

An Exploration of Socio-cognitive Aspects in Reading Course book for 10th Graders: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract: Socio-cognitive theory claims that scaffolding serves as a teaching tool in the cognitive development of the students. Applied in a reading course book, scaffolding might take different types intended to scaffold students' reading competence. However, it is hard to find a reading course book applying appropriate types of scaffolding enhancing students' comprehension. This study, therefore, aimed at analyzing the types of scaffolding applied in a selected reading course book. To investigate the issue, document analysis, guided written reflection, and in-depth interview were used as data collection techniques, in this explorative case study. An interactive model technique was used to analyze the data. Seven English teachers of Islamic Senior High School in Indonesia took part in this study. The research findings showed that the reading course book has applied scaffolding types in its components, namely objective, topic, instructional prompts, practical consideration, vocabulary, text and context, task and activity, grammar, and material presentation. They were classified as means and goals scaffoldings. However, the application of those types was not as they supposed to be. The teachers and researchers, therefore, are recommended to develop a reading course book deploying scaffolding types as an artifact mediating language learning.

Keyword: *exploration, reading comprehension, course book, socio-cognitive, teachers' perspective*

Introduction

Scaffolding which refers to a practical concept within socio-cognitive theory has been used as a teaching tool in the students' cognitive development (Amerian & Mehri, 2014). When the scaffolding is used correctly, students are encouraged to develop their own motivation, creativity, and resourcefulness (Vacca & Levitt, 2008). This can be compared to building construction. When a new building is constructed, the builder uses scaffolding on the outside of the building to give the builder access to the emerging structure as it is being created. When the building is able to support itself, the builder removes the scaffolding. Like the builder, the course book must be provided with essential but temporary support. This support will help students develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As students develop those abilities, the support is not needed anymore. What they need then is only extending and developing the new tasks, understandings, and concepts independently (Vacca & Levitt, 2008).

In educational practice, scaffolding has multi-layered meanings. In this research, scaffolding refers to a teaching tool that serves as a support to develop students' reading competence (Amerian & Mehri, 2014). The teaching tool in this study is a reading course book that constitutes an artifact as mediation of teaching interaction in the classroom. This artifact contains some essential components providing students with language exposures. It functions as an inspiring teaching guide that may assist the teachers to awaken their brilliant ideas in case they miss their genuine teaching concepts. When they face such situation, the course book may open their mind by providing some routes map to follow in conducting the teaching and learning in the classrooms (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016).

Applied in the reading course book, scaffolding might take different types intended to scaffold students' comprehension. The most important thing is that the scaffolding provides support to enhance students' reading competence. This study, therefore, describes the types of scaffolding applied in the selected reading course book.

Method

The research applied a case study exploring the deployment of socio-cognitive aspects in a selected material for 10th graders of Islamic Senior High Schools. The selected material for the analysis was a reading course book, entitled *Pathways to English* (PTE hereafter). The book was in fact a compulsory book designed for students of Senior High School or Vocational High School Grade X. It is presented in integrated skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing because there is no reading subject for Senior High School. The evaluation, therefore, will be focused on the specific part of reading without regardless of the general part. PTE was designed based on the revised 2013 curriculum and published in 2016. It was published by Private Publisher. The authors claim that the book is aimed at providing a framework for teaching and learning English for students and help them develop their discourse competence. The socio-cognitive aspects took different types of scaffolding, namely objective, topic, instructional prompts, practical consideration, vocabulary, text and context, task and activity, grammar, and material presentation.

The research was carried out at Islamic Senior High Schools Central Java, Indonesia. Six female and one male experienced English teacher took part in this study. They were selected from seven regencies and representing the leaders of English Teachers Association (ETA) Central Java, Indonesia. They have been experienced in teaching English for more than 20 years. They also have joined workshop on developing teaching materials.

The source of the data included the artifacts and the informants. The artifacts referred to PTE and the informants were the seven experienced English teachers. The techniques of collecting data used in this study were document analysis, guided written reflection and in-depth interview. The technique of analyzing data was an interactive model technique (Garner & Scott, 2013).

The procedure of collecting data was firstly started by analyzing PTE course book in terms of socio-cognitive aspects. The researcher referred to the instruments for analyzing reading course book in socio-cognitive perspectives which was adapted from reading course book aspects by Miekley (2005), and Widodo (2015). The instruments have also been validated by the experts. Next, the participants were interviewed individually based on the interview protocol which also referred to the socio-cognitive aspects. The practice of document analysis and in-depth-interviews were aimed at identifying the types of scaffolding applied in PTE course book. Finally, the researchers re-interviewed the participants to make sure the key information to avoid the inaccuracy of data.

To guarantee the validity of the collected data, data source and method, triangulation was implemented to make the final results more reliable. An interactive model technique was applied to analyze the collected data. The component of data analysis of the interactive model includes four stages, namely: collecting the data, reducing the data, displaying the data, and drawing conclusion (Garner & Scott, 2013).

Results and Discussion

The research finding and discussion were based on the research objective. It was to explore the deployment of scaffolding types in PTE course book.

Results

The result of document analysis, guided written reflection and in-depth interview showed that PTE applied the concept of scaffolding in the book component, namely: objective, topic, instructional prompts, practical consideration, vocabulary, text and contexts, task or activity, grammar, and material presentation. The deployment of each scaffolding type is explained in the following section.

First, PTE deploys objective scaffolding. It is to develop discourse competence through the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Every chapter does not include the aims (Competence Standard) relevant to the curriculum. The indicators or specific objectives are not well formulated.

Second, the topic scaffolding is presented in each chapter and developed based on standard of competence representing the title of the chapter. The variety of topics, however, does not meet with the students' need at Islamic Senior High School, at grade X. The topic variation is general and addressed for all levels of secondary school students, namely Senior High School, Islamic Senior High School, and Vocational High Schools.

Third, PTE applies instructional prompts scaffolding. Grammatically the instruction is formulated clearly but semantically the formulation is not completely clear. For example, it is stated on page 4 "*answer these questions*", it is understood but it does not guide and give prompts how to do the task. They do not give explanation, example, hints, or certain clues to answer the questions. Irrelevance instructions are also found.

Fourth, practical consideration scaffolding appears in the illustrations, pictures, tables, and the fonts used to convey the message. The fonts used to convey the language are clear. However, there are some pictures irrelevant to the students' lives. They include (1) the picture on page 53 showing the girl who does not wear polite dress, and (2) the picture on page 56 showing the couple who are kissing each other and do not teach good norms for Islamic Senior High School students.

Fifth, PTE presents limited vocabulary. It does not provide vocabulary to support text comprehension in the pre-reading activity. Three chapters present vocabulary activities before texts, however, they do not go along with the texts that will be discussed in the chapters. For example, chapter 1 page 14 presents the vocabulary activity about family members but the text that is discussed (page 24) is different. The vocabulary development is discussed only in chapter 4 and 8 in the form of matching activity.

Sixth, the scaffolding is applied in the component of text and context. The ten chapters of course book present text types (genres) relevant to the 2013 curriculum. The variety includes letters, announcements, congratulation card, recount, description, narrative, and song. The text and context are general and there is no relevant text and context of Islamic Senior High School students. There is no modeling text to provide students with reading strategy in comprehending texts. There are three chapters presenting model texts accompanied with the generic structures, namely chapter 5 entitled *Borobudur Temple*, chapter 8 entitled *World War 1*, and chapter 9 entitled *Batu Badaun*. The model presents a framework that allows students to learn the text structure by filling the gaps. This model, however, does not teach how to understand the text but to test text understanding.

Seventh, task or activity scaffoldings are not well applied. It does not present the tasks or activities for activating students' background knowledge and modeling reading strategy to understand texts. PTE presents tasks or activities to develop reading comprehension through comprehension questions in the form of essay. The questions are qualitatively and quantitatively inadequate. Most of questions show low order thinking skills (LOTS), for examples *Who wrote the letter?*, *To whom is the letter?*, and *When did the writer write the letter?*. They only ask about the facts or ideas that can be found in the text easily. The task or activities are not applied clearly in three general activities, namely pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. The authors may plan to have those scaffoldings but, in fact, the activities are used to test comprehension based on the text. The form of task and activity are limited and less interesting, since there are only essay and matching form. PTE does not present tasks and activities which are addressed to develop students' interaction with peers in pairs, small group, and big group.

Eighth, grammar scaffolding is not consistently presented in PTE. Seven of ten chapters discuss some grammar rules related to texts and there is a redundancy in the discussion of *to be and to have* in chapter 1 and chapter 5. Chapter 5 also discusses too many grammar materials, namely *to be and to have, relating verbs, opinion and fact, adjective, compound adjectives, degrees of comparison, preposition, and adverbial phrases*. On the other hand, chapter 3, 4, and 10 do not discuss grammar rules at all. It shows the inconsistency of grammar discussion.

Finally, PTE applies material presentation scaffolding both in the level of steps and the tasks. PTE applies some procedures or steps guiding the activity, but they are not consistently included. The steps of each chapter are also different.

Discussion

Based on the result of the research, it can be seen that scaffolding concepts within socio-cognitive theory are applied in nine components of course book, namely objective, topic, instructional prompt, practical consideration, vocabulary, text and context, grammar, task or activity, and material presentation. Each component plays its own role to achieve the goals by using specific means. These components, however, form a unity as an artifact (a reading course book) which scaffolds students to develop their reading competence. The final aim of scaffolding is that the students have the ability to do the tasks or similar types of tasks, on their own (Hartman, 2000). Amerian & Mehri (2014) also connects that the aim of scaffolding is to facilitate the students to become independent readers.

Many researchers and experts classify scaffolding into different classifications, since no consensus exists with respect to the classification of it. In this research, the types of scaffolding applied in the book components are classified into the scaffolding of tools or means for scaffolding (how is scaffolding taking place) and the goals or intentions (what is done by using scaffolding) of scaffolding (Amerian & Mehri, 2014). The distinction into means and intentions enables the students to look more precisely at interactions and results in more nuanced descriptions of teacher–student interactions mediated by an artifact (reading course book) in the classroom (Lajoie, 2005; Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015; Sam, 2011).

In relation to the distinction of the scaffolding types applied in the reading course book, the nine types of scaffolding are classified into means and goals. The researcher may take different scaffoldings in the reading course book as real scaffoldings to help students comprehend texts in reading class.

Conclusion

Socio-cognitive reading course book is an artifact which is inspired by socio-cognitive aspects. The aspects include objective, topic, instructional prompts, practical consideration, vocabulary, text and context, grammar, task or activities, and material presentation. They play important role as a bridge or mediation to develop students' reading competence. The bridge is called scaffolding which guides and helps students to develop their reading competence easily. Applied in a reading course book, it is classified into and goal scaffolding. In fact, the reading course book for 10th grader provides insufficient scaffolding for students. The students find difficulty in understanding the text. The teachers and researchers, therefore, are recommended to develop reading course book deploying socio-cognitive aspects to enhance students' reading competence.

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