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Original Research Article

Reading Comprehension Skills through Scaffolding Strategies of Grade 7 Students

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Abstract: Reading is basic to all learning, both in learning in general and in acquisition of languages. This one-group quasi-experimental action research determined the effects of Scaffolding Strategies in the level of reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 Students of a national high school in Zambales, Philippines. The study involved a total of forty-four students. A pretest/posttest served as the main instrument used to measure the students' reading comprehension skills in terms of making predictions, getting the meaning through context clues, determining text importance, making inferences, and making connections. Results revealed that the level of reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 students before the application of Scaffolding Strategies is Approaching Proficiency. Students belong to Approaching Proficiency level in making predictions while they are developing in terms of making inferences, making connections, determining text importance, and getting the meaning through context clues. The level of reading comprehension skills of the students after their exposure in the Scaffolding Strategies is still Approaching Proficiency level but with higher mean score. The students are Approaching Proficiency in terms of making predictions, making inferences and getting the meaning through context clues. The study concludes that there is a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of the students before and after their exposure on the Scaffolding Strategies. Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers may continue to innovate and customize different scaffolding strategies to keep abreast with the emerging trends in English teaching towards better reading comprehension among the students.

Keywords: Action research, English instruction, language teaching, reading comprehension, scaffolding strategies, Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is basic to all learning, both in learning in general and in acquisition of languages. Society is highly dependent on knowledge and information. There is a constant overflow of information from numerous sources (Braten & Stromso 2007:168). It is vital to be able to navigate in these sources and search out what is needed. This requires multiple skills, as the ability to navigate in the text overflow, to read multi-medially, digitally, and intertextually, in addition to the mere comprehension of the written text and its words, phrases, structure, and genres. In a knowledge society, it is necessary to acquire the ability to understand, integrate, and combine information from multiple sources (ibid).

Alderson (2000) states that reading is built from two components: word recognition and comprehension. These two components gained through reading will foster learners' language competence. Reading comprehension is generally the main goal of reading and it is critical for both academic and lifelong learning. It can be defined as the intentional thinking that occurs when readers actively engage in and reflect on text that they have read in order to extract meaning that makes sense to them (Cain, 2010; Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000).

Previously when reading comprehension instruction was vaguely understood, it was widely assumed that it was linked to intelligence and it would develop naturally once word reading skills were consolidated so specific instruction in it was unnecessary (Block and Lacina, 2009). With the extensive research conducted within the specific area of

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reading comprehension instruction and how to teach it in the recent years (Duke and Pearson, 2002), there is now a growing awareness of the need to provide reading comprehension instruction distinct from instruction in word reading skills.

In the Philippines, under the DepEd K-12 Curriculum Guide (CG) the Reading Comprehension has the following components: 1. schema and prior knowledge; 2. Strategies; 3. narrative text; and 4. informational text. This K-12 CG also outlines the different Key Stage Standards which are the actual expectations for every curriculum levels in the basic education. Grade 7 up to Grade 10 students are expected as of the following: Students should be able to interpret, evaluate and represent information within and between learning area texts and discourses.

Current reading research shows that several key factors impede a student's reading comprehension: the ability to process the individual sounds of letters, which is needed for word recognition; poor phonological information; poor working memory; low prior knowledge; lose interest and disengage from reading. This calls for effective reading comprehension strategies for students and other related interventions. Reading comprehension is increased when strategies are explicitly taught and used by the student during reading (Coyne *et al*., 2009).

The scaffolding strategy is one of the latest trends in developing reading comprehension. Scaffolding is used to bridge between students' independent and supported operating levels. Scaffolding is temporarily provided and it is gradually removed bit by bit as the learners become more competent independently (Yu, 2004 & Cameron, 2001). Scaffolding can be provided by experts as well as more experienced people around the student; teachers, parents, and even peers at the same class. Guidance and collaboration with a more knowledgeable person causes movement of learners from a lower level to a higher level. Well-constructed scaffolds optimize student learning, provide a supportive environment as well as facilitating student independence.

One of the main benefits of scaffolded instruction is that it provides for a supportive learning environment. In a scaffolded learning environment, students are free to ask questions, provide feedback and support their peers in learning new material. When you incorporate scaffolding in the classroom, you become more of a mentor and facilitator of knowledge rather than the dominant content expert. This teaching style provides the incentive for students to take a more active role in their own learning. Students share the responsibility of teaching and learning through scaffolds that require them to move beyond their current skill and knowledge levels. Through this interaction, students are able to take ownership of the learning event.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to improve the level of reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 Students of a national high school in Zambales, Philippines.

Reading

Reading is an interactive process in which reader's prior knowledge of the subject and the purpose for reading operate to influence what is learned from text (Ifrianti, 2008). Moreover, according to Johnstone and King (2006), reading is decoding and understanding text. Readers decode written text by translating text to speech, and translating directly to meaning. It can be stated that reading is a process in decoding and understanding written texts in which reader's prior knowledge of the subject operate to influence what is learned from the text. Furthermore, Harmer states that reading is useful for language acquisition. Provided that the students more or less understand what they read, the more they read, the better they get at it (Harmer, 2007).

In addition Patel and Jain (2008) state that reading is an important activity in life with which one can update his/her knowledge. It means that reading has usefulness for providing more understanding in subject learning and it has important part in life which can update her/his knowledge.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is defined as the level of understanding of a text/message. This understanding comes from the interaction between the words that are written and how they trigger knowledge outside the text/message. Comprehension is a creative, multifaceted process dependent upon four language skills: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Proficient reading depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. It is also determined by an individual's cognitive development, which is the construction of thought processes. Some people learn through education or instruction and others through direct experiences. There are specific traits that determine how successfully an individual will comprehend text, including prior knowledge about the subject, well developed language, and the ability to make inferences.

Reading Comprehension involves a variety of skills. Munby (1985) has identified the following as sub-skills of reading comprehension; recognize the script of language; reducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items; understanding information explicitly stated; understanding conceptual meaning; understanding the communicative value of sentences and utterances; understanding relations within the sentence; understanding relations between the parts of a

text through lexical cohesion devices; interpreting text by going outside it; recognizing indicators on discourse; identifying the main points or important information in a place of discourse; distinguishing the main idea from the supporting details; extracting salient points to summarize; selective extraction of relevant points from a text; using basic reference skills-understanding and use of graphic presentation, cross referencing; using skimming (glancing rapidly through a text to find out its general content, central idea(s), or gist) for main ideas; using scanning (darting over a text to search for a specific item of information desired, passing over irrelevant information) to locate specifically required information.

Scaffolding Strategy

Scaffolding strategy refers to supporting students to certain extent until the degree of acquiring new skills in an individual basis (Rosenshine & Meister, 1992; Larkin, 2002). Logically, students' academic performance when guided to some extent by teachers excels compared to those without supervision. Scaffolding strategies are undeniably excellent way to guide students in learning high-order thinking skills.

In other words, it is the process of temporarily providing support to a learner within a social context and then gradually withdrawing this support as the learner becomes capable of independence in performing tasks and children could accomplish the task at a higher level. Just like building workers in under construction, they need scaffolds to help them to do certain tasks and to reach high places. Hence, scaffolds are temporary, used to achieve certain tasks then they should be removed.

Instructional Scaffolding is the means by which support is provided and adjusted, and it serves the function of 'facilitating the collaboration necessary between the novice and the expert for the novice to acquire the cognitive strategy or strategies' (Palincsar, 1986). Most teachers have used scaffolding activities in the classroom in one or more ways. Research suggests that providing assistance and support to students through instructional scaffolding optimizes student learning. It is similar to the scaffolding used in construction to support workers as they work on specific tasks (Huggins & Edwards, 2011).

Jumaat and Tasir (2014) define instructional scaffolding as a guidance or support from teachers, instructors or other knowledgeable persons that facilitate students to achieve their goals in learning. Conceptually, scaffolding means providing students with instructions during the early stage of learning before slowly shifting the responsibility to them as they develop their own understanding and skills.

Sawyer (2006) defines instructional scaffolding as a learning process designed to promote a deeper level of learning. Scaffolding is the support given during the learning process which is tailored to the needs of the student with the intention of helping the student achieves his/her learning goals.

Scaffolding Strategies

Scaffolding through Modelling and Think-Aloud. Think-aloud method is an instructional approach in which a teacher models comprehension strategies for students by verbally explaining the thinking process in order to make particular connections, predicting, drawing inferences etc. (Smith, 2006; Walqui, 2006). Therefore, teacher's speech and external thinking are both effective scaffolding tools in teaching that would support students in better comprehension in reading sessions.

Safadi and Rababah, (2012) suggests that modelling thinking aloud processes are appealing to students and promote interaction in classrooms. Additionally, Obeid, (2010) argues that the use of think-aloud techniques help students acquire a wide variety of strategies which enhances their understanding before, during, and after the reading task and helps them overcome difficulties.

Scaffolding through Activating Prior Knowledge. When encountering a text in a different language, students need to employ their schemata (prior knowledge) to acknowledge what they have read and fit it into what they already know (Harmer, 2001). Cummins (2009) argue that "prior knowledge is the foundation of learning" (p. 1), for it facilitates learning and helps students apprehend L2 through decreasing the "cognitive load of the text".

Activating prior knowledge can be done in many ways i.e., the use of visuals, make cultural and personal connections, ask students to predict etc. However, Al-Thiyabi & AlBargi (2015) argue that although utilizing students' background knowledge is a very effective scaffolding strategy, yet, ELI instructors in EFL classrooms rarely use it. Therefore, there is an urge to enlighten teachers with the importance of implementing such strategy to facilitate the reading texts.

Scaffolding Through the Use of Bridging and Building Connections. Bridging helps students link between what they read in text and their lives and it has a significant facilitating role on reading comprehension (Chi, 2007). This connection building is achieved in several ways; through encouraging students to connect their own experience in certain situation or to what they have learned from another different subject.

Thus, it is important for student to realize that what they read is not just only words but are feelings written by other people just like them and that they can

benefit and learn from what they read (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2005; Graves & Graves & Braaten, 1996).
Scaffolding Through the Use of Visualizing

Visualizing or "Mental Imagery" as described by Schirmer and McGough (2005) as a strategy that relies on forming mental images while reading. It involves "asking readers to construct a visual or spatial representation of what they are reading" (p.103). It can be used before, while, and/or after reading and it has proven to be a useful strategy in improving reading comprehension with EFL/ESL learners (Erfani, Iranmehr, & Davari, 2011). Ghazanfari (2011) believes that visualizations play a great role in improving reading comprehension and students should be supported to utilize such strategy.

Scaffolding Through the Use of Graphic Organizers. Graphic organizers are learning tools that aid "students in their attempts to establish relevant connections regarding the acquisition of knowledge" (Gil-García & Villegas, 2003, p.2). They are used to support students in predicting, organizing their ideas and information, recalling information, expanding their knowledge, comparing their background knowledge to information provided in the learning material, and better understanding their reading texts (Acosta & Ferri, 2010). There are many types of graphic organizers for example: hierarchical, conceptual, sequential, evaluative, relational, and cyclical (Gil-García & Villegas, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The study used Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as theoretical les of the study. Constructivists believe learners create meaning by building upon previous experiences. The acquisition of knowledge is a learner-centered, hands-on process where students construct new ideas or concepts and fit those ideas and concepts into their existing knowledge (Schuh & Barab, 2008). Hands-on exploration of the learning environment and its materials through problem solving as well as opportunities for creative expression are keys to learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). Constructivists posit that the learner constructs knowledge rather than passively absorbing it (Katz, 1996).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) views on language learning provide a psycholinguistic explanation of the sociocultural circumstances and processes through which pedagogy can foster learning that leads to language development (Nassaji & Cumming, 2000). The basic theme of the Vygotskian theory is that learning takes place in social settings, Vygotsky was more interested in the learning potential that a child might have and what the child might accomplish with the guidance of adults or older peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Perhaps Vygotsky's most influential ideas are those related to zones of development. What a child can do alone and unassisted is a task that lies in what Vygotsky calls the zone of actual development (ZAD). When a teacher assigns a task and the students are able to do it, the task is within the ZAD.

In Vygotsky's words, "what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 211). Thus he made mental testing a more collaborative, guided experience instead of the solitary, individual performance it had hitherto been. He conducted rigorous experimental studies that showed clear evidence that his ZPD-based testing was a better predictor of success than the traditional individual test.

Vygotsky extended the concept of the ZPD to pedagogical activity. He argued that to understand the relationship between development and learning, two developmental levels must be distinguished: the actual and the potential levels of development. The actual refers to those accomplishments a child can demonstrate alone or perform independently; in contrast to potential levels of development as suggested by the ZPD—what children can do with assistance. Vygotsky defines zone of proximal development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, P. 86).

Another theoretical lens used in the study is Bruner's theory. This theory of scaffolding emerged around 1976 as a part of social constructivist theory, and was particularly influenced by the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky argued that we learn best in a social environment, where we construct meaning through interaction with others. His Zone of Proximal Development theory, where we can learn more in the presence of a knowledgeable other person, became the template for Bruner's model. Bruner believed that when children start to learn new concepts, they need help from teachers and other adults in the form of active support.

To begin with, they are dependent on their adult support, but as they become more independent in their thinking and acquire new skills and knowledge, the support can be gradually faded. This form of structured interaction between the child and the adult is reminiscent of the scaffolding that supports the construction of a building. It is gradually dismantled as the work is completed. In a very specific way, scaffolding represents a reduction in the many choices a child might face, so that they become focused only on acquiring the skill or knowledge that is required. The simplistic elegance of Bruner's theory means that

scaffolding can be applied across all sectors, for all ages and for all topics of learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The researcher used the one-group quasi-experimental research design for it tested the causal hypotheses of this study. Dinardo, J. (2008) defines quasi-experimental study as a kind of research which shares similarities with the traditional experimental design or randomized controlled trial, but it specifically lacks the element of random assignment to treatment or control. Instead, quasi-experimental designs typically allow the researcher to control the assignment to the treatment condition, but using some criterion other than random assignment.

A quasi-experimental study is a type of evaluation which aims to determine whether a program or intervention has the intended effect on a study's participants. It includes a pre-post test design in both treatment group and control group. Quasi-experimental studies are often an impact evaluation that assigns members to the treatment group and control group by a method other than random assignment.

Shadish *et al*., (2002) further noted that in the quasi-experimental designs, the program or policy is viewed as an 'intervention' in which a treatment comprising the elements of the program or policy being evaluated is tested for how well it achieves its objectives, as measured by a specified indicators.

2.2 Respondents and Location of the Study

The research was conducted in a national high school in the Schools Division of Zambales, Philippines. The study involved a total of 44 Grade 7 students taken from Thomson class age ranging from 12-15 years old. Pre-test was used to assess the reading comprehension level of the class. The study is used to estimate the causal impact of the intervention which involves selecting groups without any random pre-selection processes.

2.3 Instruments

Pre- test/ Posttest

In order to gather a reliable and valid data, the researcher used pre/ post test to determine the effectiveness of Scaffolding Strategies in improving the level of reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 students' in English subject.

The respondents' level of reading comprehension skills was determined using the 50-item test adapted from National Achievement Test. The raw scores were tabulated and grouped into five (5) descriptive ratings: Advanced (41-50), Proficient (31-40), Approaching Proficiency (21-30), Developing (11-20), Beginning (0-10).

The 10-item test for each reading comprehension skills: a. making predictions, b. getting the meaning through context clues, c. determine text importance, d. making inferences, e. making connections was tabulated and grouped into descriptive ratings: Advanced (9-10), Proficient (7-8), Approaching Proficiency (5-6), Developing (3-4), Beginning (0-2).

2.4 Data Collection

The researcher sought an approval from the Schools Division Superintendent and coordinated to the school principal. Upon the receipt of the approval, the researcher then conducted the study. The researcher identified the class where the intervention was implemented. A 50-item diagnostic test (Pre-test) adapted from the National Achievement Test was administered before the start of the quarter to determine the comprehension level of the students. There were ten items for each reading comprehension skill: making predictions, getting the meaning through context clues, determine text importance, making inferences and making connections.

The class was exposed to the use of scaffolding strategies namely; modelling and think-aloud, activating prior knowledge, use of visualizing, use of bridging and building connections and the use of graphic organizers. These strategies were integrated in lessons to optimize students' learning, provide a supportive learning environment as well as facilitating students' independence.

After the application of the strategies, the post-test was administered. The results of the pre-test and posttest were compared to determine the effectiveness of the strategies. Validity was ensured. There is no question on the validity of the research instruments and tools since these are already validated, standardized and nationally used.

2.5 Data Analysis

The results of students' pre-test and post-test were analyzed using the SPSS software. Statistical tools such as frequency and percent distribution, weighted mean, paired t-test, and standard deviation were utilized.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Level of Students' Reading Comprehension Skills before the Application of Scaffolding Strategies

Pre-test results determined the level of students' reading comprehension prior to the application of the Scaffolding Strategies (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Pre-test Scores

Pretest Scores	Frequency	Percent	Verbal Description
31-40	2	4.55	Proficient
21-30	18	40.91	Approaching Proficiency
11-20	22	50.00	Developing
1-10	2	4.55	Beginning
Total	**44**	**100.0**	**M = 20.73 (AP); SD = 5.85**

As gleaned from Table 1, the pre-test result of the students showed that the class belonged to Approaching Proficiency level in terms of reading comprehension skills as revealed by the weighted mean of 20.73 (SD=5.85). The test scores came majority between the score bracket of11 to 20 out of the 50-item diagnostic test. This connotes that majority of the students perform fairly satisfactory in reading comprehension. Only few students belong to the Beginning (2, 4.55%) and Proficient (2, 4.55%) levels. It can be noted that none of the students belong to the Advanced level prior to the intervention.

Before the intervention, the reading comprehension skills of the class is approaching proficiency. Hence, the researcher used an intervention in order to enhance the students' reading comprehension skills. To communicate efficiently, learners need the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but of all these four skills, reading is regarded as the most vital and necessary for students in both a classroom context and an extracurricular environment (Carrell, 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Reading comprehension is specifically, the basic goal for students to gain an understanding of the world and of themselves, enabling them to think about and react to what they read (Tierney, 2005). Yuko (2009) stressed that learners have difficulty achieving academically without comprehending much of what is written in the reading material.

The findings negate the study of Rodgers and Rodgers (2004) which noted that although the issue of early grade reading instruction has been an important part of research on reading skills and strategies, it was overlooked in favor of secondary school reading search. Hence, it could be argued that improving primary level students' poor reading comprehension in the English language had not been duly considered or taken care of.

To determine the level of reading comprehension of the students in terms of the different sub-skills, the means and standard deviations of the different sub-skills were computed (Table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Pre-test Scores per Sub-Skill

Sub-Skill	Items	Mean Score	sd	VD
Making predictions	10	4.66	1.31	AP
Making connections	10	4.05	1.43	D
Determining text importance	10	3.91	2.04	D
Getting the meaning through context clues	10	3.66	2.13	D
Making inferences	10	4.45	1.76	D

Legend: 9-10 (A-Advanced); 7-8 (P-Proficient); 5-6 (AP-Approaching Proficiency); 3-4 (D-Developing); 1-2 (B-Beginning)

As reflected from table 2, the students' level of reading comprehension in the different sub-skills is Developing. In particular, the highest mean is making predictions (M=4.66, SD=1.31) followed by making inferences (M=4.45, SD=1.76), making connections (M=4.05, SD=1.43), determining text importance (M=3.91, SD=2.04); and getting the meaning through context clues (M=3.66, SD=2.13).

Prior to the treatment, the students perform developing on the different sub-skills of reading comprehension. The most mastered skill is making predictions and the least mastered is getting the meaning though context clues. This confirms the study of Scharlach (2008) that teachers often lament that their students can read but they do not understand. The most important thing about reading is comprehension. It is the reason that we read. However, many teachers express concern about their ability to effectively teach all of their students to become strategic metacognitive readers.

In practice, good readers activate prior knowledge; constantly evaluate whether their reading goals are being met; frequently formulate predictions and make inferences; and read selectively (National Reading Panel, 2000). This contravene the findings of Hilden and Pressley (2007) that teachers often struggle with teaching reading comprehension strategies due to the complexity of designing purposeful comprehension strategy instruction, and many reading comprehension programs are overwhelming in terms of time to learn and requirements for implementation.

3.2 Level of Students' Reading Comprehension Skills after the Application of Scaffolding Strategies

The level of reading comprehension skills of the class was determined after their exposure to the treatment. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the students' scores in posttest.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Post-test Scores

Post-test Scores	Frequency	Percent	Verbal Description
41-50	1	2.27	Advanced
31-40	11	25.00	Proficient
21-30	30	68.18	Approaching Proficiency
11-20	2	4.55	Developing
Total	**44**	**100.0**	**M = 28.27 (AP); SD = 5.31**

As shown from Table 3, the post-test result of students showed that the class still belonged to Approaching Proficiency level in terms of reading comprehension skills but with higher mean score as revealed by the weighted mean of 28.27 (SD=5.31). The test scores came majority between the score bracket of 21 to 30 out of the 50-item achievement test. This indicates that majority of the students perform in approaching proficiency in terms of reading comprehension. Only few students belong to the Developing (2, 4.55%) levels and there is one student (2.27%) who belonged to Advanced level. It can be noted that none of the students belongs to the Beginning level after the intervention. The descriptive statistics show that there is an improvement among the students in terms of reading comprehension.

This corroborates the findings of Lantolf and Thorne (2006) which emphasize that students better learn subjects and reading comprehension with the help of capable adults, parents, teachers or peers. In this theory, therefore, scaffolding is a prerequisite for reading development to take place appropriately. Scaffolding reading strategies is recommended as having a facilitative role when it is connected and practiced with reading comprehension. So, the relationship between teacher scaffolding reading strategies and student reading comprehension in primary reading classrooms has increasingly attracted attention of reading experts in recent years (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004; National Reading Panel, 2000).

However, the findings refute the study of Mijena (2014) which examines the practices and challenges in teaching of English to young learners in selected ten first cycle (Grades 1-4) public primary schools in Ethiopia. He discloses that teachers used to teach in students' mother tongue dominantly because of their poor command of the English language. Teachers' low capacity in the English language was attributed to lack of the necessary pre- and in-service professional development courses, which implies the necessity of teacher training on scaffolding strategies.

Moreover, Gemechis (2014), in his investigation of whether or not teachers employed an effective reading techniques and how the students accessed reading materials in some selected second cycle primary school (5-8) of Oromia region, Ethiopia, has also found out that the most serious problems identified in teaching reading were the less applicability of appropriate reading techniques by teachers and lack of relevant reading materials for students.

To determine the level of reading comprehension of the students in terms of the different sub-skills after the treatment, the means and standard deviations of the different sub-skills were computed (Table 4).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Post-test Scores per Sub-Skill

Sub-Skill	Items	Mean Score	SD	VD
Making predictions	10	5.82	1.81	AP
Making connections	10	5.52	1.42	AP
Determining text importance	10	5.48	1.70	AP
Getting the meaning through context clues	10	5.68	1.94	AP
Making inferences	10	5.77	1.59	AP

Legend: 9-10 (A-Advanced); 7-8 (P-Proficient); 5-6 (AP-Approaching Proficiency); 3-4 (D-Developing); 1-2 (B-Beginning)

As reflected from table 4, the students' level of reading comprehension in the different sub-skills is Approaching Proficiency. In particular, the highest mean is making predictions (M=5.82, SD=1.81) followed by making inferences (M=5.77, SD=1.59), getting the meaning through context clues (M=5.68, SD=1.94), making connections (M=5.52, SD=1.42), and determining text importance (M=5.48, SD=1.70).

After the treatment, the students perform approaching proficiency on the different sub-skills of reading comprehension. The most mastered skill is making predictions and the least mastered is determining the text importance. This is in line with the study of several authors (e.g., Boblett, 2012; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Hogan & Pressley, 1997) that scaffolding is a temporary instructional supports that teachers provide to assist learners, or learners provide to each other, such as explanations and word glosses.

This assistance helps learners to accomplish tasks or comprehend concepts which they cannot typically achieve on their own. As students become able to complete the tasks or understand the concepts on their own, the scaffolding is gradually removed. Researchers have concluded that comprehension strategies should be taught to students as they are immersed in reading rather than separate from reading (Block *et al*., 2002; Keene & Zimmermann, 1997; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992; Pressley, 2002).

To easily see the improvement in terms of reading comprehension, results of the students' pre-test and post-test were compared in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Scores	Pretest		Post-test		Verbal Description
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
41-50	0	0.00	1	2.27	Advanced
31-40	2	4.55	11	25.00	Proficient
21-30	18	40.91	30	68.18	Approaching Proficiency
11-20	22	50.00	2	4.55	Developing
1-10	2	4.55	0	0.00	Beginning
Total	**44**	**100.0**	**44**	**100.0**	
	Pretest: M = 20.73 (AP); SD = 5.85		**Post-test: M = 28.27 (AP); SD = 5.31**		

It can be observed that there was an improvement on the students' reading comprehension after the implementation of the intervention. The mean of the reading comprehension test increased from 20.73 to 28.57 yielding 7.55 points increase.

It can be noted that from 18 students in the pretest, a total of 30 students belonged to the Approaching Proficiency level after the intervention. A total of 11 students reached the Proficient level compared to the 2 students in the pre-intervention. It is also notable that one student attained Advanced level based from the post-test results. This implies that majority of the students have improved in their reading comprehension using the Scaffolding Strategies based from the comparison table.

Pressley (2002) cited that researchers have often neglected the average and advanced readers by focusing on how to improve the reading achievement of struggling readers. Certainly, everyone would agree that improving reading achievement for struggling readers is of the utmost importance. However, we must remember that we are responsible for improving the reading achievement of all of our students. It is an incredible challenge for teachers to attempt to meet the needs of all the students in a classroom.

The findings contravene the study of (Hilden & Pressley, 2007) that teachers often struggle with teaching reading comprehension strategies due to the complexity of designing purposeful comprehension strategy instruction, and many reading comprehension programs are overwhelming in terms of time to learn and requirements for implementation.

To easily compare the level of reading comprehension of the students in terms of the different sub-skills, a summary table is presented (Table 6).

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Pre-test and Post-test Scores per Sub-Skill

Sub-Skill	Mean Score	VD	Mean Score	VD	Mean Difference
Making predictions	4.66	AP	5.82	AP	1.16
Making connections	4.05	D	5.52	AP	0.95
Determining text importance	3.91	D	5.48	AP	1.57
Getting the meaning through context clues	3.66	D	5.68	AP	2.02
Making inferences	4.45	D	5.77	AP	1.32

Legend: 9-10 (A-Advanced); 7-8 (P-Proficient); 5-6 (AP-Approaching Proficiency); 3-4 (D-Developing); 1-2 (B-Beginning)

As shown from table 6, the most improved sub-skill of reading comprehension among the students is on getting the meaning through context clues with 2.02 mean difference between pretest and post-test. The students have also improved in terms of determining text importance with 1.57 gain score from the pretest

score of 3.91 to post-test score of 5.48. The least improvement was on the making connections with 0.95 gain score. This implies that students need to develop their skill in connecting what they read to real-world applications.

This conforms the study of Enyew and Yigzaw (2015) which indicated that the students' responses during each lesson indicated that students have demonstrated gradual and steady improvement in passage reading comprehension.

This finding is likewise consistent with previous studies, which pointed out the use of teacher scaffolding reading strategy instruction has resulted in an increased reading comprehension skill of the students (Butler, 2007; Dawit, 2014; Karimi and Jallivand, 2014; Kim and White, 2008).

3.3 Difference on the Level of Students' Reading Comprehension Skills before and after the use of Scaffolding Strategies

To measure the significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of the students before and after the treatment, a t-test for paired samples is presented in Table 7.

Using the t-test for paired samples, the class obtained an overall gain score of 7.55 from the 28.27 and 20.73 mean scores of the posttest and pretest, respectively. The t-value obtained was 10.437 and the p-value was 0.000. This means that there is a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of the students before and after their exposure on the Scaffolding Strategies.

Table 7: Paired Samples T-test of the Pretest and Posttest Mean Gain in the Reading Comprehension Test

Sub-skill	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain Score	*t*-value	*p*-value	Remarks
Making predictions	4.66	5.82	1.16	3.759	0.000	Significant
Making connections	4.05	5.00	0.95	4.379	0.000	Significant
Determining text importance	3.91	5.78	1.57	5.447	0.001	Significant
Getting the meaning through context clues	3.66	5.69	2.02	6.176	0.000	Significant
Making inferences	4.45	5.77	1.32	4.209	0.000	Significant
Overall	**20.73**	**28.27**	**7.55**	**10.437**	**0.000**	**Significant**

*$p<0.05$ *equal variances assumed*

It can also be noted that there exists significant differences in the pretest and posttest mean scores in the different sub-skills. However, there are higher mean gain scores in making predictions, determining text importance, getting the meaning through context clues and making inferences. This means that the use of Scaffolding Strategies like Modelling and Think-Aloud, Activating Prior Knowledge, Use of Visualizing, Use of Bridging and Building Connections and the Use of Graphic Organizers improves students' achievement.

The results disclosed that there were significant improvements in the students' reading comprehension scores after the intervention. The finding is consistent with Dawit's (2014) and Kim and White's (2008) results which show the students in the intervention with explicit teacher and parent scaffolding reading strategies demonstrated consistent improvement on reading passage comprehension.

Good readers are active and use a variety of strategies as they read (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). Direct instruction in comprehension strategies includes teacher modeling and explaining when and how to use the strategies, repeated opportunities for guided practice, and extended independent reading (Guthrie, 2002).

The idea of scaffolding instruction as a teaching strategy originates from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Although comprehension improves through extensive reading, researchers have concluded that comprehension could improve more if all readers were taught to use the comprehension strategies that good readers use (Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002).

Previous research has shown that when a teacher creates learning environments that enable reading engagement to be continuous and conforming to students' level, their reading comprehension increases (AIR, 2012; Dawit, 2014; Karimi and Jallivand, 2014; Kim and White, 2008).

In scaffolding instruction, a teacher provides scaffolds or supports to facilitate students' ability to build on prior knowledge and internalize new information. An important aspect of scaffolding instruction is that the scaffolds are temporary. As the learner's abilities increase, the scaffolding is progressively withdrawn until the learner is able to complete the task independently. Therefore, the goal for teachers is to help students to become independent and self-regulated learners (Scharlach, 2008).

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that before the intervention, the level of reading comprehension skills of Grade 7 students is approaching proficiency. The

students belong to approaching proficiency level in making predictions while they are developing in terms of making inferences, making connections, determining text importance, and getting the meaning through context clues. After exposure to Scaffolding Strategies, the level of reading comprehension skills of the students is still approaching proficiency but with higher mean score. Students approaches proficiency in terms of making predictions, making inferences, getting the meaning through context clues, making connections, and determining text importance. There is a significant difference in the reading comprehension skills of the students before and after their exposure on the Scaffolding Strategies.

The study recommends that since the least mastered skills of reading comprehension are getting the meaning through context clues, making connections, and determining text importance, this can be highlighted more in the intervention proper. The teachers may design task-based activities that could strengthen these least learned sub-skills. Since the use of scaffolding strategies (i.e. modelling and think-aloud, activating prior knowledge, use of visualizing, use of bridging and building connections and the use of graphic organizers) enhance the students' skill in making predictions and inferences, the teachers may be given training-workshop which focuses on the appropriate and effective utilization of such strategies in improving students' reading comprehension skills and later help students to become independent and self-regulated learners. Since the intervention was found to be effective, teachers may continue to innovate and customize different scaffolding strategies to keep abreast with the merging trends in English teaching towards better reading comprehension among the students. Since scaffolding strategies are integrated in the lesson exemplars, teachers may use these to improve students' reading comprehension and higher order thinking skills. Further studies may be conducted to validate the results of this quasi-experimental research.

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