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## Scaffolding Strategies for the Elder People's Cognitive Engagement and Second Language Learning

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to investigate senior university teachers' use of scaffolding strategies for enhancing elder people's cognitive engagement and their second language learning. The main focuses of the study included, the types of scaffolding strategies used by Senior University teachers to enhance older people's cognitive engagement and the processes of using these scaffolding strategies. From the literature review, the major findings of this study are as the following: The elder people's cognitive engagement is classified into three categories: Attention, memory and critical thinking the elder people's teachers' scaffolding strategies in different ways could help older people to achieve different categories of cognitive engagement; and Senior University teachers' perceptions of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding strategies are important for their appropriate role in assisting and cooperating with the elder people's second language learning.

**Key words:** Scaffolding strategies, older people, cognitive engagement, second language learning

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### INTRODUCTION

As our living conditions and health improving, aging population arouses the global attention now. With the decreasing of children, elder people's long life learning and life quality becomes the key in influencing country's development. Ministry of Education has public the White book of elders' learning in 2006. In order to implement the rights of elders to learn and understanding the aging with a positive attitude. Ministry of Education established Active Aging Learning Resource Center, cooperating with township District Office, public libraries, community colleges, social welfare groups, community buildings, etc. Therefore, with the Active Aging Learning Resource Center becoming not just a learning place but the rest home for elders to develop their social interrelationships. Taiwan has a rapidly aging population which is projected to double within the next 25 years. However, lifelong learning for the elderly has yet to be fully developed. In a world with increasing numbers of older adults and a world-wide emphasis placed on lifelong learning, it is crucial to design appropriate environment for learning in later life (Leung *et al.*, 2005). Thus, with the globalization of English, the study aims to explore the interrelationships among elder people's second language learning, cognitive engagement and scaffolding strategies in the senior university in Taiwan.

In modern teaching and learning model during recent years, young children's acquiring language education as well as elder people's long life education (Nikolic, 2008) has offered the significant proof on the practice of socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky *et al.*, 1978). In adult education, scholars hold the belief that for the development of older people's higher order functions of the mind, the mutual communication and interpersonal interactions during older people's senior university learning period is so important that adult educators need to take care of older people's social interaction with peers, parents and teachers (Kinginger, 2001, 2002). Vygotsky *et al.* (1978) claimed that learners' meaningful learning takes place at one's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in which learners are assisted by more knowledgeable people. With the social interactions, older people as well as young children have the access to gradually develop the independent ability to complete certain tasks without others' assistance. In a word, older people educators' scaffoldings are necessary for older people's learning before they are able to solve problems by themselves on their own (Wood *et al.*, 1976).

Some studies claimed that scaffolding in general education has been examined and discussed for a long time. They have been carried out to explore the way in which teachers assist learners in reading lessons (Calfée and Patrick, 1995; Ogle, 1986) and

computer-mediated lessons (Cavalier and Klein, 1998; Ge and Land, 2003; Gordin and Pea, 1995; Greene and Land, 2000; Lin and Lehman, 1999; Oliver and Hannafin, 2000; Ping and Swe, 2004; Roehler and Cantlon, 1997). However, rather than second language teaching, these studies focused on general education. The types of scaffolding strategies in second language learning context (e.g., asking questions and giving feedback) have been investigated in many studies. However, few studies examined how and why these strategies are used by senior university teachers, especially in an second language learning context in which class hours are sometimes the only time that assistances can be provided for learners to learn English.

Therefore, the present study intended to fill the gaps in literature by investigating senior university English teachers' scaffolding strategies for enhancing EFL older people's cognitive engagement, examining the process of teachers' adopting those scaffolding strategies and the way how do teachers' deal with those strategies. Especially for the popularity of senior universities in Taiwan, it shows the currency for older people's long life learning attitude. With the globalization village, English has not only become the universal language, it has also become the daily life communication tool for young people and old people. Even in elementary school curriculum, the integration of English learning with the play courses can be seen. Therefore, this study addressed the following questions: What scaffolding strategies do senior university English teachers adopt to enhance EFL older people's cognitive engagement? How do senior university English teachers use these scaffolding strategies for enhancing EFL older people's cognitive engagement?

### **LEARNING MOTIVATION FOR ELDERS**

The motives for elders' learning are of multidimensional perspectives and are not easy to find a fixed standard to classify. In accordance with the following researches (Sloan, 1989; Zillmen *et al.*, 1989; Wann *et al.*, 1999a), they have sought to group the motives into varied and broad classifications. Based on elders' learning motivation toward second language, the following eight classifications for sport consumption from Wann (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) included entertainment, eustress (which refers to positive levels of arousal or stress release experienced by the people when they consume sport, self-esteem or personal enhancement, escape (i.e., an opportunity to use sport consumption as a diversion from everyday life), affiliation needs (offered by the contact/association with other

people who consume sports), economic gains (offered via sports such as wagering), family motives (sport consumption motivated by the desire to spend time with family members) and the aesthetic value of sports (beauty and artistic characteristics of sport performance). The SFMS developed by Wann (1995) concluded the motives that people feel like to be fans of sports and in the previous literature, age was not found to be related to sport fan motivation (Wann, 1995; Wann *et al.*, 1999b). In the literature, several differences were found in the motivational patterns of males and females in contrast to age. Female reported higher levels of family motivation than males, while males reported higher levels of eustress, self-esteem and aesthetic motivation.

Besides, in SFMS developed by Wann (1995), it did not mention about the racial differences in sport fan motivation. Later, one study had empirically examined racial differences in sport fan motivation by Wann *et al.* (1999b). In this study, the sport fan motivation of European Americans and African Americans was compared, the participants were asked to complete the SFMS (Wann, 1995) and the results reported that European American and Africa American participants had differential motivational patterns. Overall, European Americans had higher motivation scores than African Americans, with European Americans reporting significantly higher levels of eustress, self-esteem, escape and family motivation.

African Americans did not report significantly higher levels of motivation than European Americans on any of the subscales. Although, these data seemed to suggest that European Americans are more highly motivated as fans than African Americans, this conclusion is premature in light on research suggesting that African Americans are disproportionately probable to be interested in sport as fans (Schurr *et al.*, 1988). In a later literature about racial difference in sport fan motivation by Bilyeu and Wann (2002), it also found that European Americans scored higher SFMS than African Americans. In this study we will discuss the elders' motivation of participation and find the result whether consistent with previous studies are discussed.

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Vygotsky *et al.* (1978) socio-cultural theory has become a prominent domain of inquiry for language teaching and learning and been widely applied by language teachers recently. A key feature of socio-cultural theory is that language development for humans comes from social interaction. Vygotsky *et al.* (1978)

believed that social interaction can not only increase learners' level of knowledge but also mediate learners' thoughts and behaviors. Kublin *et al.* (1998) briefly explained Vygotsky's idea and stated learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects and events in the environment. In the beginning of language learning process, teachers, being considered as experts, can control and guide learners in class. Gradually, learners internalize what teachers have taught and become independent in learning. Thus, teachers' instruction in class plays an important role for second language acquisition. What teachers do to help older people in class becomes an important area for second language educators and researchers to explore. Especially for older people, they have lots of experience in learning for many years; however, with the decreasing of physical, mental, cognitive development, learning motivation plays such an important role for them to sustain their passion in learning English. With the globalization worldwide increasing, older people have more and more experience in going abroad and meeting foreigners. Considering the motivational basis of second and foreign language acquisition has been at the center of much research and controversy for many years for many ages people, stressing that learning is situated in learners' social world means a lot for learners. With meaning culture and content, older people would have more interests in learning English and therefore with profoundly interactional practices, senior university teachers would be able to investigate how tasks are not only accomplished but also collaboratively (re) organized by learners and teachers which might lead to various configurations of classroom talk and structuring specific opportunities for learning. The analysis of elder people's classroom interactions at basic and advanced levels shows how the teacher's instructions are reflexively redefined within courses of action and how thereby the learner's emerging language competence is related to other (interactional, institutional, sociocultural) competencies (Thomas, 2010). Discussing the results in the light of recent analyses of the indexical and grounded dimensions of everyday and experimental tasks allows us to broaden our understanding of competence and situated cognition in older people language learning.

**Zone of proximal development:** Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is one of the core concepts in socio-cultural theory and it can provide an understanding of the role of assistance in older people's second language learning. Vygotsky *et al.* (1978) defined ZPD as the distance between the actual development level as

determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Wertsch (1979) reported that children could solve the complicated problems through interacting with their parents. Moreover, Lightbown and Spada (2006) indicated L2 learners advance to higher levels of linguistic knowledge when they collaborate and interact with speakers of the second language who are more knowledgeable than they are. Thus, how experts, teachers in particular, support second language learners plays an important role in language learning. The challenge for teachers in assisting second language acquisition is to help older people's engage cognitively in class (Zaidah, 2003). Due to this factor, investigating how senior university teachers support older people's cognitive engagement becomes an important issue in second language acquisition research.

Some second language scholars have discussed that Vygotsky's ZPD is similar to Krashen's theory of  $i+1$  (Guerra, 1996; Krashen, 1992). However, not all the scholars agree that Vygotsky's ZPD and Krashen's  $i+1$  share the same characteristics in nature. Several scholars recently indicated these two theories are incommensurable (Dunn and Lantolf, 1998; Kinginger, 2001, 2002). Lantolf (2005) clarified that the main difference between these two theories is teacher's roles in the process of language learning. Krashen, following Chomsky's view of language acquisition, claimed that learners acquire language through Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which helps learners to process comprehensible information for achieving the next level of language learning ( $i+1$ ). In addition, Ellis (2003) indicated, interaction plays a significant role in language learning because it provides chances for learners to produce language, engage in communication and receive feedback. For Vygotsky, the teacher has to take a part in older people's meaning negotiation process or guide older people's interaction to advance older people's language learning experience.

**Scaffolding:** Scaffolding, the other important concept of social-cultural theory, is also presented to provide an understanding of teachers' role in assisting older people's second language learning. Scaffolding is a process which an expert assists novices to achieve a goal or solve a problem which novices could not achieve or solve alone (Nikolic, 2008; Wood *et al.*, 1976). In school settings, scaffolding is what teachers say or do to enable children to complete complex mental tasks they could not complete without assistance (Cumming-Potvin, 2007; Pearson and Fielding, 1991). Bruner (1978) explained scaffolding as a

mother's verbal assistance for maintaining conversation with children and viewed it as a means for promoting language acquisition. According to Bruner (1978), the mother's scaffolding behavior is characterized by five significant features: (1) Reducing the complexity of the task, (2) Getting the child's attention and keeping it focused, (3) Offering models, (4) Extending the scope of the immediate situation and (5) Providing support so that the child moves forward and does not slip back (De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000).

In addition to mothers, some scholars indicated teachers can be experts who provide assistance for older people's to learn the target language. In addition, Gallimore and Tharp (1990) redefined several qualitatively means which are adopted by teachers to assist learners' performance. The functions of each means are discussed as follows (Thornton, 2009): (1) Modeling is the process of offering behavior for imitation, (2) Contingency management is the means of assisting performance by which rewards and punishment are arranged to follow behavior, depending on whether the behavior is desired or not, (3) Feedback occurs in interactive teaching and helps older people's to improve their accuracy of output, (4) Instructions are used primarily in two contexts: On matters of deportment and in assigning tasks. Instructing voice of the teacher becomes the self-instructing voices of the learner in the transition from apprentice to self-regulated performer, (5) Questioning explicitly calls for an active linguistic and cognitive response and (6) Cognitive structuring refers to the provision of a structure for thinking and acting.

At this point in tracing the existing literatures or personal assumptions, the present study discovered that older people's cognitive engagement might need teachers' assistance to elevate. This finding responded to ZPD (Vygotsky *et al.*, 1978) and scaffolding (Griffin *et al.*, 2011; Wood *et al.*, 1976) which pointed out teacher's role in assisting older people's second language learning. The following propositions then inferred:

- **Proposition 1:** Senior University EFL teachers' perceptions of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding are important for their role in assisting older people's second language learning
- **Proposition 2:** Senior University English teachers' scaffolding strategies in different ways could help older people to achieve different categories of cognitive engagement
- **Proposition 3:** Older people's cognitive engagement is classified into three categories: attention, memory and critical thinking

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has identified different types of scaffolding strategies for enhancing older people's cognitive engagement. Moreover, this study also has examined how these scaffolding strategies were used. One of the findings in the study showed that Senior University English teachers believed that cognitive engagement is classified into three categories including attention, memory and critical thinking. Another finding is that Senior University English teachers perceived that the three categories of cognitive engagement are sequential and hierarchical. That is, there is a fixed order for the occurrence of cognitive engagement. In the future, the researcher can investigate Senior University English teachers' beliefs on assisting older people's cognitive engagement and take the older people's and parents' perspectives into account to make the results of the present study more persuasive and meaningful.

The present study has discussed Senior University English teachers' scaffolding strategies for enhancing Older people's cognitive engagement. There are several possible directions for further research. First, there is a need to investigate teachers' teaching or leaning experiences has a great impact on their beliefs which is reflected on their teaching then. For example, if the teacher holds the stable beliefs in teaching elder people in certain teaching model or style, the true interaction between teachers and children would take place spontaneously.

Second, this study only focused on Senior University teachers' view of using scaffolding strategies for cognitive engagement. In other words, the understanding of these scaffolding strategies could only be viewed as teachers' hypothesis of ways to enhance elder people's cognitive engagement.

Thirdly, considering the concept which helps learners to process comprehensible information for achieving the next level of language learning ( $i+1$ ), this is not only appropriate for adult learners, it also works well for young learners. With the multiple interacting learning model in this technology area, with the cooperation with young people and older people, it might excite more sparkling learning modes for older people. With the E-learning knowledge spreading out, there would be more possibilities for the cooperatively learning for older people and young people.

To conclude, this research may help the promoters understand what these silver haired Active Aging Learning Resource Center participants need to design unique curriculum or activities related to second language learning which make them interesting and satisfied.

Considering the designing of specialized activities according to different needs, at present, most Active Aging Learning Resource Center promoters promote language courses to the aged people only from the aspect of efficiency improving. And each teaches them all movements of elderly courses. But according to this research, some other factors still can be used to design appropriate courses for the participants. Like the motivations including aesthetics, relax, social interaction, escape from pressure and body shaping, each of them might help in different focus and needs different activities to satisfy. Further, in accordance with different clusters of participants with different motives are separated. These clusters can be taken as different segment with its unique needs. As for elderly people who care about their extrinsic identity and appearance, language activities should be designed to make them look good outside. But for people who stress on their physical and mental health and the skills, the language and cognitive activities should be designed to improve their health and skills. Therefore, if a promoter who wants to attract these people with different needs, varied function for unique activities need to be designed for elder people in the future.

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