation of the environment (Wu Dongmei, Wu Jingjing, 2015: 74-82).

One of the most popular concepts advanced by Vygotsky was the notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) in every learner: the distance between learner’s existing development state and their potential development. Put it another way, zone of proximal development describes that a learner has not yet learned but is capable of learning with appropriate stimuli (Slavin, 2003: 44). Vygotsky divided learning tasks into three categories: one is the task that students can complete independently; one is the task that students can not complete even with the help of others; one is the task that students can complete with the help of others. The first type of learning task is not challenging, so it is easy for children to lose interest in learning. The second type of learning task is too difficult to make children easily frustrated in learning. Only the third type of learning task, that is, learning in zone of proximal development, children’s cognitive development is the most rapid. Therefore, Vygotsky believes that adult instructors must provide sufficient guidance for the child’s development (Byrnes, 2011: 37). And this is the core theory that allows scaffolding instruction to exist.

4. Specific Application Strategies of Scaffolding Instruction in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

The proposal of the scaffolding instruction in senior high school English reading teaching is not only the need of traditional English reading instruction, but also the inevitable result of the rise of students’ subjectivity in modern society. At present, the academic research in this field mainly focuses on teaching model, classroom design and the application of teaching cases. There are few researches on the strategies of scaffolding instruction in senior high school English reading teaching, and the only research on the strategies is also lack of a certain degree of systematization. In view of this, this study attempts to put forward a specific “five-step” progressive teaching strategy on the basis of constructivism.

4.1. Providing Reading Scaffolding

Providing reading scaffolding means that the teacher should identify students’ zone of proximal development and construct conceptual scaffolding. In the practice of senior high school English reading teaching, the primary task for teachers to use scaffolding instruction is to determine the distance between the current teaching objectives and the students’ existing development level. That is to determine the student’s zone of proximal development, and then on this basis to build scaffolding (Yan Xianfeng, 2018: 87-89). The premise of building an effective scaffolding is that the teacher has a full understanding of students’ learning situation and is familiar with the knowledge of students. In this way, the teacher can flexibly grasp the relationship between the zone of proximal development and the degree of scaffolding assistance, and exert the effectiveness of the scaffolding instruction (Chen Qi, Liu Rude, 2010: 187).

There are many ways to build reading scaffolding. For example, teachers can build scaffolding by asking questions. In addition, teachers can also build scaffolding by giving examples. For example, the teacher can lead the students to review similar works in the past before teaching

the new discourse. In the process of explaining examples, the teacher should try to arouse the students' enthusiasm of thinking so as to deepen their understanding of the discourse. Of course, there are many other ways to build scaffolding, teachers can provide scaffolding in ways that they are good at or familiar with.

4.2. Entering Reading Situation

Entering reading situation means that the teacher should create a vivid situation according to the pivot point link. Teaching situation is an important element of teaching activities, which is a focus worthy of every teacher's attention. Entering the situation is like building a bridge between what students know and what they don't know. Creating the right situation can effectively improve students' learning efficiency. According to constructivism, knowledge is subjectively constructed, and students' learning process is the process of constructing knowledge in specific cultural situations. Therefore, in the process of scaffolding instruction of English reading, teachers should pay full attention to the value of the reading situation. Specifically, the teacher needs to create situations in advance based on the background knowledge of the discourse or the object of the discourse.

After the scaffolding is built, teachers can use suspense, experimental operation, multimedia technology and other ways to grasp the creation of a activity situation and introduce students to a certain problem situation (a pivot point in the conceptual framework) based on the existing conditions and students' receptivity (Lin Yuewu, Hu Yong, 2010: 108-109). For example, when students are learning English independent nominative structures, the teacher can first give students a sentence: He entered the classroom, his nose was red. Then ask the students: Please judge the sentence right or wrong, and give the reason (in fact, this sentence is not in accordance with the rules of grammar). After the students' judgment is completed, the teacher told the students that they only needed to change one place to make the sentence conform to the grammar rules. After the students thought and discussed, the teacher announced the correct answer: remove the word "was" and change it to "He entered the classroom, his nose red." And tell the students that this is a typical example of the new grammatical knowledge "independent nominative structure," thus leading the students into the problem situation.

4.3. Independent Exploration

Independent exploration means that the teacher should train students' autonomous reading ability. How to guide students to read independently is an important problem for the teacher after providing the scaffolding, setting up and leading students into the reading situation. This form of reading fully embodies the teaching principle of "student-centered and giving full play to their subjective initiative". Before students begin to read independently, the teacher needs to set the exploration objectives and prepare the appropriate reading instructions for students, and then allow them to do independent reading analysis. In the process of self-directed reading, the teacher can set relevant reading tasks according to the situation of the students, for example, the teacher can ask the students to answer some detailed comprehension questions.

In addition, the teacher needs to pay attention to the following two aspects when guiding students to carry out independent reading activities: (1) Generally speaking, students should not spend too much time on independent reading. (2) Before students engage in independent reading, the teacher should provide tips on issues that need to be paid attention to during the reading process so as to ensure students' reading efficiency.

4.4. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning means that teachers should diversify students' thinking through cooperative learning. Constructivism emphasizes the active constructive, socially interactive, and contextual nature of learning, and values the "peer influence approach" in education. After independent exploration, teachers can organize groups for cooperative learning. Group

cooperative learning refers to a class of students into a number of groups, students work in groups to systematically use the various enabling elements of the teaching activities to engage in collaborative inquiry-based learning about a topic. The teacher organizes students to carry out this form of learning is helpful for students to share the crystallization of collective wisdom, and on this basis to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of what they have learned, and ultimately to complete the construction of the meaning of the knowledge (Lin Yuewu, Hu Yong, 2010: 108-109).

Group cooperative learning is generally divided into two levels. The first level is communication and cooperation among members within the group. The second level is communication and discussion among groups. For example, the teacher assigns a discussion situation, and then divides the students into several groups, let them have a free discussion in groups (the teacher controls the discussion time). After the discussion, each group is required to send group member to the platform to present the results of the group discussion. The groups comment each other and complement each other. The purpose of cooperative group learning in scaffolding reading instruction is to help students better construct knowledge through cooperative learning and thus achieve an overall improvement in their reading skills.

4.5. Effect Evaluation

Effect evaluation means that teachers should establish multiple evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of reading teaching. Teaching evaluation is not only the end of a teaching activity, but also the starting point of a new one (Yan Xianfeng, 2018: 87-89). The traditional evaluation of senior high school English reading teaching focuses on the result and ignores the process, and focuses on the score and ignores the improvement of reading ability. However, the evaluation concept of scaffolding instruction is different from the traditional one. The former focuses on the process and ability improvement, while the latter focuses on scores and results. Based on this difference, this study designs an evaluation system based on scaffolding instruction to test the effect of reading teaching. The new evaluation system includes two categories. One is students' evaluation, including personal self-evaluation and mutual evaluation among students. The other is teachers' evaluation, which mainly involves students' performance in the process of group cooperation, students' independent learning ability, reading ability and whether they are helpful to others.

The evaluation of students' reading effectiveness can not only tests students' learning achievement, but also reflects the current situation of students reading, allowing teachers to make timely adjustments to their teaching. Both categories of teaching evaluation can facilitate students' self-reflection and ultimately improve students' English reading ability.

5. Conclusion

The most important feature of scaffolding instruction is its practicality. It can provide a new way of thinking for teachers to find suitable and effective scaffolding for different students. It is found that the teaching quality can be improved effectively by using scaffolding instruction reasonably in classroom teaching activities. Therefore, based on the previous research results of scaffolding instruction, this study starts from the current situation of English reading teaching in senior high school, and try to explore the specific application strategies of scaffolding instruction in senior high school English reading teaching with the help of the relevant theories of constructivism in systemic functional linguistics. In the hope of providing some practical references for English teachers.

Since the premise of effective implementation of scaffolding instruction is that teachers have some knowledge of students' zone of proximal development, the measurement of it is still a puzzle in the research field. Therefore, the appropriateness of the application of scaffolding

instruction strategies based on zone of proximal development is still necessary for further study. It is expected that future studies will further explore the relevant issues, improve and enrich the research of scaffolding instruction, which will be helpful to the current English teaching in China.

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