

Enhancing L2 Writing through Scaffolding Concept: A Study With Reference To Rural Students in a Government College of Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu



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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to highlight the importance of Scaffolding concept in L2 writing. As writing requires complex psycholinguistic skills it is necessary study writing to come out with new insights. A number of studies have highlighted the importance of learner scaffolding. This paper tries to answer the following research question. How does scaffolding concept in L2 writing, enhance the writing ability of the target group of learners? It touches upon a number of factors that affect L2 writing. Besides, the paper makes use of scaffolding framework with regard to four major components namely, content knowledge, context knowledge, process knowledge and linguistic knowledge and finally it reveals the indispensable role of scaffolding framework in L2 writing context.

KEYWORDS: Scaffolding concept, psycholinguistic skill, content knowledge, context knowledge, process knowledge, linguistic knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching Second language writing differs from teaching other language skills (Joy Reid 2001) It is also one of the challenging tasks to be taught by the teachers. This paper attempts to deal with teaching L2 writing through scaffolding concept. At this point it is necessary to define scaffolding. Let us consider the following definition

Scaffolding is nothing but providing a clear cut framework, or a structured learning environment to the learner. The learning item to be learnt or practised in the classroom is given to the students with a particular design, using the concept of scaffolding. Hence the learning becomes easy for the learner. The item to be learnt is learnt in a series of logical steps so that the learner proceeds to complete the task without task difficulty, comprehending the learner input (meant for the learner to learn) with ease.

According to Cazden (1983) there are two common types of learner scaffolding as described below

1. Vertical scaffolding (i.e. the adult extending the child's language by asking further questions.)
2. Sequential scaffolding (i.e. found in the games played with children at meals, bath times, and so on.) Whereas, According to Applebee, (1986) there are certain criteria for effective scaffolding.

They are as follows

Student ownership of the learning event

Appropriateness of the instructional task

A structured learning environment.

Shared responsibility

Transfer of control

However, in all scaffolding based instructional tasks, the common notion centres around 'making the learners to internalize routines of the item to be taught' in a series of steps, which not only makes use of the existing knowledge of the learner but also allows the learner to pick up a new item of learning which has not been learnt so far. Further, once the confidence and competence level develops on the part of the learner, scaffolding framework is sparingly used or not used at all.

This paper attempts to find out the significance of scaffolding concept used within the task framework inside the classroom in a structured learning environment.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study makes use of learner scaffolding as a primary concept. Though there are studies on L2 writing, this type of study (with scaffolding as a major concept) is not done, particularly with the rural students from government colleges in the

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District of Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. This study assists the learners with reference to content knowledge, context knowledge, linguistic knowledge and process knowledge. This has been made into a clear cut frame work of hints and flow charts, along with a topic of the student choice. Hence, the students who do not know to write coherently about a topic, do write effectively with the help of this scaffolding frame work.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

How does scaffolding concept in L2 writing, enhance the writing ability of the target group of learners?

4. PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants hail from one of the Governments colleges in the District of Thanjavur-5 South India. They study English as a second language and they are aged between 18 and 19. These students come from poor village backgrounds. Though they have studied English for about twelve years as a second language (from I standard to 12th standard) they are not too good at written communication. This is because they actually had memorization (learning by rote memory) practice in their school education, so they could pass in each class they studied as they could write answers (especially essay questions paragraph questions and short answer questions) based on their memory. Unfortunately the system also did not actually tested their skill in written communication. Hence, writing independently in the second language has always been a challenging and arduous task for them. With regard to their ability to write, these students may be considered as homogeneous.

5. METHODOLOGY

After having explained about the significance and the advantages of the study, a total number of 13 volunteers were chosen from a class. They were asked to write a foundation test (tests their fundamental knowledge in writing) This includes a free writing passage that has a topic sentence and certain hints about major and minor support sentences. It also includes a cloze passage. Based on the marks scored in the foundation test they were selected for coaching. Two students did not clear the test and the remaining 11 students were selected for the study and they were put in two different groups namely control group A and experiment group B.

These students were given coaching for one hour per day for about 12 days. One of them has discontinued and remaining 10 students kept attending the classes. In the coaching classes, they were given two different types of worksheets for each group. For the first group, the work sheets had essay questions on a variety of topics and for each topic. There were comprehension questions, hints of the main idea, topic sentence for each paragraph and so on were given. For the second group the work sheets contained scaffolding frame work, specifically made for the given topic. It had flow charts and assistance in terms of process, context, linguistic and context knowledge. The control group of students were given practice based on hints, (i.e. topic sentence, comprehension questions and so on) given in the worksheets. On the other hand the experimental group of students were given worksheets containing, scaffolding frame work specially designed for each topic, they chose to write. It also included scaffolding in terms of content knowledge, context knowledge, process knowledge and linguistic knowledge. At the end of the stipulated period of study, both the groups were asked to write an achievement test.

The test included a short essay writing in about 200 words on a open ended topic. The students needed to write an essay based on the types of assistance given along with the question paper. First type of assistance is for the control group of students as mentioned earlier. The second type of assistance (i.e. scaffolding with regard to context, content, linguistic and process knowledge along with useful phrases and cohesive devices and glossary. Descriptive statistics has been used to describe the data for this study. At the end of the course a feed back about the course was elicited from the participants and they were also interviewed to know about their opinion about the tasks given and their responses were noted.

Their scores indicated certain visible changes. In terms of their writing ability, the experimental group of students were far better than that of the control group of students. Their essay was good and each paragraph written were consistent and appropriate with regard to content knowledge, context knowledge, linguistic knowledge and process knowledge

6. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

The criteria for evaluation for this study as follows

Content knowledge, context knowledge, linguistic knowledge and process knowledge. (as referred to by Christopher Tribble 1996 about the range of knowledge requires for a specific writing task)

7. RESULTS

Control Group A

| Sl No. | Roll No. | Topic | Content knowledge 10 | Context knowledge 10 | Linguistic knowledge 10 | Organization or process knowledge 10 | Total Max: 40 |
|--------|----------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | 17PE1206 | Cricket | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 21 |
| 2 | 17PE1221 | The Internet | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 21 |
| 3 | 17PE1226 | Earthquakes | 6 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 22 |
| 4 | 17PE1233 | Tamil Movies | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 20 |
| 5 | 17PE1236 | Indian Politics | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 18 |

Experimental Group B

| Sl.No. | Roll No. | Topic | Content knowledge 10 | Context knowledge 10 | Linguistic knowledge 10 | Organization or process knowledge 10 | Total Max: 40 |
|--------|----------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | 17PE1209 | Cricket | 7 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 32 |
| 2 | 17PE1210 | The Internet | 8 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 34 |
| 3 | 17PE1223 | Earthquakes | 9 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 32 |
| 4 | 17PE1225 | Tamil Movies | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 35 |
| 5 | 17PE1227 | Indian Politics | 8 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 32 |

8. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

- Over all, there has been a significant difference between the groups. The experimental group (B) students have performed far better than that of the control group students
- It was obvious that the Worksheets with scaffolding frame work on content, context linguistic and process knowledge have helped them to write a better written assignment as it has improved their comprehension to a higher level
- Over all the essays of the experimental group of students were up to the mark in terms of coherence. Once again this has clearly shown that it was easy for the experimental group students to do mind mapping with a well framed plan as to write what, when and how and after what. This is the clear cut indication of the impact of scaffolding frame work
- The time they have taken for writing was lesser then that of the control group of students.
- A personal interview with the experimental group students revealed the fact that they would write down the topic easily based on the Scaffolding, which has not only saved their time but also helped them to write according to a plan which did not require a rough draft.
- Some participants have told that the 'language help' given in terms of words, phrases, & cohesive devices were quite useful.
- It is to be noted that both the groups were chosen based on their homogeneity but the performance the experimental group indicates the impact of scaffolding
- Some participants have told that the flow chart of the topic given has helped them to write with out a plan for the topic which in turn helped them to complete the task well ahead of time.
- A Structured learning environment is created with the help of scaffolding framework given for the experimental group of students
- The marks scored by the participants indicate the appropriateness of the instructional task given to them.

9. LIMITATIONS

- The study is Restricted with a few samples and only one college taken for the study
- Internalization of the scaffolding framework is un avoidable which might have lacked their original thinking on the topic

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- A guided writing practice like this may affect their independent flow of writing
- In a ideal set up, scaffolding has to be reduced or removed once their learning and confidence has reached to a considerable extent. But this study did not test it as the official time frame is completed

10. CONCLUSION

Over all it is obvious that the scaffolding frame work has facilitated the participants to a considerable extent to write in the second language efficiently Besides, this study has highlighted a number of factors that affected the ability of the participants to write in the target language such as mind mapping,(becomes easier for the participants as they view the scaffolding flow chart and write) time taken to complete task, coherence and logic of their writing in L2 and most importantly content , context , process and linguistic knowledge pertaining to the topic chosen by the learners to write.

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