

The Effectiveness of Using Context Clues Strategies in Teaching Vocabulary of Descriptive Text

¹Lenni Oktaviana Rangi, ²Luwandi Suhartono, ³Sumarni

English Language Education Study Program
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Tanjungpura, Pontianak

Corresponding e-mail: lennioktavianarangi@student.untan.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

To language, vocabulary is like a well-stocked toolbox to a carpenter. The more tools possessed, the better the product will be. Likewise, vocabulary is the core of all English skills both spoken and written. Concerning its importance, this research aimed to discover whether or not context clues strategy is influential for students' learning of vocabulary in descriptive text as well as its effect size score. This quantitative research was carried out by the use of a Pre-Experimental design with a single group. The sample of this research was the tenth graders of SMKN 1 Belitang Hilir. The data were gathered by using the technique of pretest and posttest in the form of objective questions. The data were then analyzed statistically using the employed procedures, namely the calculation of variants, deviations, correlation, hypothesis testing, and derived formulas in gaining the effect size. The findings showed that the pretest and posttest respectively resulted in the mean score of 53,51 and 69,19 with the effect size of 1,64. Herewith, the use of context clues strategy has a strong and significant effect in enhancing students' vocabulary of descriptive text.

Keywords: Context Clues Strategies, Teaching Vocabulary, Descriptive Text

ABSTRAK

Bagi bahasa, kosakata bagaikan kotak peralatan yang lengkap bagi seorang tukang kayu. Semakin banyak alat yang dimiliki maka semakin baik pula produk yang dihasilkan. Demikian pula, kosakata adalah inti dari semua keterampilan bahasa Inggris baik lisan maupun tulisan. Mengingat pentingnya hal ini, penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui apakah strategi Context Clues berpengaruh terhadap pembelajaran kosakata siswa dalam teks deskriptif serta untuk mengetahui skor ukuran pengaruhnya. Penelitian kuantitatif ini dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan desain Pra-Eksperimental pada kelompok tunggal. Sampel penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas X SMKN 1 Belitang Hilir. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan teknik pretest dan posttest berupa pertanyaan objektif. Data tersebut kemudian dianalisis secara statistik dengan menggunakan prosedur yang diadaptasi yaitu perhitungan varian, deviasi, korelasi, uji hipotesis, dan rumus untuk mendapatkan skor ukuran pengaruhnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pretest dan posttest masing-masing menghasilkan nilai rata-rata sebesar 53,51 dan 69,19 dengan effect size sebesar 1,64. Dengan demikian, penggunaan strategi Context Clues memiliki pengaruh yang kuat dan signifikan dalam meningkatkan kosakata teks deskriptif siswa.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Context Clues, Mengajar Kosakata, Teks Deskriptif

INTRODUCTION

Language proficiency hinges on a robust vocabulary, which empowers individuals to grasp information and/or communicate effectively, especially in a foreign language country. Without vocabulary, there is a big zero in communication of any form (Dunsmore, 2020). The acquisition of vocabulary is an aid for students to gain, understand, and enhance the process of knowledge transfer for better results (Milligan, 2011). However, vocabulary, referring to English, still becomes odd for some students especially those who are rarely exposed to it. As an essential collection of words for receptive and productive language, the implementation of effective learning instruction is very matters.

Concerning the syllabus of tenth grade, the text genre lies on Descriptive Text. This text implies the description of something or someone in terms of their look, sound, taste, and any kind of perception (Kane, 2015). It can be inferred that this text plays a critical role in language learning by honing students' ability to describe animate and/or inanimate objects. Yet, encountering unfamiliar vocabulary within the descriptive text can interfere with students' comprehension and ability to grasp the overall message. As proven in this research's pre-observation and interview, the students found it tricky to understand the text given as they had no idea how to make sense of the vocabulary itself.

To empower students to be independent and foster their self-agency in vocabulary acquisition, the context clues strategy was tested and used. Context clues may be words, pictures, figures, notes, etc. which can be used as additional information to help infer the meaning of particular unknown vocabulary within the text (Reardon, 2019). It lies on the reason of context clues' ability to enable individuals to know the meaning in general by skipping the unknown vocabulary and paying attention more to the clues around it (Chastain, 2014).

In an attempt to teach the vocabulary of descriptive text using the Context Clues strategy, several kinds of employed clues were utilized. They are clues contained in the sentence and/or text levels in the form of hint definitions, synonyms, antonyms, examples, and general ideas (Denton et al., 2012). Other than that, five tricks of using context clues employed by (Rebecca, 2015) were also utilized in the main activity, namely circling the unknown word/phrase, underlining its keyword, knowing the main idea of the paragraphs where the word is in, trying to translate the whole sentence in the first language, and guessing the meaning of the unknown word logically.

Several previous studies have underscored the benefits of context clues in vocabulary acquisition. Research from (Sarilila, 2019) concluded that teaching reading using context clues has a significantly greater effect on vocabulary acquisition compared to dictionary use. Similarly, (Kurniawati et al., 2019) found that the context clues technique has a positive impact on vocabulary learning. Tuyen and Huyen (2019) further emphasize the positive impact of contextual clues on vocabulary retention and reading comprehension.

Apart from those highlighted research, this research is slightly in a similar way yet possesses its own focuses. These were in terms of its subject participants of vocational high schoolers, the rural location chosen, and the aim which testing the efficacy of context clues strategy in enhancing students' vocabulary of descriptive text.

METHODOLOGY

This research utilized the quantitative approach and pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design by Elleman and Oslund (2019). According to Dowdy et al. (2015), pre-experimental design works in gathering data from a group of subjects, where the researcher introduces a treatment to the group and then observes the changes after the treatment.

The population of this research was the tenth graders of SMKN 1 Belitang Hilir consisting of 90 students from 3 different majors. Simple random sampling was then used to obtain the representative sample for this research, namely the tenth grade of Rekayasa Perangkat Lunak/RPL (transliterated as Software Engineering). There were 37 students in total.

In conducting this research, a technique of testing was done using the tools of pre-test and post-test. The former was used in measuring the students' prior vocabulary of descriptive text. The latter was used in assessing the students' vocabulary acquisition after getting exposure to the context clues strategy. The test was designed in the form of 25 objective questions containing the use of context clues such as signal words (definition, general), punctuation clues, and synonym-antonyms. The results of both tests were measured and categorized as valid and reliable for the research.

After collecting the data, they were then analyzed by employing some procedures from (Seltman, 2018). Firstly, the individual degree of the score and the subject mean score were calculated, thus, the researcher gained the students' pre-test and post-test comparison scores. Secondly, the standard variants and standard deviation were generated by the following formulas.

Formula 1. Standard Variants

X:

$$s_x^2 = \frac{\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}$$

Y:

$$s_y^2 = \frac{\sum(y_i - \bar{y})^2}{n - 1}$$

Where:

s_x^2 = Standard variant Pre-test

s_y^2 = Standard variant Post-test

x_i = Value Pre-test

y_i = Value Post-test

n = Number of students

Formula 2. Standard Deviations

X:

$$s_x = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Y:

$$s_y = \sqrt{\frac{\sum(y_i - \bar{y})^2}{n - 1}}$$

Where:

s_x = Standard Deviation Pre-test

s_y = Standard Deviation Post-test

x_i = Value Pre-test

y_i = Value Post-test

\bar{x} = Sample means of Pre-test

\bar{y} = Sample means of Post-test

n = Number of students

Thirdly, the hypothesis test was calculated using the T obtained as shown below.

Formula 3. T Obtained

$$t_{\text{obtained}} = \frac{\bar{X} - \bar{Y}}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{s_x^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_y^2}{n_2}\right) - 2r \left[\frac{s_x}{\sqrt{n_1}}\right] \left[\frac{s_y}{\sqrt{n_2}}\right]}}$$

Where:

- T = Test Score
- s_x^2 = Standard variant Pre-test
- s_y^2 = Standard variant Post-test
- s_x = Standard Deviation Pre-test
- s_y = Standard Deviation Post-test
- $2r$ = Correlation score
- n = Number of students

Afterward, the effect size score was generated through a sequence of calculations as shown below.

Formula 4. SDspotted

$$SD_{\text{spotted}} = \sqrt{\frac{(N_1 - 1)S_x^2 + (N_2 - 1)S_y^2}{N_1 + N_2 - 2}}$$

Where:

- $N1$ = degree of freedom
- $N2$ = number of students
- S_x^2 = standard deviation pre-test
- S_y^2 = standard deviation post-test

Formula 5. Effect Size

$$\text{Effect Size} = \frac{Y - X}{SD_{\text{spotted}}}$$

Where:

- Y = Average post-test
- X = Average pre-test

Ultimately, to obtain the category of the effect size, a classification adopted from Cohen (1988) was used as shown in the following.

Table 1. The Classification of Effect Size

Scale	Category
0.10 - < 0.30	Small
0.30 - < 0.50	Medium
≥ 0.50	Large

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study investigated the effectiveness of context clues strategies in teaching vocabulary acquisition for descriptive text comprehension in tenth-grade students ($n=37$) at SMKN 1 Belitang Hilir. A pre-test and post-test design was employed to assess student learning. The pre-test scores ranged from 36 to 68 with an average score of 53.51. The post-test scores ranged from 48 to 84 with an average score of 69.19. This represents a notable increase in vocabulary knowledge after the intervention using the context clues strategy.

After completing the sequence of several indicators in order to gain the T-test score, the result was ultimately uncovered. The t_{obtained} score is 8,56 (symbol minus in this matter ignored at standard significant 5% as well as at standard significant 1%). Then, the t_{table} was determined ($\alpha 5\% / 2 = 0.025$) since this research used two-tailed tests. After that, the t-distribution table of significance was checked ($df = 35$). Since the result of df is 35, then the t-table value is 2,030.

Based on the above data analysis, it is obvious that the calculated t_{obtained} (8.56) exceeded the critical t-value (2.030) at a degree of freedom of 35 and a significance level of 0.05 (two-tailed test). This result suggests that the context clues strategy had a statistically significant effect on students' vocabulary knowledge for descriptive texts. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) stating that context clues have no significant effect on vocabulary acquisition was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) stating that context clues have a significant effect was accepted.

Using the data result of standard deviation between the pre-test and post-test (SD_{spotted} of 9.55), the effect size gained was 1.64. This result indicates a large effect size according to Cohen's d criteria. This suggests that the context clues strategy had a strong and positive impact on students' vocabulary development, even if the correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores might not be particularly high.

The effect size was calculated using the standard deviations of the pre-test and post-test scores. The result (1.64) indicates a large effect size according to the criteria adopted by Cohen (1988). This suggests that the context clues strategy had a strong and positive impact on students' vocabulary development.

Discussion

This research investigated the effectiveness of context clues strategies in improving vocabulary acquisition for descriptive texts. The findings demonstrated a significant increase in student vocabulary scores after implementing the strategy, suggesting its success.

These results align with the expert voice which emphasizes the importance of vocabulary for language learning (Nunan, 2000; Nation & Waring, 2020). Students with a stronger vocabulary foundation can comprehend descriptive texts more effectively (Pikulski & Templeton, 2004). The low pre-test scores highlight the initial vocabulary challenges faced by the students.

The context clues strategy, as defined by Reardon (2019), equips students with the tools to decipher unfamiliar words within a descriptive text by using surrounding information. This empowers students to actively participate in the learning process since this strategy enables them to practice in a new way (Heaton, 1988).

It is essential to also acknowledge limitations. Fadhilah (2011) suggested context clues might be more suitable for learners with advanced vocabulary. This study's focus on a specific strategy and student population may limit generalizability. Additionally, potential limitations with student responses and data collection methods warrant consideration for future research.

CONCLUSION

This pre-experimental research demonstrates a statistically significant improvement in vocabulary knowledge related to descriptive text among tenth-grade students at SMKN 1 Belitang Hilir following the implementation of the context clues strategy. The large effect size (1.64) further emphasizes the substantial positive impact of this strategy on vocabulary acquisition.

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