

# The Application of Unit Theme Scaffolding in Junior High School English Reading Teaching

Sisi Chen, Hong Yun

College of foreign languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, Zigong 643000, China

## Abstract

The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education of 2022 has raised the teaching of English reading to a new level. One of the English teachers' main goals is to improve learners' English in-depth reading ability effectively. In this paper, through the research of domestic and foreign literature in recent years, it is found that the application of unit theme scaffolding can integrate the knowledge of the unit, build a complete knowledge structure for learners and guide learners to read deeply. There is a result that it can cultivate learners' core literacy and reflect the educating value of English subjects.

## Keywords

Unit Theme Scaffolding; Junior High School; English Reading Teaching.

## 1. Introduction

The language skills in English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022-year Edition) require that the cumulative reading volume outside the classroom in junior high school should reach more than 150,000 words. Reading is the main line to train learners to improve their comprehension skills. As a language subject, reading plays an important role to improve English learners' learning ability. Through reading texts on different topics, we can understand the information and meaning of texts, perceive the connotation of excellent cultures and have correct values. We can also develop healthy aesthetic tastes and good characters, so as to cultivate the core literacy of learners and reflect the education of English subjects' human value. (Ministry of Education, 2022) The ancients said: Books are the ladder of human progress, and reading promotes the formation of human higher-order thinking. In the new curriculum standard, we can see that the state attaches great importance to learners' reading abilities. While reading ability is improved, core literacy has also been developed, which is in line with the requirements of our new curriculum standard for learners. How to improve learners' reading ability and cultivate learners' reading skills in English teaching in junior high schools are problems worthy of our research.

## 2. The Present Situation of English Reading Teaching in Junior Middle Schools

The survey shows that in the teaching of English reading in junior high school, in most cases, the English reading passages selected by teachers are out of the real life of the learners. Learners cannot resonate in reading, so they lack in-depth understanding and thinking about the theme and meaning expressed in the reading passages, and it is difficult to develop the habit of in-depth reading. The traditional way of teaching reading: Teachers translating passages, analyzing sentences' grammatical structures, dismembering discourse, etc, they will destroy the integrity of reading passages, teachers use "doing excessive assignments" to improve learners' reading scores, and use reading scores to evaluate learners' reading ability. In this way,

teachers ignore the cultivation of learners' reading thinking. It is difficult to develop learners' core literacy, and the value of educating people in English teaching is difficult to reflect. This is contrary to the core literacy and educating values mentioned in the English curriculum standards. However, the emergence of scaffolding theory has brought teachers' teaching and learners' learning to a scientific level.

### **3. Scaffolding Theoretical Basis**

#### **3.1. Constructivist Theory**

Contemporary constructivists argue that learning is a process in which learners actively construct internal mental representations. On the one hand, construction is the construction of the meaning of new information, and at the same time it includes the transformation and reorganization of the original experience. (Kong Yanping, 2009) Piaget brought constructivism to the field of education and made great contributions to the world education. According to the constructivists' view of knowledge, knowledge is not passively received, but actively constructed by the cognitive subject; The constructivists' view of learning believes that, the essence of learning is the change of cognitive structure, promote the reorganization and development of cognitive structures through the continuous cycle of assimilation and adaptation; The constructivists' view of students emphasizes learner-centered, based on the experience of the learner as the starting point of teaching, to guide learners to learn new knowledge concepts on the basis of original knowledge; The constructivists' view of teaching holds that, teaching activities should be placed in real situations, construct new knowledge in real situations. Teaching activities are designed to place learners in the "zone of proximal development".

#### **3.2. Zone of Proximal Development**

In 1930s, Russian psychologist and philosopher L.S. Vygotsky put forward the theory of "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD). ZPD refers to the distance between the learner's actual development level and the level of potential development that will be achieved. (Zhang Guorong, 2004) Vygotsky believes that identify at least two developmental levels of the learner. The first level is the actual level of development. The second level refers to learners who cannot solve problems independently at the current stage of their development, but can reach the level of problem-solving with the help of adults and peers' guidance and cooperation or other relevant knowledge. The difference between these two levels determines the zone of proximal development of learners' psychological development. (Vygotsky, 1978) The proposal of the zone of proximal development theory makes educators pay more attention to how to build a scaffold in teaching for learners to reach new cognitive heights through the zone of proximal development.

#### **3.3. Social Construction Theory**

Vygotsky's social construction theory believes that knowledge is formed in social interaction and construction, learning is a process of meaning construction, social construction theory encourage and allow for diverse voices. Only in the dialogue, collision and impact of diverse viewpoints can the self, organization, community and society be constantly updated and even transformed. (Mao Ju, 2017) Social construction theory emphasizes that the process of knowledge construction requires the cooperation and interaction of the learning community, constructed under the influence of society and culture. No activity of human beings can be separated from the social culture in which they live. The process of individual knowledge formation is closely related to social construction. The learning of knowledge is a process of meaning construction. Teachers form a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of new knowledge and experience based on learners' existing knowledge and experience.

## 4. Teaching Scaffolding

### 4.1. The Concept of Teaching Scaffolding

In 1986, Bruner borrowed the terminology of the construction industry and first proposed the concept of scaffolding. Definition of Teaching Scaffolding: Immediate support for learners by teachers or parents (tutors), this support facilitates the learner (mentee) to engage meaningfully in problem solving and acquire skills. (HeKekang, 2017)

### 4.2. Teaching Steps of Scaffolding Teaching

In this article, the author will discuss the five steps of scaffolding teaching by Professor He.

**Step 1 Build the stand.** Before the English reading class, teachers use the learners' original knowledge as a starting point to select reading texts suitable for their learning characteristics. Teachers should understand the knowledge accumulation of learners, leaving questions according to the text before class, assigning discussion tasks. Let the learners discuss new knowledge points with their peers, and let them prepare for the learning of new knowledge.

**Step 2 Enter the reading situation.** Teachers should consider the rationality and ideological nature of the questions set, guide learners to think about the deep meaning of the text, and activate learners' thinking activities. In this process, teachers need to create situations so that learners can be placed in real situations and learn new knowledge through personal experience.

**Step 3 Explore independently.** Teachers have established various scaffolds in front of them to introduce learners into situations to learn new knowledge. In this step, the task of independent exploration can be set up, so that learners can complete the learning task independently.

**Step 4 Collaborative learning.** After the independent exploration stage, the teacher divides the learners into several groups, and gives the pre-set tasks to the groups to discuss and complete together. In this process, learners can brainstorm ideas, collect different new knowledge and new theories, and then share with their peers and improve each other. In the process of cooperation, learners can also develop a sense of teamwork.

**Step 5 Evaluation.** After the learners have learned the new knowledge, the teacher should explain to the learners timely, for example, the performance of learners in the independent exploration stage and the performance of collaborative learning with peers. Teachers should also evaluate learners' learning outcomes objectively and scientifically. At the same time, teachers should also pay attention to allowing learners to conduct self-evaluation, and they should conduct mutual evaluation with their peers, so as to encourage learners to further explore and learn.

### 4.3. Literature Review on Types and Functions of Teaching Scaffolds

#### 4.3.1. Domestic Research on the Types of Teaching Scaffolds

Liu Xiaojie and Chen Yuqun (2020) in *The Construction of Scaffolding in English Reading Teaching in Primary Schools*, it is proposed to build various thinking schema scaffolding according to the text relationship: butterfly diagram, network diagram, fishbone diagram, bridge diagram, flow chart, geographic map, etc. Using visualization tools to present thinking will promote learners' understanding of new knowledge. Wang Xiaoli (2018) applied dynamic teaching support for reading teaching in *Building a scaffolding skillfully to make the reading teaching goal soft landing*, the dynamic teaching support includes: ingenious board drawing, simulation performance, example demonstration, problem-driven. A reasonable teaching support is a booster to become a high-quality classroom, it can flexibly adjust and change the type of teaching scaffold according to the characteristics of learners, so that learners can construct new knowledge in thinking and emotion. Zhang Mingfeng (2018) proposed in *The Construction of Chart Scaffolding in Reading Teaching*, teachers use sticker charts, guided charts, tabular charts, card charts and star-rated charts as the scaffolding for learners to

understand reading teaching. Allow learners to comprehend the central idea of reading through comparison, judgment and other thinking. Li Danmei and Fu Yao (2017) used the scaffolding in questioning and the scaffolding in feedback to improve the quality of high school English teaching in the Enlightenment of the Application of Scaffolding Teaching Methods to High School English Teaching. Teachers simplify learning tasks by asking questions, teachers let learners discover their own learning deficiencies in the feedback, and exercise learners' self-learning thinking. Zhu Ling (2016) Application of Scaffolding Teaching Model in English Writing, she proposed by building a learning scaffold before writing, a scaffold to maintain writing motivation, a scaffold to cultivate independent exploration ability, etc., the effect evaluation framework after writing is used to improve and cultivate learners' writing ability and cooperative learning spirit.

#### 4.3.2. Foreign Research on the Types of Teaching Scaffolds

Rasheed, R.A, Kamsin, A, and Abdullah, N.A. (2021) believed that online peer-learning self-regulation strategy scaffold is an effective way to increase their abilities. Muzammil.L and Saifullah. (2021) stated that the scaffolding strategy practiced by the learners could build their reading comprehension skills by means of steps by steps activity. In Li, L.'s (2021) class, some scaffolds are anticipated and pre-planned whereas others are accidental mainly based on the real teaching situations. Obeiah, S.F and Bataineh, R.F (2015) used three types of scaffolding in their experiment: expert scaffolding, reciprocal scaffolding and self-scaffolding. Park, M.H (2017) made the emotional scaffolding as a strategy to support children's engagement in instruction. Harraqi, M (2017) claimed that Types of Instructional Scaffolding to Use with English Learners: Modeling, Bridging, Contextualizing, Schema Building, Developing Metacognition, Re-Presenting Text.

Based on the research on the types of teaching scaffolds at home and abroad, few have suggested the type of "unit theme scaffolding", therefore, this paper will study the use of unit theme scaffolding in English reading teaching.

## 5. Unit Theme Scaffolding

A unit is an integral part of the course content and a basic unit that carries the meaning of the theme. (QiDier, 2019) In a classroom led by thematic meaning, teachers should be based on the inquiry of the meaning of the theme, encourage learners to learn and use language, develop an inquiry into language, meaning and cultural connotations. (Ministry of Education, 2018) The themes include three categories: man and self, man and society, and man and nature. (Ministry of Education, 2022) Within each level of the three categories there are different subtopics. Teachers design unit theme teaching according to the content of different themes, with the unit theme as a scaffold, integrate textual knowledge, learners are guided to conduct in-depth reading under the overall goal of the unit, and learners' core thinking is developed, The educational value of English subjects is reflected.

### 5.1. The Definition of Unit Theme Scaffolding

In the field of basic education, themes are usually defined as the verbal content and speech form of the text, the extracted core words with the value of promoting children's life growth. (DouGuimei, 2006) Teachers' teaching goal is the unit theme. Teachers build scaffolding for the construction of learners' knowledge, help learners avoid fragmentation and fragmentation of knowledge learning. At the same time, teachers discover the deep meaning of discourse, encourage learners to read the text in depth. Learners receive knowledge that is closely related to life, contribute to the development of learners' thinking and cultivate learners' good reading habits.

### 5.2. The Meaning of the Unit Theme Scaffolding

The overall unit teaching based on thematic significance is an effective way to integrate course content, implement in-depth teaching, develop core literacy, and implement the goal of subject education. (QiDier, 2019) Teachers design unit theme scaffolding in the teaching process, it can provide learners with a holistic and systematic knowledge framework. Through the design of the theme of the unit, the teacher has an in-depth understanding of the theme meaning, discourse structure, and cultural value of the unit, combining learners' actual life with direction and purpose, guiding learners to read and study deeply. In this way, learners' thinking ability and study skills are cultivated, their ability to choose effective reading strategies is developed, and learners' core literacy is cultivated, LideShuren put them into practice. The value of educating people is reflected in this process.

### 5.3. The Application of Unit Theme Scaffolding in Junior High School English Reading Teaching

This article uses Unit 1 *What's the matter?* From Grade 8, Volume II, People's Education Publishing House, to explain how theme scaffoldings are used in reading teaching. First, the analysis of the discourse theme of the first unit: the category covered in this unit is "people and self", the theme group is "Life and Learning", the topics in the unit are physical and mental health, being helpful, learning first aid knowledge, cherishing the awareness of life and developing a positive attitude towards life. The teacher divides the first unit into four lesson hours, the designed unit theme scaffolding are: 1. They can give reasonable advice after family and friends are sick or injured; 2. When encountering people who need help in life, we need to help others and learn simple first aid knowledge at the same time; 3. If we encounter danger or difficulty, we must overcome difficulties and fears, and be a person who loves life, cherishes life, is willing to help others, and has a tenacious character. 4. Be able to communicate and express the above-mentioned problems with friends in English. In the teaching design, teachers design the teaching process by combining problem scaffolding, schema scaffolding, and peer scaffolding. The questions and the teaching activities should be based on the unit theme, stick to the subject matter, let the unit theme scaffolding activities throughout the reading class.

Next, the author will establish the unit theme scaffolding in the first lesson to guide learners to learn.

**Table 1.** Establish the unit theme scaffolding

<p>Building unit theme scaffolding</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers assign tasks to learners to find "When family members or friends are sick, what can we do to get them back to health faster" by asking their parents or looking up materials online.</li> <li>2. Before class, the teacher used the video, the contents: how to take care of the sick, help those in need, and how to calm down to save yourself when in danger.</li> </ol>	<p>In the process of establishing the unit theme support, teachers should fully consider the learners' learning situation, and the tasks assigned by teachers should be within the ability of learners.</p>
<p>Enter the reading situation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a situation. Through the pictures prepared in advance, the teacher tells the learners when Nancy's grandmother in the picture is sick, how does she take care of her grandmother. Teachers ask learners: When your family members are sick, how will you take care of them and help them recover.</li> </ol>	<p>When explaining the content of the first lesson, teachers should pay attention to laying the groundwork for the learning of the second lesson. By asking questions, learners can exercise their language and thinking ability.</p>

	2. Set the question: Ask learners to imagine when you met a sick stranger on the street who needed help, would you help them?	
Learners reading independently	Teachers' assignment: What skills have you learned about caring for patients from the reading of the first part of the text? What will you do if your family or friends get sick? Then teacher asked the learners to try to complete a short essay on how to care for a sick person independently.	The task setting of this step is reasonable, which can cultivate learners' abilities of reading, reading and writing .
Peers work together to complete tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Role play. Learners and their peers work together to complete the performance part of the text in the textbook.</li> <li>2. The teacher assigns tasks, and learners make a form with their peers. The form should write down the contents of how to take care of the patient if he /she has a cold and a fever, and what methods should be used for each type of illness to restore the patient to health.</li> <li>3. Through the study of the first discourse, the peers discuss how to care for and care for family and friends.</li> </ol>	In the process of making the form, learners are also experiencing life, accumulating life experience, learning how to take care of people, and doing in-depth analysis of the text.
Teachers evaluate learners' reading performance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers rate learners' performance in answering questions and acting in class.</li> <li>2. Through learners' self-assessment and mutual assessment can understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and lay the foundation for subsequent learning.</li> </ol>	Teachers should pay attention to the evaluation of learners' performance in the learning process of learners.

**Table 2.** The use of unit theme scaffolding in the first unit discourse

Unit theme scaffolding	
If your family or friends have a cold /stomachache... what are your suggestions?	You should...
If someone is ill, he needs help, what should you do?	I should...
If you are in danger, how to save yourself?	Firstly... Secondly... Thirdly
Unit theme scaffolding	
You give them the reasonable advice, they will recover from the sick bodies.	Learn to care for others and look after others
You help the person who needs help, they will appreciate what you did.	You will be a good boy who likes to help others.
Learn simple ways to save yourself, and then wait for the professionals to help you.	You will not be afraid of difficulties and be a person with perseverance.

Through the study of this unit, learners in knowledge learning: be able to give reasonable advice after family and friends are sick or injured. For example, T: When someone has a stomachache/



headache/toothache... what are your suggestions? In our daily life, when someone cuts himself/herself, what's your advice? If you meet someone who needs your help, what will you do? Help him/her or not? If someone is in danger, how should he save himself? Asking learners questions about the subject of the unit, guide learners to build complete knowledge, cultivate learners' positive emotions and let them form a correct outlook on life and values: we should learn to take the initiative to care for the family members and friends around us. When someone needs help, we should extend a helping hand to them within our ability. If we are in danger, we should learn to how to save ourselves. In this way, we can cultivate our tough character, helpful spirit and positive attitude towards life. The design of the unit theme scaffolding can promote the sublimation of learners' emotions, learners can relate the discourse knowledge to their daily life and study how to apply knowledge.

After getting the construction of the above theme scaffolding, the learners use the knowledge learned in the classroom under the guidance of teachers to write an essay about a dangerous experience of themselves or someone they know. They should know how to overcome difficulties, the process of self-first aid, and what this experience means to them, so that it can develop learners' abilities of listening, speaking, reading, reading and reading skills. This is in line with the new curriculum standard of English compulsory education in 2022. Emotional aspects of learners: let learners learn how to cultivate tenacious perseverance and tenacity in the process of learning new knowledge. In terms of student values: guide learners to be a positive person who cherishes life, respects others, and willing to help others and loves themselves. At the same time, learners master the main content and central idea of this unit under the unit theme scaffolding designed by the teacher, establish an understanding of the law of language knowledge learning, and complete the knowledge learning and emotional establishment of this unit. While reading texts, learners can achieve deep reading, experience the deep meaning conveyed by the texts, and they can cultivate a good habit of meaningful reading.

This is a general overview of what learners will learn in Unit 1 and what they are thinking, teachers' attention should be paid to the teaching process, when setting up the unit theme scaffolding, teachers should fully consider the situation of learning. For example, the learning characteristics and knowledge base of eighth-grade learners.

By establishing thematic scaffolding for this unit, to enable learners to have a holistic understanding of the text that appears in the text, help learners to build a complete knowledge system in the brain. Under the guidance of the teacher's unit theme scaffolding, teachers build situational scaffolding for learners and develop learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. At the same time, teachers combined with situation scaffolding, performance scaffolding, problem scaffolding, peer scaffolding, etc., to promote learners' in-depth reading of texts. In this process, learners take the initiative to master the central idea to be expressed in the reading text and the correct world outlook, outlook on life and values to be conveyed. When learners can independently dig the deep meaning of the text and comprehend the deep meaning conveyed by the reading text, the teacher can slowly and silently withdraw the scaffolding. But it should be noted that, after the teacher withdraws from the scaffolding, they should continue to monitor the process of learners' independent learning and writing learning with peers until the learners have completed the entire stage of learning, and finally make a scientific evaluation of the learners' learning process and results. The high-quality development of education and teaching needs to pay attention to performance evaluation and process evaluation, and combine evaluation to promote learning. (Zhao Decheng, 2022) Evaluation occurs at the end of the teacher's teaching and the student's learning, evaluation plays a very important role, scientific evaluation can motivate learners to learn independently and find their own learning strategies, these methods can well promote the development of learners' core literacy.

## 6. Conclusion

The research shows that, in junior high school English classes, it is very important and effective for teachers to establish a good unit theme scaffolding for learners. Based on the learner's original knowledge and experience, the teacher guides the learner to do the pre-class preview to understand the overall content of the unit in advance. Teachers combine situational scaffolding and peers scaffolding in class to urge learners to build a complete knowledge system in their brains through independent exploration. This action changes the fragmentation of traditional English reading teaching and promotes deep reading of learners.

The new curriculum standard of English compulsory education has raised the educational value of the subject to an unprecedented height. In English teaching, reading plays an important role in promoting the development of learners' core literacy. Teachers should not only pay attention to reading in class, but also combine reading outside of class, the combination of the two will jointly improve the deep reading ability of learners, thus reflecting the educating value of English subjects.

## Acknowledgments

This work is supported by the Course Construction for Graduates of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (KA 202105).

## References

- [1] Harraqi, M. . (2017). Review of aidawalqui's scaffolding instruction for english language learners: a conceptual framework. *American Journal of Arts and Design*, 2(3), 84-88.
- [2] Li, L. I. . (2021). Application of Scaffolding Instruction to Picture Talk Course for Chinese Beginners. 7th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2021).
- [3] Muzammil, L. ,& Saifullah. (2021). Enhancing Reading Comprehension of Junior High School Students Through Scaffolding Instruction. 2nd Annual Conference on Social Science and Humanities (ANCOSH 2020).
- [4] Obeiah, S. F. ,&Bataineh, R. F. (2015). Does scaffolding-based instruction improve writing performance? the case of jordanianefl learners. *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages & Literature / Lubelskie Mate*.
- [5] Park, M. H. (2017). Emotional scaffolding as a strategy to support children's engagement in instruction. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(1), 492-499.
- [6] Rasheed, R. A. ,Kamsin, A. , & Abdullah, N. A. . (2021). An approach for scaffolding students peer-learning self-regulation strategy in the online component of blended learning. *IEEE Access*, PP(99), 1-1.
- [7] Vygotsky, L. S. .(1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*.
- [8] Dou Guimei.(2006).*Dou Guimei and Subject Teaching [M]*. Beijing:Beijing Normal University Publishing House.
- [9] He Kekang.(2017).*The Meaning, Type, Design of Teaching Scaffold and Its Application In Teaching-The United States "Educational Communication and Technology Research Handbook (Fourth Edition)" One of the Highlights That Inspired Us*. *China Electronic Education(04)*,1-9.
- [10] Kong Yanping.(2009). Application of "Scaffolding " Theory in Business English Teaching. *Education Theory and Practice(15)*,60-62.
- [11] Li Danmei&Fu Rao.(2017). The Enlightenment of the Application of Scaffolding Teaching Method to High School English Teaching. *Primary and Secondary Teacher Training(02)*,64-67.
- [12] Liu Xiaojie&Chen Yuqun.(2020).The Construction of Scaffolds in Primary School English Reading Teaching. *Teaching and Administration(29)*,60-63.



- [13] Mao Ju.(2017).The Theoretical Framework and Enlightenment of Teachers' Socially Constructed Learning. *Foreign Education Research*(02),71-80.
- [14] Qi Dier. (2019). The Overall Teaching of the Unit Based on the Meaning of the Theme. *Foreign Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools*, 42(17), 6.
- [15] Wang Xiaoli.(2018).Cleverly Build the Scaffolding, Let the Reading Teaching Goal Soft Landing. *Teaching and Administration*(11),38-39.
- [16] ZhangGuorong.(2004).The Application of "Scaffolding" Theory in English Writing Teaching. *Foreign Languages and Foreign Language Teaching*(09),37-39.
- [17] ZhangMingfeng. (2018). The Construction of Chart Scaffolding in Reading Teaching. *Teaching and Administration*(35), 3.
- [18] ZhaoDecheng.(2022). Some Thoughts on Students' Academic Evaluation under the Background of "Double Deduction" Policy. *Curriculum. Textbook. Teaching Method*(01),140-146. doi: 10.19877 /j.cnki. kcjcf.2022.01.015.
- [19] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.(2018). *General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition)*.Beijing:People's Education Press.
- [20] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.(2022)*English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)*.Beijing:Beijing Normal University Publishing House.
- [21] Zhu Ling.(2016).The Application of Scaffolding Teaching Mode in English Writing. *Chinese Journal of Education*(S1), 114-115.