

SCAFFOLDING IN ACTION: A MULTIPLE CASES STUDY IN SUMEDANG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract: Difficulties of teaching English in Indonesia has been analyzed by several researchers (Nurweni, 1997; Moedjito and Harumi, 2008). These issues have provoked some research to anchor several solutions for teachers to consider (Supriadi and Hoogenboom, 2004; Thalal, 2010). Scaffolding, is an issue that has been significantly discussed as one of the alternative solution proposed. Scaffolding leads to a good teaching (Hammond, 2001) and addresses to a chance to form an independent learner. This paper attempts to reveal the scaffolding concept perceived and believed by 4 junior high school teachers in Sumedang and how the concept is reflected in their teaching. Whether the concept help or hinder students' understanding will also be investigated. Scaffolding concept has been widely investigated and believed as appropriate tool mediation for children to learn English with particular difficulties hampered: culture, teachers' background, quantity and quality of teaching and similar causes (Vygotsky, 1962; Tudge, 1992; Stone, 1998; Kong, 2002; Donovan and Smolkin, 2005). This concept of scaffolding is considered in this research as a bridge to a better understanding of English materials given by the teachers. The results show that: (1) contingent pacing, intersubjectivity and handover are the three among seven aspects of scaffolding in action that were still hard to be framed in the teachings. Meanwhile help for the students, continuity, flow and ZPD concepts are the scaffolding concepts that were reflected by all teachers in their teaching with different quantities for each of them; (2) belief about how important scaffolding is influence the efforts teacher made in their teaching; (3) scaffolding concepts help students grasp the material given (4) scaffolding in the form of teacher's leading instruction (dialogue) help students the most.

Keywords: Scaffolding, contingent pacing, intersubjective, handover, ZPD concepts, continuity, flow, teacher's belief.

INTRODUCTION

Issues of teaching English in a cultural context as a case of Indonesia have been widely investigated by some researcher (Erlenawati, 2002; Bradford, 2007; Cahyono and Widiati, 2008). Same topics have so long been a concern to many researchers all over the world started from the influence of different cultures affect students' mastery of language (Li, 2004; Baker, 2003; Chen, 2006; Englebert, 2004; Nault, 2006; Yanpu, 2004; Darren, 2006 in Faridi, 2008) to the impact of different sociocultural background to different learning strategies and different results in language learning (Lengkanawati, 2004; Erlenawati, 2004; Astini, et. al, 2002 in Faridi, 2008). These issues reveal not only Indonesian students' difficulties in learning English but also teachers' difficulties in teaching English. The causing factors come from both the teacher and the students. The problems originated from students' characteristics in their learning, that they are often shy, silent and passive (Exely, 2005); unreflective (Pikkert and Foster, 1996); adopt

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memorization that they tend to adopt what teachers note down in the blackboard (Lengkanawati, 2004); motivated only by immediate needs (Bradford, 2007). The problems rooted from teacher are various. Socioeconomic factor, that teachers are among the underpaid profession in Indonesia (Jalal, et.al, 2009) so that they have to double shift their earnings by doing, not rarely, low status occupation. This kind of life cycle impact their quality of teachings (Supriadi and Hoogenboom, 2004) and even their attendance at school (Jalal et.al., 2009). English teachers in Indonesia also experienced 'malpractice' as it is in medical term, that they 'did not undertake sufficient educational degree (Firman and Tola, 2008). More than 60 percent of the total 2.78 million teachers did not hold undergraduate degree in education (Jalal et.al., 2009). This has becoming another crucial issue that can hamper English teaching and learning in Indonesia.

Specifically, some researchers pointed to the 'silence' of the students. Indonesian students tend to keep quiet during the lesson and less initiative. They speak only when they are asked to. In fact, they are able to understand the material and finish the task (Exely, 2005), yet they are too shy to speak up. An important aspect to effective scaffolding is that teacher should understand and develop the *timely* support. Teacher needs to plan and provide support at the point of need. No need to be excessive yet it can scaffold students in the knowledge and force them to say something. This strong point of scaffolding is relevant to the effort needed for the case.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some theories will shed light this study. First, the concept of scaffolding will be elaborated in terms of its discussion throughout the world along with the philosophy in it as a social-constructivist theory. Then teaching in the concept of scaffolding will be portrayed in terms of its distinctive features compared with regular (good) teaching, to solve the problems face by the teachers.

The Concept of Scaffolding

The term scaffolding was firstly introduced by Wood, Brunner, and Ross (1976) in their examination of parent-child talk in the early years (Hammond, 2001; Gibbons, 2014). This term is particularly understood as a structure that is often put up in the process of constructing a building. It is placed around the outside of new buildings to allow builders access to the emerging structures it rises from the ground. Once the scaffold part is considerably hard and strong, the scaffold can be removed. The term has widely assumed as a metaphor (Heinneman, 2002; Hammond, 2001) or a heart of ZPD concept by Vygotsky (Verekinina, 2008) or an operational procedure of the ZPD concept (Jacobs, 2001; Rassmussen, 2001).

The distance between what the child can do with and without the help of adults is coined as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and it is this concept illuminates the scaffolding concept being introduced. Since the term scaffolding was coined in 1976, there has been a great deal of discussion and debate about what the concept of scaffolding actually means. Many experts assume that scaffolding is an operational term for ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). Scaffolding is no longer associated with interactions between individuals only. These days, artefacts, resources, and environments themselves are also utilized as scaffolds. Put differently, scaffolds can consist of tools, strategies, and guides which support students so that they can achieve a higher level of meaning making; one which would be impossible if students worked on their own (Hammond, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Holton and Clarke (2006) propose more concrete tools be used as scaffolds. According to them, "scaffolding may also be provided in book form, over the internet, by telephone, and so on" (p. 130). More importantly, scaffolding can be provided through supplying hints, prompts, probes, simplifications or other similar learning supports (Ronen & Langley, 2004). Up to this point, the concept of scaffolding is associated with so many efforts as good teachings.

Knowledge is collaboratively constructed rather than simply passed on, or handed from teacher to learner. Knowledge is constructed in and through joint participation in activities where all participants are actively involved in negotiating meaning (Hammond, 2001). The process of negotiating understandings contributes to ongoing development of social and cultural understandings and ways of thinking about the world (Mercer, 1994).

The ZPD, defined as the distance between a student's assisted and independent performance (Vygotsky, 1978), points to the meaning of teaching as the transformation of socially constructed knowledge into that which is individually owned. This type of teaching assumes a specific paradigm of teacher-student interaction where the role of the adult is that of collaborator and co-structor. Vygotsky emphasized that children and adults are both active agents in the process of child's development. "Development is, in this case, co-constructed." (Cole & Cole, 2001, p.37). Vygotsky recognised that the distance between doing something independently and doing it with the help of another, indicated stages of development, which do not necessarily coincide in all people. In this way he regarded an instructors "teaching of a student not just as a source of information to be assimilated but as a lever with which the student's thought, with its structural characteristics, is shifted from level to level". (Yaroshevsky, 1989, p.283).

Teaching in Scaffolding Concept

Scaffolding refers to support that is designed to provide the assistance necessary to enable learners to accomplish tasks and develop understandings that they would

not quite be able to manage on their own (Hammond, 2001). It can be argued that it is only when teacher support—or scaffolding—is needed that learning will take place since learners accept kindly with what they have already known. Students tend to deal with their ZPD, nevertheless Vygotsky argued that it is not ‘actual development’. Dealing with what students have achieved is talking only about ‘yesterday development’. Students need to deal with what they might be able to potentially mastered. That is an ‘actual development’. At this pinpoint the scaffolding concept works; it helps children or students move toward their new skills. As every children has different range of ZPD, teachers’ scaffolding at class minimizing the longer distance they would take. Teachers, through their sequencing of teaching activities and through the quality of their support and guidance, are able to challenge and extend what students are able to do. It is by participating in such activities that students are pushed beyond their current abilities and levels of understanding, and it is then that learning occurs and students are able to ‘internalize’ new understanding.

Scaffolding in turn will bring to a good teaching (Hammond, 2001). The sequence of targeted activities teacher plan for the students is subject to frame with concept of scaffolding. The ‘how’ of scaffolding is offered by many theorists. One of which that will be used in this research as the main knife to slice the process of teaching is the powerful frame provided by Hammond (2002), Mercer (1994), Wells (1999) and of course Vygotsky (1978). Those are: *contingent pacing*, which includes the points at which the teacher will challenge particular students, support particular students, withdraw support to enable students to work independently; *intersubjectivity* which refers to mutual engagement and rapport, *help for students* which address teacher and peer’s intervention (pair work, group work, class work), *contingency* which refer to repeated and chained task also sequenced activities, *flow* means skills and challenge are in balance and students are focused and ‘in tune’ and *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* that has been explained earlier. These 7 concepts will slice the scaffolding actions performed by 4 teachers in the class.

RESEARCH METHODS

Considering the objectives of this study are to reveal the belief and perception teacher has on scaffolding, the reflection of scaffolding concepts in their teachings as teacher builds students’ knowledge, whether or not the concept help or hinder students’ mastery and the action of scaffolding in establishing students’ knowledge, I decide to conduct a mixed method studies where the qualitative component had priority and the researchers identified themselves primarily as qualitative researchers (Brannen, 2005). Creswell (1998: 15) argues that qualitative research needs interpretive and naturalistic approaches to the subject matter and multiple sources of information.

This research will be a case study because the characteristics of genre are embedded in a certain community communication. Since the research will typically describe an entity and the entity's action, the hows and whys the entity acts as it does, this research took case studies as the method qualitatively (Thomas, 2003).

The Site and Participants

A case study in qualitative research requires a natural setting and purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998:14, 62; Maxwell, 1996: 70-71; Miles and Huberman, 1994: 27). The general aim of this study is to explore and describe the reflection of scaffolding concepts in the teachings of English in junior high schools in Sumedang along with their teaching practices. Investigation were drawn upon teachers in terms of their understanding on the concept, how they implement it in their classroom teaching and how they perceive it. Given this objective, it is imperative to find junior high schools in Sumedang that has well-trained English teachers. It is critical also to consider that the schools have facilitated the teaching with supportive teaching materials sufficient and relevant to the subject matters to support the English teaching activities to their students. It is considerable also—to certain amount—to involve teachers who have been actively participated in some improvement programs in teaching English for Sumedang district at least. Having considered above reasoning, the participants of this study are four teachers who have been reviewed thus far based on the requirements. They were interviewed, observed, and requested to be engaging and mingling into the establishment of the new model of scaffolding teaching. Their opinion, assumption and teaching practices were triangulated with interview, questionnaires, observation, focus group discussion and other necessary instruments. They have their English teaching observed thoroughly, students and teachers were interviewed purposely. The process were carefully recorded and documented.

Besides teachers and students of targeted classes acting as the key informants of this study, there will be several lesson plans to be analyzed that will represent the 'KTSP and curriculum 2013' characteristics used in elementary English teaching; they will serve as the 'focal participants' of this study (Maxwell, 1996: 70-71). These focal participants will have these criteria: written in a neat form, mainly used by elementary English teachers in Sumedang and suggested by one legitimate association such as MGMP (teachers' forum).

Data Collection Methods

Mixed method and qualitative research needs multiple techniques to collect data from multiple sources (Creswell, 1998). In general, the data will be taken from the following techniques.

Research Question 1:

1. How do teachers understand and perceive the concept of scaffolding?

The data were collected through both questionnaires and interview. The questions asked were around scaffolding concepts: how far teacher understands the concept, apply and perceive it in curriculum 2013? Questionnaires were given first, and interview will serve as the confirmation and elaboration of what had been sounded in the questionnaire.

Research Question 2:

2. How is the scaffolding concept reflected in their teaching?

The data to answer this question were collected from classroom observation, field note and interviewing teachers and students. This process were conducted more than once depended upon the needs. The data were triangulated and collected thoroughly and continuously guided by some purposively designed formats. The interview were targeted to teachers and students and structure of interview is subjects to change accordingly. The points to which teachers reflect scaffolding in particular ways were deeply elaborated.

Research Question 3:

3. In what way does the scaffolding concept help or hinder students from their language mastery?

The data were gathered from classroom observation triangulated with interview and test results. The interviews were conducted both to the teachers and the students. Having observed the teaching, the teacher was asked about the scaffolding they have planned and implemented and how significant it is to help students' mastery.

Data Analysis Method

As suggested by Creswell (1998), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Maxwell (1996) that qualitative research applies multiple sources from various techniques of collecting data. This data will be analyzed inductively and coded; the meaningful recurring patterns will be identified. Constant comparative methods will be applied to identify the meaningful recurring patterns. The comparison will be made within each focal data in each period and across focal participants and periods.

RESULT

Having observed 3 times for each teacher in the classroom, some actions reflecting scaffolding are captured. Each caption reflects the scaffolding item and the explanation for each teacher will be presented in the table below. The name will be put in acronym.

Help to Students

- DS He provided many helps to his students in a form of artefacts, resources, and environments. He also prepared a well-planned teaching. He used in focus and many pictures, videos also cards. He put his efforts a lot in planning a good strategy on his teaching.
- MQ He helped his students by providing lots of English dictionaries (one for one group consists of 4 people). He also helped his students by walking around the class establishing a close connection to what his students has performed.
- AR She helped her students by providing many clues and hints for every word students do not familiar with; sentence students can not translate and context students could not grasp. She used 90% English for her instruction in the class. She used less media and supporting aids, nevertheless laid her strength to help and support her students by her own style of guessing contexts.
- S He loved using technologies and providing students with pictures, films, videos from many sources as the supporting aids for his teaching. He conducted one way teaching almost all the time, less communicative but still supportive in other ways.
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Contingency

- DS Task procedures are adjusted to the learning materials, not to the action of the learners; whether or not students follow teacher's intention is not the priority for the teaching. His instructions were sometime adjusted to the needs of the students but most of the time did not.
- MQ He tended to divide the materials from a simpler one to the more complicated one. He did not follow the sequence the syllabi have already instructed, yet, he distributed them based on the action of the learners. His instructions were too fast, sometimes his students could not follow.
- AR She changed many of her actions depend on the actions of her students. She did not follow the sequence of her lesson plan. Her utterances and instructions were made slowly adjusted to the students actions toward them.
- S He spoke sometimes too hard to understand, avoided re-explaining them or giving hints and clues. He made his materials contextually based on students' interests.
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ZPD

- DS Teacher assumed students' initial knowledge from the previous tests given
- MQ Teacher gave pre-test for measuring the initial knowledge and understanding of his students
- AR She assured students' initial and ongoing knowledge and understanding all the time along her teaching by proposing many questions.
- S He followed the lesson plan and assumed that students have already come to that point, no need to figured it out one by one
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Flow

- DS Skill and challenge were in balance and students were kept focused and in-tune. They loved the lesson
- MQ Skill and challenge were in balance and students enjoyed his teaching by his humorous characters.
- AR Skill and challenge were properly in balance by some structured scaffolding actions she provided and students were so active
- S Skill and challenge were structured in balance, yet teacher was not quite often updating students' progress
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Continuity

- DS He is the neatest teacher among others. His tasks are properly planned and sequenced. He prepared his teaching thoroughly and as a result, students were kept in tune.
- MQ He did not manage the lesson plan as well as others, he followed his intuition at most, he kept the continuity of his class not by following the rules
- AR She kept her class ongoing, live and active. From three classes she taught with different students, she found almost less difficulties managing the class. She was able to keep it continued and significant.
- S He sometimes put repeated and chained tasks, but in some other times he put the task improperly. He put the materials which are not directly connected to the targeted skills students should achieve.
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Intersubjectivity

- DS He did not establish balance and intense mutual engagement. He seldom performed or uttered humorous things in his teaching. Students were quiet, yet still motivated. In some of his pauses, he confused filling it with something that can establish significant rapport.
- MQ He is so supportive, warm, humorous, and tender. Students enjoyed making jokes, laughed, delivered thoughts and opinions. Warm and active situation of the class was easily established. He often put materials that are laughed by all the students. It made the class so lively.
- AR She is so tender and caring. She is also so attentive. She gave not only teaching materials but also ethical conduct: how to establish a good manner, in each of the actions.
- S He showed his power more instead of attentive actions in front of his students. He seldom laughed and so were his students. Class were motivated more by his teaching aids which are outstanding and interesting.
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Handover

- DS From the questionnaires given to the students and contrasted with the teaching, the increased role of the learners is not appeared significantly. Students felt confidence in doing the task because the teacher prepared and performed the teaching so neatly.
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- MQ Students were so active because of the style of his teaching, yet, the increased role of the students could not be defined as a result of his teaching because from the interview results it was found that those students who were actively engaged on the teaching are indeed active and salient students of all subject matters.
- AR Students' roles are gradually increased by the actions of the teachers. The occurrences were not so high yet it happened. Students gradually understand and capable of doing the instructed skills and understanding by the teaching.
- S The increased role of the learners also the increasing confidence were not yet seen and invited by the teacher.
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From the interview results and questionnaires given, two teachers (AR and MQ) know and understand the concept of scaffolding. Mrs. AR knows the theorists (Vygotsky, Brunner) and some features of teaching in scaffolding concept. The other two (DS and S) admitted that they never heard of the term, yet, considered and argued that a good teaching addressed to the actions of supporting students at the point they can do something by their own, and let them do it themselves (Vygotsky, 1978; Mercer, 1994, Hammond 2002). Having their own perception on scaffolding and good teaching, they all agreed that teaching should be performed that way.

Interview conducted to the students show that scaffolding efforts from their teachers-especially in forms of teaching aids-help them understand the material better and made the teaching more pleasant. Students also admitted that their knowledge has already been nourished by those supportive actions of the teacher in the form of: teaching aids, significant and leading instruction, clear voice, neat sequence of activities.

DISCUSSION

Teacher's Perception on Scaffolding

From the result of the interview and observation, teacher who owns a good perception about scaffolding tends to think and do more efforts on it than teacher who does not know and understand the concept yet. This leads to a conclusion that perception frames someone's belief and in turn, changes it into real actions. Teacher who understands the concept in detail (Ms. AR) put her action in detail, gave her best efforts to make learning as social process. Along with her students, she made a meaning of each learning they created together. This is what Vygotsky (1978) and Hammond (2001) called as 'jointly constructed' or Cole and Cole (2001) referred to 'co-constructed'. She never answered the problems excepts together with her students.

The Reflection of Scaffolding in Action

In helping the students, all teacher showed some efforts of performing scaffolding teaching, starting from providing the hints, cue cards, pictures, videos, miniatures,

and so many forms of teaching aids collecting from internet and many other sources. This is a significant support to create a better understanding for the students, and therefore categorized as scaffolding ((Puntbaker & Hubscher, 2005). In fact all teachers provided tools, strategies, and guides which support students so that they can achieve a higher level of meaning making; one which would be impossible if students worked on their own (Hammond, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978; Holton and Clarke, 2006; Ronen & Langley, 2004).

In *contingent pacing*, not all teachers consider task procedures and teaching actions relevant to students' needs and students' point of understanding, in the meantime, this is very important in scaffolding action since students' ability is varied and they will use it to maintain and grasp new knowledge. This starting point of the students is a measure to what extent it will be developed (Vygotsky, 1978; Hammond, 2001). Knowing the ability of each students will ease teacher to develop teaching efforts in students ZPD.

In *flow* of the teaching, all teachers were not so difficult to keep students focused and 'in tune'. They are good and capable teachers, indeed. It was seen from their preparation, their teaching and their understanding of the materials. Class management is not an issue for them to be worried to. They ran the class well.

In *intersubjectivity*, some teachers showed less mutual engagement and rapport in terms of their verbal exposure. It creates a tense among the students and yet hampers the understanding of some students. Many students are blocked by their own worries about what will the teachers do if they answered incorrectly. This is revealed from the interview and questionnaires result. Only one teacher performed 'dialogue' with the students regarding the concept she delivered, pursuing the agreement between her and the students about each word she introduced. This is the concept of 'dialogue', the heart of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Verekinina, 2002)

In *ZPD concepts*, all teachers have in their mind in general the depiction of each student's ability as the starting point. They found them out from pre-test they have conducted, or from the talk among the previous teachers. To all teachers, this becomes a consideration of how to start the teaching, but not where to start because all of them decided where to start depended upon the curriculum (syllabus, lesson plan).

In *continuity*, all teachers conducted repeated and chained tasks so that the improvement of the students from level to level can be indicated and measured (Yaroshevsky, 1989). They are not confused about that since they are all experienced and skilled English teachers.

In *handover/take over*, only one teacher showed great efforts of creating and establishing increased role of the learners. Most of the teacher performed standard treatment to all students as classical method of teaching so the increased role of the learner one by one is not apparently noticed.

The Help of Scaffolding in Supporting Students' Mastery

Students admitted that they were helped by the scaffolding efforts performed by the teachers and enjoyed the teaching so much. Only 13% of the students felt that they were not gained new knowledge from the teaching; that they were not supported by the efforts. An amazing fact also showed that the students felt so intrigued by the leading instruction from the teacher. They felt that it helped them in so many ways.

CONCLUSION

Scaffolding, in many of its forms, is a good alternative of solving teacher and student's problems in learning English. For teacher, this concept gave a great contribution of making students independent learners. For students, the concept helped them developed by their own ability at the starting point and by the help of the teacher are managed to think and act as it is purposed by the curriculum and yet they can gradually do that without the help of the teacher.

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