Use of Scaffolding Instruction to Improve Students' English Continuation Task in High School

Shiyuan Long

China West Normal University,Nanchong Sichuan,637002

Abstract: Nowadays, with the reform of the national college entrance exam carried out vigorously. The continuation task for its important role in improving students' comprehensive language ability has sparked widespread debate in the field of English teaching and learning. However，educators encountered multifaceted challenges in the process of implementing the teaching of continuation task in daily educational tasks. Scaffolding instruction, for its unique role in continuation task teaching, plays an important part in improving high school students reading and writing ability. This paper first analyzes the theoretical basis for continuation writing and scaffolding instruction and then points out that currently, there is an urgent need to put forward effective solutions to the dilemma of English teachers teaching continuation tasks in classrooms as soon as possible. Moreover, this paper further analyzes the significance of using scaffolding instruction for teaching reading-to-writing continuation tasks. It can implement the cultivation of students' core competencies, nurture potential top-notch innovative talents, and provide teachers with more teaching approaches. Finally, this paper puts forward some specific teaching suggestions.

Keywords: scaffolding instruction; continuation task; English writing

1.Introduction

With the fast-paced progress of the times, the English writing task types of the national college entrance exam are undergoing significant transformations. Recently, Sichuan province has officially announced that they not only carry out a new national college entrance exam policy but also adopt the reformed exam paper in 2025. The most noticeable change in the English test paper is the writing tasks, which shifted from practical writing to a combination of practical writing and a continuation task, which requires higher language ability from students. As for teaching continuation tasks in the classroom, students find continuation tasks highly difficult, and teachers predominantly rely on traditional classroom models, leaving them at a loss for how to improve students' continuation writing ability (Yang Yang, 2023). Hence, it is essential to deal with this problem promptly and effectively.

From the current analysis, the majority of research explores the general method of teaching continuation tasks in the context of core competencies or other related settings. Therefore, this paper starts from analyzing the concept and theoretical basis of scaffolding instruction and continuation tasks, the importance of adopting scaffolding instruction on continuation tasks, and effective ways to apply scaffolding instruction on the teaching of continuation tasks in the classroom.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Continuation Task

In the 20th century, professor Wang Chuming proposed the concept of a continuation task in English learning. From the perspective of the asymmetry between language comprehension and language production, it can be argued that language learners, through the method of continuation writing, are able to closely integrate comprehension and production in an interactive manner, thereby greatly enhancing the efficiency of foreign language learning (Wang Chuming, 2012). Therefore, based on the theory of Synergy Effects, the continuation task officially walked in the language testing domain of L2 teaching (Huang Zhengcui, 2022). The basic requirements of the continuation task are that given a reading material without an ending with approximately 350 words, learners need to read, precisely comprehend story plots, and finish a short passage with approximately 150 words (National Education Examinations Authority, 2015).

The application of the continuation task in language learning and teaching is magnificent. Because students will deeply understand linguistic knowledge and enhance comprehensive language proficiency by not only forming a new paragraph but also using their creative ability to create the writing content (Wang Chuming, 2015). Therefore, how to teach continuation tasks for students becomes a highly contentious issue. And there are several reliable teaching strategies for reading continuation writing as follows. First, we need to cultivate students' reading ability and exercise their thinking quality. Second, we should strengthen their writing ability and keep refining the teaching evaluation system (Luo Xuan, 2024).

2.2 Researches on Scaffolding Instruction Both at Home and Abroad

In 1976, scaffolding was first recognized as a teaching strategy by Wood, Bruner and Ross, and they emphasized that the teacher take the role of "activators" to break up complex tasks and present them to students. This actually implies that teachers can help learners by providing scaffolding or learning structures (1976). As time passes by, the systematic theory of scaffolding instruction comes out. Vygotsky's concept of assisted learning and his concept of the sociocultural theory of development jointly make this outcome. He believes that scaffolded instruction takes place within students' zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the zone is the distance between the actual development level (mainly examined by independent problem-solving ability) and the level of potential development under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Based on its importance in English reading and writing teaching, many scholars have conducted related research on scaffolding instruction on English reading or writing teaching or on continuation tasks in the last 5 years. Liu Liushan conducted experiments with 108 students, and the result showed the implementation of scaffolding instruction in writing teaching can effectively enhance students' structural awareness, writing performance, and learning awareness (2023). Moreover, more scholars reached the same conclusion, like Li Qi, Yang Yang and so on. They all believe that scaffolding instruction is conducive to English writing teaching. Since the continuation task is adopted in English testing in China, there is little research abroad.

3.The Significance of Scaffolding Instruction on Continuation Writing Teaching

3.1 Cultivating the Key Competencies of Students

According to the General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017), the basic concept of developing core competencies in English and implementing the fundamental task of cultivating virtue and nurturing people is emphasized, and it is pointed out that the core competencies in English mainly include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability (Ministry of Education, 2020). Through adopting scaffolding instruction in the classroom, learners not only can improve their writing and reading ability but also learn how to write story plots by carefully analyzing and thinking, thereby enhancing learners' language ability and thinking quality. At the same time, learners also will realize and accept an idea that structural learning might be easier and more effective, which helps them improve learning ability. Besides, learners will encounter different cultural stands and points through discussion and idea exchange, which gradually fosters their cultural awareness.

3.2 Nurturing Outstanding Innovative Talents

In this new era, elementary education is assuming a pivotal function in cultivating outstanding innovative talents. The definition of outstanding innovative talents is that these individuals possess a strong sense of career dedication and social responsibility, have the spirit and ability for innovation, and have made significant contributions to the country's development (Yao Gang). What's more, the element of creativity can definitely be counted as a key feature of talents. Deutch points out that creativity refers to a cognitive activity, which means using a novel perspective to deal with a question or a new situation (Deutch S L, 2009). As for continuation tasks under scaffolding instruction, it requires students to integrate reading comprehension with creative writing, demanding both logical reasoning and imaginative thinking (Ding Shimei, 2024). By engaging with open-ended tasks, students

are encouraged to think divergently, and this is actually a key component to creativity. Moreover, from a long-term perspective, these students possess significant potential to become top-notch innovative talents.

3.3 Diversifying Teachers' Pedagogical Methods for Continuation Writing

In terms of problems in continuation writing teaching, there are two aspects that exist. From the aspect of teachers, their teaching methods are not scientific, and the forms and subjects of assessment are singular, which may cause inefficiency in the implementation of continuation task teaching (Jiang Fabing & Lu Zhouhuan, 2023). From the aspect of students, they are in great need of improvement in writing environment, language knowledge, writing strategies, and thinking capacity (Li Chen et al., 2024). In order to deal with the current problems in continuation tasks teaching, scaffolding teaching can actually help teachers acquire a brand new teaching method from a new standpoint. What's more, through building reading and writing scaffolds for students, it's also beneficial to help learners learn how to write and know what to write in a better way.

4.Effective Uses of Scaffolding Instruction on Continuation Writing Teaching

4.1 Provide Structured Scaffolding to Deconstruct Task Complexity

It is well-known that continuation task teaching consists of two parts, namely reading teaching and writing teaching. Therefore, we actually can separate continuation tasks teaching into two phases. Next, this paper will analyze how to provide scaffolds in the reading phase and writing phase, taking the continuation task in the 2024 New College Entrance Examination simulation papers in Sichuan Province as an example. The reading-to-writing task narrates the author's experience during a business trip in Philadelphia, where they came across an advertisement for a documentary about a local animal rescue organization. Unwilling to go out alone, the author initially planned to stay in the hotel. However, due to extreme boredom, they mustered up the courage to head to the theater to watch the documentary. Upon arriving at the theater entrance, the author encountered many big and tough-looking bikers, which made him feel extremely nervous and even regretful of coming to the theater. As a result, the author rushed into the theater in the hope of safely watching the movie.

First of all, in the reading phase, the basic measure is to break down the reading material into parts and filter the useful information. That is to say, it's essential for learners to grasp the plots, the language, and the clues. In order to achieve this, let's dive into different types of scaffolds. According to Gao Yan, the scaffolds of scaffolding teaching can be divided into 5 parts, and they are exemplar scaffolds, questioning scaffolds, tool-based scaffolds, and graphic scaffolds (2012). Therefore, we can adopt question scaffolds guided by why, where, what, who, when, where, and how to help our learners sort out the basic plots. At the same time, we break down the passage into small tasks for our learners to discover while reading. For example, in this testing, when refers to the night; where refers to a change from hotel to theater in Philadelphia; why refers to the writer loving animals and being bored; and who refers to the writer and a group of bikers. Then, how is waiting to be explored by learners?

Secondly, in the writing phase, let's focus on the two sentences in the writing part first. The sentences in paragraphs one and two: I hurried into the theater, only to find there were even more bikers inside; when the film began, I realized that the bikers were an animal rescue group. Therefore, we can provide questioning scaffolds. For instance, what feelings did I have? How did I deal with this situation? Will I sit quietly or just leave? Then, how do I find those bikers are animal lovers? What happens between bikers and the writer? What dialogue would we have? Based on these questioning scaffolds, students will quickly build structures in their minds and form up the basic outlines for the writing task. Moreover, through the teacher's guidance and peer assistance in the learning process, they will gradually figure out the clues and use appropriate language to finish the task.

Besides, teachers should also find more related reading material for students. What's more, using graphic scaffolds as voiceless guidance for our learners to practice continuation tasks on their own improves their own learning and writing consciousness. For example, we can use an information sheet for learners. In this way, they can strengthen what they've learned in the classroom and form good learning habits on their own.

4.2 Dynamically Adjust Support Through Gradual Fading of Scaffolds

The implementation of scaffolding instruction should be withdrawn according to the real situation of individuals. Digging into the essence of the zone of proximal development, it aims to help learners gain development in an area, which enables learners to achieve the goal with moderate efforts. Therefore, L2 teachers should adjust scaffolds to the real developmental status of each learner and, most importantly, withdraw them so as to cultivate independent language learners.

The gradual fading of scaffolds goes through 3 stages. They are the initial stage, intermediate stage, and final stage. In the initial stage, the teacher delivers explicit instructions and model responses to ensure task comprehension, and this usually happens in real classroom teaching. In the intermediate stage, the teacher provides fewer prompts and encourages learners to recall the basic steps for continuation writing. Then prompt learners to summarize and form their own understanding and steps for continuation writing. Finally, for the final stage, teachers remove scaffolds entirely and require learners to complete continuation writing independently. This stage usually existed in the final stage for the college entrance exam.

4.3 Foster Deep Learning Through Interactive Feedback Mechanisms

In China, He Ling and Li Jiahou first defined the concept of deep learning, which pointed out that deep learning refers to learners' ability to critically learn new ideas and thoughts and integrate them into original cognitive structures based on the understanding and be able to transfer existing knowledge to new situations, make decisions, and solve problems (2005). Thereby, after learners receive the scaffolding learning, the feedback is also critical for teachers to construct carefully. So, the combinative use of peer feedback and teacher feedback is useful. For peer feedback, teachers can provide scaffolds for discussion. Teachers can provide a table with sequenced questions with scores from 1 to 5, like, "Does the story contain basic logical plots? At the same time, encouraging learners to give their own detailed suggestions and give specific rectification advice within charts or lists. On the other side, as for teacher feedback, exemplar scaffolds can be given. That is to say, the teacher can choose a perfect writing example for learners to learn from it. At the same time, specific grading criteria for continuation tasks should be given so that they can estimate their own degree of completion. What's more, giving personalized scaffolds can help different learners improve their writing ability and language competence from different angles.

5.Conclusion

In a word, the use of scaffolding instruction plays an important role in promoting English continuation tasks teaching and is an important way to cultivate the core competencies of students. Moreover, this approach also provides teachers with diverse instructional methods while contributing to cultivating top innovative talents in China. Based on the theory analysis of continuation tasks and scaffolding instruction, this paper focuses on solving the problem of real continuation tasks teaching and provides a few useful teaching strategies and techniques for teaching continuation tasks, which involves providing structured scaffolds to break down complex tasks, gradually withdraw scaffolds accordingly, and employing interactive feedbacks through different kinds of scaffolds. However, this paper only discusses three aspects of teaching continuation tasks using scaffolding instruction. More systematic and scientific research on continuation writing using scaffolding instruction is encouraged in the near future.

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