

==== *Child Centered Strategies As A Booster To The Learning Of English* ====

THE ROLE OF SCAFFOLDING, LITERATURE CIRCLE AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES, IN BOOSTING CHILD- CENTERED LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper entitled the role of Scaffolding, Literature Circle and Cooperative Learning Strategies, in boosting child- Centered learning of English Language is aimed at showing language teachers the importance of making language learning child centered through the use of the mentioned strategies in class. The purpose of classroom interaction is for students learning to take place. Sometimes this learning does not take place because of the method, approaches and procedures used by the teacher in the learning situation. Some of interactions are teacher based. Teacher based instruction inhibits learning because it does not allow the students to play active roles in the learning activities. But when the teacher is aware of the students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), he will build new knowledge and concepts on the level where they are with the students' full participation in the classroom activities. Scaffolding instructional strategies, literature circle and cooperative learning are instructional strategies that if the teacher employs carefully, they ensure child centered learning as the students play active roles in the learning activities while the teacher only guides them. This is because "what I hear, I do not understand, what I see I forget and what I do I know". This paper therefore recommends that scaffolding instructional strategies should be used to promote child – centered cooperative learning to students' English language.

Keywords: Scaffolding Literature Circle, Cooperative Learning Strategies and English Language

Introduction

In the recent past, classroom instructions in the English language and the other subjects had been teacher centered. The teacher was looked upon as the reservoir of knowledge and the child as having nothing in him, but depending on the teacher to impart knowledge on him. The method then was the traditional method in which the teacher taught only the rules of grammar to the pupils. This he did through traditional reading comprehension exercise, reading round the class pattern, treatment of new words, spelling and dictation among others. The teacher did these with his chalk in one hand and a frightening cane or sometimes canes in the other hand waiting for an unfortunate child who would not recapitulate what the 'lord of the class', the teacher, had done in the course of the lesson.

But today there is a drastic shift from teacher centered education to child centered learning. The child is expected to make adequate and active contributions and participate in what he is learning. He has background knowledge to do that, as Offorma (1994:154) reveals “No child in school is a tabula rasa (clean slate). Children go to school with a lot of experiences already accumulated from their environment. This means that every child in school already has an entry behaviour, a background experience on which the teacher should build the new information. Chauhan (1981:5) says the school should begin with the immediate environment of the child. That means that the experiences which the child has already acquired should form the basis of teaching” (Offorma, 1994:55). According to Tyler (1975) the teacher must begin where the student is.

The child’s schema (the background knowledge) is indispensable to the child’s learning. The teacher must be aware of the child’s schema. Pardede (2013) argues that the ability to use this schema, or background knowledge, plays a fundamental role in one’s trial to comprehend a text. But the knowledge of the child’s schema is not enough. The teacher should be able to harness the schema and the environment to help the child learn. The purpose of this paper therefore is on the strategies that will help the teacher to help students learn especially, English language. The strategies include: scaffolding instructional strategies for English language learning, literature circle and cooperative learning strategies.

The gap in education this paper intends to fill is that of ensuring that teachers of English language and, indeed, the teachers of all other subjects should realize that they should always give adequate support to the learners to learn. Students learn better in a friendly atmosphere. The classroom should not be tensed up, but should be friendly. The above strategies are to help students play active participatory roles in the teaching processes while the teacher only guides them. This creates a sure shift from the traditional teacher centered learning to a more exuberant child centered learning classrooms.

Scaffolding Instructional Strategies

Scaffolding instructional strategies are the ways to support learners to actively learn, to be able to accomplish a task they would otherwise not be able to do. Scaffolding is defined as a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal, which would be beyond his or her unassisted efforts (Wood, Brunner and rose, 1976). The key concept underlying the scaffolding reading experiences is that of providing support to help learners bridge the gap between what they know and can do and the intended goal, (Founier and Graves, 2002). Pearson (1996) says that scaffolding allows us as teachers to intervene in an environment and provide the cueing, questioning, coaching, corroboration, and plan old information needed to allow students to compute a task before they are able to complete it independently.

Scaffolding, ordinarily, stand for the support the builders of a house provide for the house under construction with strong woods and Indian bamboes to support the structure until the building is finished. When they finish the building, they remove the support which is the scaffolding. In the

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same way it is the support the teachers give to the students to enable them learn, once the learning has taken place the support—the scaffolding—can be removed from the students.

Scaffolding Instruction as a teaching strategy originated from Lev, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is like the background knowledge, the schema or the entry behaviour of the learner. (Raymond. 2000:176) defines "The zone of Proximal Development is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" The scaffolding teaching strategy therefore provides individuals support based on the learner's ZPD (Chang, sung & Chen, 2002). An important aspect of scaffolding instruction as earlier said is that the scaffolds are temporary. As the learner's abilities increase the scaffolding provided by the more knowledgeable teachers or instructors is progressively withdrawn. Finally, the learner is able to complete the task or master the concepts independently (Chang, Sung & Chen 2002). As the learner's knowledge and learning competence increases, the educator gradually reduces the support provided Scaffolding instructional learning should be done in a social learning atmosphere. The classroom should not be tensed up, or boring with frightening canes and unfriendly approaches. The teacher should help the students and should be friendly with them. He should group them and let them work freely in their groups. They should bring the much they have done to the class. The teacher should give them adequate reinforcement. The scaffolding instructional learning shares features with Social Constructionist Learning Theory. This is because students are encouraged to read and perform their tasks in groups and with their peers and should discuss the outcome of their reading and assignments in the class.

The benefits of scaffolding instruction strategies are summarized by Mckenzie (1999) as follows:

1. It provides clear direction and reduces students' confusion. This provides a step by step instructions which explains what a student must do to meet expectations.
2. It clarifies purpose. It helps them understand why they are doing what they are doing and why it is important.
3. It keeps students on task by providing structure and focus which will keep them on track on the designated task.
4. It clarifies expectations and incorporates assessment and feedback.
5. It points students to worthy sources to reduce confusion, frustration, and time to enable the student decide which of the sources to use.
6. It reduces uncertainty, surprise, and disappointment. Educators test their lessons to determine possible problem areas and then refine the lesson to eliminate difficulties so that learning is maximized.

Literature Circles as Instructional Strategy for Language Learning

Another instructional strategy which helps to shift attention or emphasis from the teacher to the students in teaching and learning is literature circle. Literature circle is an instructional approach for helping English language learners improve both reading comprehension and overall language proficiency. Schlick, Noe and Johnson, (1999) observe that, This approach, the literature circle –

which is somewhat like a student book club in the classroom – has drawn a great deal of attention in recent years. Many teachers champion the strategy and use it consistently in their classrooms (Daniel, 2002).

Literature circles are small student-led group discussions in which each group member has a specific role and has prepared for the discussion according to that role. It means giving student freedom in learning and how to follow their own ideas. In a large class, the students are divided into groups with group leaders. Each group is made up of fast and slow learners. Each member of the groups is given a role to play. The teacher simply acts as a facilitator. The students should contribute to selecting of the book to read, but their choice must be according to the curriculum. They will read according to roles, discuss and respond to the book. Daniels (2002) opines that a literature circle is an activity in which members meet to discuss and respond to a book that they are all reading. Cameron, Murray and Cameron (2012) argue that literature circles are led mostly by students, while the teacher remains at the background and performs only basic control functions.

The roles are usually assigned to members of the literature circle to allow the group to function productively and help members remain focused on the chosen book. There are five roles that can be distributed to individual members sometimes two members can have one role assuming the group is more than five members. After sometime, the roles can be exchanged. The roles include: Discussion Director, Literary Luminary, Illustrator, Summarizer and Vocabulary Enricher (Daniel and Steineke, 2004). The Discussion Director could develop at least five questions about the text and then share these questions with the group. The literary Luminary pinpoints important parts of the text for the group in order to stimulate thinking and elicit some interesting facts about the text. The summarizer recalls what happened in the reading and prepares a summary for the group and Vocabulary Enricher helps the group find and discuss new or difficult words (Daniels and Steineke, 2004). Literature circle supports student language improvement, especially through reading comprehension and vocabulary learning.

Literature circles are beneficial in many ways.

- As students perform their roles, they draw information from the text, pay attention to details to support their ideas, highlight main ideas, and respond critically to what they have read by making judgments about the character's intentions and actions, and about how and why things happen in the story.
- Learners feel more comfortable working with their peers than being constantly monitored or corrected by the teacher and may be more willing to share their viewpoints without feeling anxious about making mistakes.
- When students work in collaborative groups they encourage each other's efforts and this leads to increased motivation and efforts (Daniels, 2002; Chi, 2008; Williams, 2009).
- During the meaningful oral discussions that occur in literature circles, learners have more opportunities to practise oral skills, which eventually may help to develop their oral proficiency (Sourenir, 1997).

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- Literature circle also helps students develop critical thinking which is essential to developing critical writing skills.

Cooperative Learning Strategies

Johnson & John (1999:9) say that Cooperative learning strategies are the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. To (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002:1), they are the principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively. In cooperative learning, students are brought into small groups of about 4 or 5 or more depending on the size of the class. In their groups, they work cooperatively. They share ideas, views and knowledge. It is more of peer tutorial. They encourage one another and teach themselves. Unlike literature circles, they do not have roles. They rather work cooperatively for effective learning outcome. Once the teacher gives them the idea of what he wants them to learn, they take it to their groups and teach themselves under fun in a friendly atmosphere devoid of any form of intimidation, name callings or the like. Kaga (1995), is of the view that Cooperative learning promotes language acquisition by providing comprehensible input in a supportive and motivating environment.

In planning cooperative learning, teachers take several roles. First, teachers make pre-instructional decisions about grouping students and assigning appropriate tasks to them. Teachers have to be able to explain both the academic task and the cooperative structures and then must monitor and intervene when necessary. Finally, the teacher is also the one who is responsible for evaluating students learning and the effectiveness of each group's work (Cohen, 1998).

Cooperative Learning Principles

Jacobs (2004), outlines some cooperative learning principles such as:

1. Cooperative Learning groups should be heterogeneous. The grouping should be mixed on the variables of sex, ethnicity, social class, religion, personality, age, language proficiency, and diligence.
2. Cooperative Learning groups should be made to have collaborative skills as they work together. Each member should also give reasons for what he is doing.
3. There should be group autonomy. The group should be encouraged to look to themselves for resources rather than relying solely on the teacher.
4. **Simultaneous Interaction:** In this, one person in a group is speaking at a time. If there are five groups in the class five students will be speaking simultaneously each in his own group.
5. **Equal participation:** A frequent problem in groups is that one or two group members dominate the group and, for whatever reason, impede the participation of others. Cooperative learning offers many ways of promoting more equal participation among group members.
6. **Individual Accountability:** In this, every member in the group tries to learn and to share their knowledge and ideas with others.
7. **Positive Inter dependence.** This principle lies at the heart of cooperative learning. This makes the members of a group feel that what helps one member of the group help the other

members and what hurts one member of the group hurts other members. It is this “All for one and one for all” feeling that leads group members to want, to help one another to see that they share a common goal.

- 8. Cooperation as a Value.** Cooperative as a value involves taking the feeling of “All for one and one for all” and expanding it beyond the small classroom group to encompass the whole class, the whole school, on and on, bringing increasingly greater member of people into students circle of ones with whom to cooperate.

Conclusion

Child centered learning strategy is a sure boost to English language learning. To eliminate the sole teacher dependence in learning that often encourages rote learning and memorization in classroom interaction, the use of instructional strategies such as scaffolding instructional strategies, literature and cooperative learning in English instruction should be considered in English language learning. The use of scaffolding of instructional strategies, literature circle and cooperative learning effectively in the classroom interaction will help the students to learn better and easier. They will show active participation in lessons, effective role playing and mutual interaction among students that will ensure independent and progressive learning of English language. The role of the teacher is simply that of a facilitator and a guide to the students.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends as follows:

- That classroom interaction should not be teacher based. The classroom atmosphere should be free from tension. It should be friendly and be free from teacher domineering approach.
- English language learning, and, in fact, all other classroom learning should be child centered. This will ensure the development of independent learning for the students.
- Instructional strategies such as scaffolding learning strategies, literature circle and cooperative learning strategies should be effectively and appropriately used in classroom interactions to give the students support, motivation and mutual cooperation in language learning. This ensures child centered learning and optimum language development.

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