

SCAFFOLDING AS USED IN THE WRITING PROCESS OF AN ENGLISH WRITING COURSE

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Abstract

Dealing with writing, there are two major problems for the students in English courses. The first is in finding 'what to write' (generating ideas about a specific topic) and the second is how to develop the idea that has been invented. Developing the ideas includes using the appropriate grammar and sentence structure in each paragraph and also developing paragraphs to form a composition. The paper overviews how scaffolding technique is able to help students in English classes to learn writing. Scaffolding is regarded as suitable for teaching writing because of the approach used in the technique focuses more to the approach rather than to the product. A general description and overview of how students are supported by scaffolding technique in generating ideas related to a particular topic and producing an appropriate text organization, is presented here.

Introduction

Writing is one of the language skills in English that can show how much the students have mastered the language. In line with the process of writing, there has been a belief that writing is an individual process and made special by the individual's unique features in one's mind. However, another belief is then emerged, that writing process is cultural and social, influenced by experiences of the writer gained from the surroundings (Faraj, 2015).

This paper is describing how scaffolding is able to help students in English classes to learn writing. Scaffolding is regarded as suitable for supporting writing process because of the nature of Scaffolding which is more to the process rather than to the product. An overview of how students are supported and helped by scaffolding technique in terms of generating ideas related to a particular

topic and producing an appropriate text organization, is presented here.

Dealing with writing, there are two major problems for students in writing. The first is in finding 'what to write' (generating ideas about specific topic) and the second is how to develop the idea that has been found. Developing the ideas includes using the appropriate grammar and sentence structure in each paragraph and also developing paragraphs to form a composition. Two major issues rise in line with the problems: how scaffolding affects the students' writing achievement and the writing process in term of generating ideas and organizing writing composition?

The Origin of Scaffolding in Learning

The underlying theory of how scaffolding can aid writing process is based on the theory of Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky ((1978) in Lipscomb, Swanson, and

West (2008), stating that every student has a level of achievement in learning, somewhere between their dependent level (a level where they are dependent to the teachers in finishing the task given) and independent level (a level where they are able to work independently). Vygotsky (1978), mentioned in his description of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as quoted by Lipscomb, Swanson, and West (2008)), that there is a distance between the actual development level of the learner (determined by independent problem solving) and the level of potential development (determined through teacher's guidance and interaction with the more capable peers. This distance is bridged by an alternative technique in Language Teaching, called: scaffolding. Scaffolding takes place in the ZPD and gives assistance up to the extent that learner is able to do his/ her task independently. Before the learner is able to perform the completion of independent task, scaffolding will give the necessary assistance to the learner. The term 'scaffolding' originates from the works of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) as mentioned by Lipscomb, Swanson, and West (2008). The term 'scaffolding' was created as an analogy to describe the type of aid offered by a teacher, tutor, trainer or peer to support learning. Scaffolding technique is based on the principle of 'assistance' given to a learner to minimize the pressure on searching and maximize the learner's potential to learn and discover (Hartani and Sulindra, 2017).

The ideas of Vygotsky's ZPD originally were used specifically for one's ability to solve problems. It can be expanded to examining other domains of competence and skills such as writing (Widjojokoesoemo, 2015). These specialized zones of development include cultural zones, individual zones, and skill-oriented

zones. In the ZPD, students are helped by scaffolding technique in their learning process to achieve their independent level. In learning writing, scaffolding takes place in the writing process which includes planning, drafting, revising and editing (Guth (1985: 15) in Ngadiman (2008: 6). Logically, scaffolding also affects the writing production, in other words, the students' writing achievement.

Scaffolding technique is based on the principle of 'assistance' given to a learner to minimize the pressure on searching and maximize the learner's potential to learn and discover. Long before this term (scaffolding) is used widely in learning, Vygotsky (1978), cited by Lipscomb, Swanson, & West (2008), introduced the term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is a level of learning where a learner is in the progress between his/ her independent level and dependent level (Vygotsky in Cole et al., 1978). Theoretically, by the help of more capable peers or tutors, and sufficient available resources (these are the Scaffolding) a learner may become an independent learner and finishing the task independently.

The term 'scaffolding' originated from the works of Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) as mentioned by Lipscomb, Swanson, & West (2008) and also Kim and Kim (2005). The term 'scaffolding' was introduced as an analogy to explain the model of assistance given by a teacher or peer to uphold learning process. In the process of scaffolding, the teacher assists the students in mastering a task or concept that the student is at the beginning unable to grasp without any help. Lipscomb, Swanson, & West (2008) states that:

"...the teacher offers assistance with only those skills that are beyond the student's capability. Of great importance is allowing the student to

complete as much of the task as possible, unassisted. The teacher only attempts to help the student with tasks that are just beyond his current capability..."

Students are expected to make mistakes or errors while scaffolding is applied during learning. However, these errors are anticipated with feedback from teachers and peers. The function of scaffolding is like a ladder, bringing students to the next level of understanding, concept, and knowledge (Kim and Kim, 2005).

There are various supportive devices which are able to be used in scaffolding student learning. They are, according to Lipscomb, Swanson, & West (2008):

...breaking the task into smaller more, manageable parts; using 'think alouds', or verbalizing thinking processes when completing a task; cooperative learning, which promotes teamwork and dialogue among peers; concrete prompts, questioning; coaching; cue cards or modeling. Others might include the activation of background knowledge, giving tips, strategies, cues and procedures.

Teachers need to be concerned of guarding the learner in a chase of the task while lowering the learner's stress level. Skills or tasks which are too far beyond reach direct a student to his frustration level, and tasks that are too simple can trigger much the same effect.

Scaffolding in Language Learning Across Times

Scaffolding in teaching and learning writing has been the subject of several researches. In this sub chapter, the use of scaffolding in several previous studies is discussed and reviewed to build a clear concept of what actually scaffolding is in several different settings and contexts. The setting and contexts ranges from young learners learning to adult learning.

The original use of scaffolding is to assist young learners, or children, to improve their learning ability from dependent learning to independent learning, one of which is conducted by Bodrova and Leong (1998) in attempting to use scaffolding to teach writing to young learners. In this study, Bodrova and Leong conducted a research on 34-at-risk-kindergarten students, about the use of materialization and private speech to improve these young learners' ability in writing. Materialization is the use of objects or other visual media to 'materialize', to make an object tangible, clear to the children's perception. Private speech is a set of self talk done by a child in order to give direction to him or herself in doing an activity (e.g. reading a loud, counting with voice..1..2..3...). These two methods of teaching and learning are used by the researchers to build a mental concept in the young learner's mind before writing takes place. In this case, the form of scaffolding technique used is materialization and private speech.

Another study on scaffolding focuses its usage to university students' academic writing, conducted by Barnard and Campbell (2002), which makes use of scaffolding principles developed by Van Lier (1996), to be applied in improving university students' academic writing. According to this study, the 6 principles of scaffolding: contextual support, continuity, inter subjectivity, flow, contingency, and handover, are applicable to the teaching writing in university academic writing context.

Barnard himself applied scaffolding in a university English class, ESLA101, *Academic Writing and Research* - a first year undergraduate course for international students at the University of Waikato,

New Zealand. The course comprises the following 'learning spaces':

- Two 2-hour lectures a week (150-300 students in class)
- One 1-hour tutorial a week (groups of 20-25)
- Consultation hours each week (individual or small group)
- 'Class-forum' - an online web-conference platform
- Informal networking among groups of students, either face-to-face or online.

In this case, it is clearly seen that scaffolding is applied to a big number of students. However, there is also a moment when the big group is divided into a very small group (consultation session).

An attempt to 'join' scaffolding with other teaching techniques has been made. A study applied to the third-year English Writing courses at the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB), titled *English Writing V* and *English Writing VI* for the first and second semester respectively, exemplify a genre-based framework in its curricular design (Lin, 2006). In this context, the researcher uses scaffolding principles to be applied in teaching writing using process-oriented approach (focus more on writing process rather than writing product), making use of genre-based teaching (teaching writing based on the genre: narrative, descriptive, argumentative, expository). The teaching material is writing genre, while the technique for teaching is using scaffolding. Here is a description at which point scaffolding occurs in the teaching process (Lin, 2006):

To provide scaffolding, the students are encouraged to constantly refer to the model text and their grammar work as they write, and the instructor plays an active role by circulating around the

classroom and guiding the students in turn or when they are in need, reminding them constantly about the text organization, appropriate use of reported speech, how they can vary the reporting verbs, and so on. Each piece of writing goes through more than one draft, before it is submitted to the instructor, who then provides further feedback for a final draft to be submitted for grading.

The researcher used a model text which is circulated around the class, as the scaffolding, to assist the students in their writing organization and grammar. Then, the writing composition made by the students are going *through a few rounds of drafting, editing, and re-drafting* (Lin, 2006), as being the prerequisite of a writing 'process'.

A research of more or less the same topic made by Lin (2006), is conducted by Kim and Kim (2005), which also emphasizes on genre-based teaching writing founded on scaffolding technique. The additional point of Kim and Kim's research is on the application of formative assessment. Both Kim and Kim (2005), and Lin (2006) use writing process orientation in their studies.

One study that was conducted by Farrah (2012) applied the Six Van Lier principles (1996), continuity and flow, in the writing process. The study employed journal/ reflective writing to smoothen the writing process. The continuity support from reflective journal writing enhanced the flow of the writing process (Farrah, 2012).

Another research conducted by Ramirez and Jones made use of literacy improvement as the scaffolding of writing and second language achievement. The learners

are given enough literature support to help them develop ideas and produce written work in the second language learning. (Ramirez and Jones, 2013). This study corresponded to the contextual support principle of Van Lier (1996).

Some researchers tried to collaborate collaborative learning as a mean of scaffolding in writing. The collaborative learning involve peer review and teacher's feedback to support the on-going process of writing (Hartani and Sulindra, 2017; Faraj, 2015). The review and the feedback given are to support or to 'scaffold' the students while they are exploring the ideas and organizing their writing.

From the reviews of recent studies on scaffolding for teaching writing, it is obvious that scaffolding can occur both in young learners' context and adult learners' context. If so, what is necessary to be adjusted according to the age group is the learning context, teaching materials, and instructions used.

From the overviews of the studies, it is obvious that teaching writing approach should better take side on process oriented; the scaffolding used varied from printed and on line resources, teacher' guided questions and instructions, and writing composition model. The subjects of those studies are group of students taking English classes with levels varying from young learners to adult learners. The pattern of how scaffolding used in the teaching are generalized into the following points:

1. The purpose of scaffolding is always to help the learners in generating ideas and forming an appropriate organization in the writing process.
2. The form of scaffolding can be any forms, from visual media, on line resources, regular meeting session, feedback and

review. The list can add more in line with the growing research in this area.

3. The learners are assumed to have potential ability to reach a higher level of learning despite of their current learning performance (in line with the Zone of Proximal Development theory). Therefore, the studies were going *through a few rounds of drafting, editing, and re-drafting* (Lin, 2006)
4. All the studies set the learning situation and the learner in a place and scheme that enable the learners to be 'growingly' independent (where finally the 'scaffolding' is no longer needed in the corresponding learning level). The writing process situated in the studies are in line with Van Lier principle of contextual support, continuity, and handing over (Van Lier, 1996 in Barnard and Campbell, 2002)

Scaffolding in Writing Process: Why and How?

Writing Composition

Many definitions have been made upon writing composition, and several of which used in here describes the meaning of composition clearly and practically. Owene in Tongue (1986) as quoted by Ngadiman (2008: 3), composition is defined as: 'the putting of words into grammatically correct sentences, and the linking of these sentences into logically appropriate order'. Another definition defines writing composition as: a creating and shaping a written text (Hartfiel et al, 1985, cited by Ngadiman (2008: 3)). According to Reinkema (1993), as quoted by Ngadiman (2008), writing composition is the product of an act of writing through a process.

Physically, a writing composition consists of paragraphs which are

coherently (and cohesively) connected to one another to form a meaningful whole content. To achieve the meaningful content, writers go through a process which leads to a product, the composition itself. From the definition provided, writing composition is not merely a collection of words and mechanics, but more to a result of an act of writing process. Consequently, when discussing about a writing composition, it is perceived as an active process, rather than a passive outcome. Examining a writing composition is more to the process of producing it, rather than just focusing at what are displayed in the composition.

Writing Process and Writing Product

The act of writing is an act of thinking. Writing is one of the most effective ways to monitor and see whether one has an organized way of thinking or the opposite one.

Murray (2004) states that writing is to discipline our mind in making meaning. Therefore, in writing a composition or a text, there are two areas that are observable: the writing process and the writing product.

Writing Process

In the process of writing, one person makes different kind of process than the other person. In other words, the process of writing is unique to each individual. A writer passes through different stages in a writing process according to his/ her personality, cognitive style, the life experience, and the nature of the writing task (Murray, 2004). According to Guth (1989) as cited by Ngadiman (2008: 3), there are five overlapping stages in a writing process:

1. the exploration of the subject to be written
2. the restriction of the explored subject as regards to the selected purpose and audience
3. the planning of a suitable

organizational pattern

4. the writing of the first draft

5. the revision of this first draft to make it unified, coherent, clear, and effective.

In other shorter way, the above stages can be abridged into three level only (that most writers would agree): 1. pre-writing, 2. whilst writing, and 3. post writing/ revising. Murray (2004) suggests almost similar writing process stages: 1. collecting 2. planning, 3. developing (drafting, revising, editing). A writer will experience the stages (from any of the above stages) not only once, but many times, putting different emphasize during each part in the composition. Correspond to this idea, Murray (2004) argues that' ... *writing process is not linear, but recursive...*'.

Writing Product

Writing product, the physical form of the composition itself, usually contains these criteria, such as spelling, vocabulary, usage, mechanics, organization, style, and appeals to an audience (Murray, 2004). According to Willis (1965), Hazel Hal (2000), as quoted by Ngadiman (2008), there are six principles to form a good composition in English:

1. Adequate subject matter
2. appropriate organization of the whole composition
3. appropriate organization and development of paragraphs
4. mature and effective sentence composition
5. effective diction
6. correct usage.

The traditional writing instruction usually deals with the above criteria or principles. The teaching of writing assumes that the students need to understand the parts first before they are able to build the whole text (Murray, 2004). Based on this paradigm, many writing teachers are still focusing on checking their students work whether the work fits

the criteria of a 'good composition' as mentioned above. In other words, the teaching does not go through the process but directly examining the product. During the process of writing, the students are taught nothing.

Types of Scaffolding in Writing Process

Scaffolding, as a teaching technique to teach writing, appears in the writing process, in four types of scaffolding application:

1. Content Scaffolding
2. Formal Scaffolding
3. Linguistics Scaffolding
4. Knowledge about Audience-Scaffolding
5. Instructional and question-directing-scaffolding

As content scaffolding, the activation of background knowledge is taking place in the teaching and learning process. Borrowing a term from reading comprehension realm, this activation of background knowledge is called 'schema' (plural: schemata). This term, introduced first time in psychology by Bartlett (1932) as cited by Rumelhart (1980), refers to...

a theory about how knowledge is represented and about how that representation facilitates the use of the knowledge in particular way. According to schema theories, all knowledge is packaged into units. These units are called: schemata (Rumelhart, 1980).

In applying the content scaffolding, the teachers allow the students to activate their 'schemata' about their writing topics by accessing internet, reading resources, or brainstorming and making mind mapping. There is also a possibility to allow interlingual transfer in the students mind, transferring their first language experience to the target language (Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn, 1990).

As formal scaffolding, it appears in the form of writing procedure, tips, and organization modeling, as suggested by Lipscomb, Swanson, & West (2008). The scaffolding gives practical procedure of writing, including collecting, planning, revising, and editing. The scaffolding also gives the writing models: narration, exposition/ expository, argumentation, persuasion, and description.

As linguistics scaffolding, the scaffolding gives the necessary cues in the use of appropriate grammar, expressions, transition signals, and diction. The students may select and use the appropriate language according to their ideas and topics. This scaffolding operates in the sentence structure and grammatical forms of the students' writing composition.

As knowledge of audience scaffolding, the scaffolding simply provide information about who are usually addressed by 'what' topic. This type of scaffolding gives the students a description of the audiences' characteristics, audiences who are reading their writing composition later on. Through this scaffolding, the learners know what kind of groups will read and even judge their writing.

As Instructional and question-directing-scaffolding, the scaffolding provides guidance and direction to the students so that they are able to write in the right track. The application is through the teachers' instruction or teaching guidance during the teaching and learning process. The other form is the teachers' directing-questions: the questions delivered by the teachers to trigger thinking during writing process.

All these scaffoldings are meant to help students extending their writing skills step by step to the higher level, stretching their dependent task-completion to the more independent task-completion.

Scaffolding in the process of Generating Ideas

The process of generating ideas is the first area that scaffolding in writing will operate on. Generating ideas is simply finding out what to write. As Barnard and Campbell (2002) quote from Van Lier (1996), one of the principles in scaffolding is 'providing context' for learning. In writing process, the process of generating ideas will be 'scaffolded' or supported by the scaffolding technique. The tangible form of the scaffolding is by providing the students with various printed materials (textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, thesaurus, dictionaries, etc.) or internet connection to varieties of websites, as the 'ideas resources'. Theoretically, these resources build the students' schemata, or fill in the gap between the students' schemata and the required topic (If the students do not have the background knowledge about the context and setting of a particular required topic, scaffolding will build the context and the setting.).

The process of how scaffolding taking place in generating ideas is described in this paper. The process involves how the students select a particular topic, how the students do the brainstorming, and finally decide the fixed-topic to develop into a further composition.

Scaffolding in the process of Organizing Ideas

The process of organizing ideas is the second area that scaffolding in writing will operate on. While generating ideas is simply finding out what to write, organizing ideas means the process of putting the ideas, reflected in the sentences structure, cohesion, coherent paragraph development, and logical flow of the whole ideas in a writing composition. Barnard and Campbell (2002), quoting

Van Lier (1996), state that other principles in scaffolding are:

- *Continuity*: repeated occurrences over time of a complex of actions, keeping a balance between routine and variation in order to sustain motivation
- *Intersubjectivity*: two or more minds thinking as one in pursuit of a common goal
- *Flow*: easy and natural communication between participants
- *Contingency* – the type and extent of assistance depends on the learners' reactions
- *Handover* – the learner is ready to undertake similar tasks without help: the scaffolding is dismantled

In writing process, the process of organizing the ideas will be 'scaffolded' or supported by the scaffolding technique. The process of how the five principles of scaffolding taking place in organizing ideas involves the following elements:

- continuity of each individual's (student) writing process in organizing ideas is (while being taught using scaffolding technique)
- the communication flow between students in organizing the ideas (while being taught using scaffolding technique)
- mental process taking place in organizing the ideas during the process of writing (any particular steps taken in developing the paragraphs for creating a composition)
- How the grammar and sentence-structure is formed in organizing the ideas

Applying Scaffolding

Here comes the steps of implementing scaffolding in the learning situation. A suggestion of how

scaffolding should apply in the writing course comprises seven proposed steps to follow.

The following scaffolding steps include what is called 'operational scaffolding'. Operational scaffolding, is defined as any techniques which utilized some media, printed, on line, verbal or non-verbal (written instruction), or any means to lead the students in such a way in improving the students' writing. These are the steps, which should be applied in order:

1. providing Initial instruction on a particular writing assignment/ task

The teachers first of all give the initial instruction and explanation about how the task should be done. This does not include the final solution of a task, just a directing guidance in doing the task.

2. providing students with resources or taking the students to the resource center

One of the Scaffolding functions is to bridge a gap between the students' schemata and the required information for the present writing task. Taking the students to online or printed resource center will provide the necessary information needed for accomplishing the current task. The resource can be magazines, newspaper, journal, or any reading materials (printed or on line) that help the students generating ideas for the writing assignment. In this step, idea generation is taking place. The students will use the resources to generate ideas for their writing task.

3. Giving chances of asking questions

The teacher cannot just leave the students 'wandering around aimlessly' in the 'big valley of information' (the resources center). The teacher then makes sure that the students have enough opportunity to ask questions related to their task.

4. Answering the questions using 'directing questions or partial solution

The way the teacher asking questions is important in scaffolding. The questions should be 'guiding' or 'providing a pathway' to the answer of the questions. The teacher will not directly answer the questions with the required answer, if he or she uses scaffolding in teaching. In other words, the teacher uses a partial solution in solving the students' problems.

5. Encouraging student-student interaction

This step is actually the essence of scaffolding, which allows interaction of more capable peers to influence the less capable ones in accomplishing a task. The teacher will encourage the students to do peer checking (on grammar and vocabulary in the writing assignment), peer evaluation and comment. The input given by peers is beneficial to improve students' writing in term of grammar and vocabulary.

6. Carrying out teacher supervision

Eventhough peers checking is quite influential to students' writing, but teacher's supervision will 'authorized' the evaluation done by the students. In some ways, such as writing organization, teacher's

comment and feedback is very needed in improving the students' writing. The teacher's supervision is done through giving feedback, comment, and hints to further steps or solution.

7. Draft one of writing composition produced

Finally, the first draft of each writing composition is produced. To improve the quality of the draft, the teacher may repeat the seven steps from the beginning.

These proposed steps of scaffolding in writing is to give some insight in English writing classroom activities, especially in generating ideas and improving writing organization. By applying scaffolding in a writing process, the students are expected to reach their independent level in producing a writing composition and continue to produce more advanced composition in their learning.

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