Working within the Zone of Proximal Development: Does It Help for Reading Strategy?

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Abstract : In recent years there has been a growing interest in issues concerning the impact of sociocultural theory (SCT) of learning on different aspects of second/foreign language learning. This study aimed to find the possible effects of sociocultural teaching techniques on reading strategy of EFL learners. Indeed, the present research compared the impact of peer and teacher scaffolding on EFL learners' reading strategy use across two proficiency levels. To this end, a pre-test post-test quasi-experimental research design was used and two instruments were utilized to collect the data: Nelson English language test and reading strategy questionnaire. Ninety five university students participated in this study were divided into two groups of teacher and peer scaffolding. Teacher scaffolding group received scaffolded help from the teacher based on three mechanisms of effective help within ZPD: graduated, contingent, dialogic. In contrast, learners of peer scaffolding group were unleashed from the teacher-fronted classroom as they were asked to carry out the reading comprehension tasks with the feedback they provided for each other. Results obtained from ANOVA revealed that teacher scaffolding group outperformed the peer scaffolding group in terms of reading strategy use. It means teacher's scaffolded help provided within the learners' ZPD led to better reading strategy improvement compared with the peer scaffolded help. However, the interaction effect between proficiency factor and teaching technique was non-significant, leading to the conclusion that strategy use of the learners was not affected by their proficiency level in either teacher or peer scaffolding groups.

Keywords : peer scaffolding, proficiency level, reading strategy, sociocultural theory, teacher scaffolding