

The Use of Contextual Clues Strategy to Improve Students' Vocabulary Mastery at SMP Negeri 15 Palu

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ABSTRACT

The research used a quasi-experimental approach with 150 students as the population. The first 30 students were chosen for experimental group, and another 30 for the control group through purposive sampling. In order to gather the data, both groups completed a multiple-choice test as a pre-test and a post-test. The results from the pre-test showed that the control group had slightly higher average score (63) compared to the experimental group (58). However, after implementing the Contextual Clues Strategy, the post-test scores revealed significant improvement in the experimental group, which achieved an average score of 83, compared to the control group's 69. Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed that the t-count value (3.14) was greater than the t-table value (2.002) at a 0.05 significance level. These findings clearly suggest that using the Contextual Clues Strategy can significantly enhance students' vocabulary mastery.

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INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the crucial components of language. In learning English, particularly for students who are learning it as a foreign language is quite difficult. It is considered the most important factor, as students with limited vocabulary find it challenging to communicate their thoughts and comprehend others. Capability in vocabulary is essential for developing the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. A rich vocabulary empowers learner to articulate thoughts precisely and engage in meaningful interactions, both orally and in writing (Nandita, Thamrin, Anggreni, & Nadrun, 2025). As a global lingua franca, English plays a vital role in educational and professional advancement (Nizam, Nadrun, & Hasyim, 2025). In conclusion, a strong vocabulary can develop the ability in four English skills.

In English vocabulary, Fries (1974) categorized vocabulary into four types: content words, function words, substitute words, and distributed words. Among these, content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are considered suitable for teaching vocabulary to

Junior High School students. According to Karman & Indriani (2021), the important aspects of vocabulary include pronunciation, meaning, synonym, antonym, and use.

The *Merdeka Curriculum* is closely linked to vocabulary learning through its flexible, student-focused approach, emphasizing real-world contexts. Vocabulary development is woven into other language skills like speaking, writing, reading, and listening, while also fostering literacy growth. Moreover, the curriculum encourages independent learning and interest-driven projects, which help expand students' vocabulary. By focusing on 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and effective communication, it highlights the importance of mastering vocabulary in practical settings, making vocabulary learning more engaging and relevant.

Several challenges related to vocabulary mastery through contextual clues arise within the *Merdeka Curriculum* framework. Based on Roma (2025), many students are lack of participation or passive during the learning process according to various observations. A key issue is the insufficient training for teachers in effectively implementing contextual learning strategies, leading to inconsistent practices that hinder students' vocabulary development. Some classrooms may emphasize rote memorization over meaningful contexts, limiting students' ability to apply vocabulary in real-life situations. Additionally, the diverse needs of students, varying levels of prior knowledge, and an overemphasis on standardized testing can make it difficult to implement effective strategies. Inadequate resources and a lack of student motivation further impede vocabulary mastery, while traditional assessment methods may not accurately measure students' abilities to use contextual clues. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing vocabulary mastery among students by promoting effective contextual learning strategies.

B. Research Subject

Population is a number of subjects that will be taken in research. According to Creswell (2012:142), "a population is a group of individuals who have the same characteristics." In this research, the researcher chose SMP Negeri 15 Palu's seventh grade students as the population. There are five classes in this grade. There are 150 total of students in this grade which are divided into 30 for each class. In selecting the sample, the researcher used 2 classes from this grade as experimental and control groups.

C. Data Collection Techniques

The researcher used a pre-test to assess students' vocabulary proficiency before treatment and a post-test to measure their improvement afterward.

A. Pre-test

The pre-test conducted prior to the treatment for both control and experimental groups of students. The students are asked to answer a multiple-choice test. The purpose of giving a pre-test is to find out the students' prior knowledge.

B. Post test

The post-test was administered to the students after they received the treatment. It was conducted to determine the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery using the contextual clue technique. In this research, the researcher gave a post-test to the students in the

experimental group to assess their vocabulary mastery after receiving the treatment. Additionally, to score the students' performance in the post-test, the researcher used the same scoring system as in the pre-test.

C. Treatment

The treatment involved the teaching-learning process using the independent variable, contextual teaching and learning. The researcher conducted the treatment over six meetings, each focusing on a different topic.

In this research, the researcher used the technique to improve the vocabulary mastery of the students. In every meeting, the students of the experimental group will be given treatment of contextual clue strategy.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

In order to determine the individual scores, the data gathered from the test was analyzed using a straightforward statistical formula. This method is suggested by Arikunto (2013:240) as follows:

$$\Sigma = \frac{x}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

Σ = Standard score

x = Total score

N = Maximum score

100 = Constant number

To compute the mean scores of the students, the researcher used the formula by Arikunto (2013) as follows:

$$Mx = \Sigma x / N$$

Where:

M = mean score

Σx = sum of scores

N = number of students

Next, the researcher determined the sum of the square derivation by using formula conducted by Arikunto (2013) as follows:

- The formula for the experimental group:

$$\Sigma x^2 = \Sigma x^2 - \frac{(\Sigma x)^2}{N}$$

Where:

Σx^2 : The square deviation sum of experimental group

Σx^2 : The score sum of experimental group

N : The total number of students

Next, the researcher used t-table test to find out the significant difference between the result of pre-test and post-test as well as to prove either the hypothesis is accepted or rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

This study presents the research findings and data analysis conducted from February-May 2024 at SMP Negeri 15 Palu. The data were gathered using tests as the main instruments, and the results are displayed in numerical format. The findings were derived from a multiple-choice test, which included both a pre-test and post-test. The pre-test was administered during the first session, while the post-test was given during the final session in two classes: VII Ki Hajar (experimental class) and VII Suratin (control class).

The pre-test was conducted for both the experimental and control classes during the first session, before the treatment began. Each class consisted of 30 students. The purpose of the pre-test was to evaluate the students' initial vocabulary mastery to receiving the treatment. The pre-test results for each class are displayed in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Initials	Max. score	Standard score	Qualification
MB	20	35	Failed
YSR	20	75	Successful
BRASSI	20	15	Failed
ERE			
SYS	20	45	Failed
MNI	20	45	Failed
DAZ	20	45	Failed
MFL	20	75	Successful
BP	20	70	Successful
CAL	20	50	Failed
SS	20	55	Failed
FPL	20	55	Failed
YRK	20	50	Failed
IHW	20	95	Successful
MA	20	25	Failed
IFL	20	40	Failed
ZF	20	55	Failed
MO	20	55	Failed
ZK	20	65	Failed
DR.	20	55	Failed
ZKR	20	50	Failed
HSR	20	85	Successful
IM	20	75	Successful
AB	20	70	Successful
GAB	20	60	Failed
YAK	20	45	Failed
FTR	20	55	Failed
MRR	20	80	Successful
HA	20	95	Successful
FM	20	50	Failed

SDA	20	70	Successful
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The average score of the experimental class in the pre-test was 58. According to Table 4.1, the highest score recorded was 95 while the lowest was 15. Based on the school's minimum competency standard (KKM) of 70, nine students met the required standard, whereas twenty-one students did not.

After the treatment was implemented, a post-test was conducted for both the experimental and control classes on November 27, 2024. The purpose of this test was to evaluate the students' progress in vocabulary mastery and to assess the effectiveness of the treatment. The post-test results for the experimental class, displayed in the table above, show that the highest score achieved was 100 while the lowest was 50. According to the school's minimum competency standard (KKM) of 70, twenty six students reach the standard, while four did not. The researcher then analyzed the average post-test score for the experimental class based on the individual results.

B. Discussion

Teaching vocabulary using contextual clues is a highly effective strategy with numerous strengths. One key benefit is that it promotes critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze and infer the meanings of unfamiliar words based on surrounding text, fostering problem-solving skills and deeper language comprehension. This approach also builds independent reading skills, empowering learners to deduce word meanings without constant reliance on a dictionary or teacher intervention. As a result, students become more confident readers, better equipped to navigate challenging texts and real-world language scenarios.

Another significant advantage is the improvement in overall reading comprehension. Understanding vocabulary through context helps students grasp the broader meaning of a text while engaging more actively with the material. This engagement creates a sense of discovery and helps solidify vocabulary retention, as words learned in meaningful contexts are easier to remember and use correctly in writing or speech. Moreover, repeated exposure to words in varied contexts strengthens understanding and reinforces long-term retention.

Contextual learning is also highly adaptable, catering to students of different proficiency levels. Simpler texts can be used for beginners, while advanced learners can tackle more complex materials requiring nuanced inference. This flexibility supports differentiated instruction, ensuring all learners can benefit from the approach. By integrating vocabulary learning with reading and writing, this strategy fosters well-rounded language development and prepares students for effective communication in both academic and everyday settings. Presenting the research results, the researcher discussed the findings. The findings convey that the use of Contextual Clues Strategy effectively increase the vocabulary mastery of the seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 15 Palu. This is supported by the result that the t-counted (3.14) is higher than the t-table (2.002). Furthermore, students showed a noticeable improvement in their vocabulary skills after using the Contextual Clues Strategy. The data revealed that 26 students scored above the minimum criteria, while 4 students scored below it, indicating an improvement in vocabulary. The use of contextual clues played a crucial role in this

enhancement. These clues helped students better understand vocabulary within reading texts, supporting findings by Rhoder & Huester (2002), who argue that contextual clues aid in identifying unfamiliar words in complex texts. Similarly, Boonchun (2018) emphasized that contextual clues help students predict the meaning of unfamiliar words by examining their surrounding context. Clarke & Nation (1980) also noted that this technique aids students in making predictions about unknown words.

The results indicated that students became more proficient at selecting and using words in context, supporting Uzzer's (2019) view that contextual clues enhance word recognition. Analyzing word functions in sentences effectively builds vocabulary and helps students use words appropriately.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the data analysis that has been presented before, the researcher concludes that the use of contextual clues strategy can improve vocabulary mastery of the seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 15 Palu. This can be proved by comparing the t-counted value and t-table value. The t-counted value is 3.14 and the t-table value is 2.002, it means that the t-counted is higher than t-table value. In short, contextual clues strategy is effective to improve students' vocabulary mastery of the seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 15 Palu.

At the end of this chapter, the researcher gives some suggestions which hopefully be useful for English teacher, students and other researchers:

a. English Teacher

English teachers can utilize this technique to help students expand their vocabulary. Contextual clues offer an effective way for students to easily comprehend and enhance their vocabulary skills. This method supports vocabulary growth by helping students infer meanings based on context.

b. Students

Students can enhance their vocabulary by frequently reading English texts, identifying unfamiliar words, and seeking their meanings. This practice helps gradually expand their vocabulary and improve word knowledge. By actively engaging with new words in context, students can steadily build their vocabulary foundation.

c. Other Researcher

This study can serve as a valuable reference for future research. Researchers can use the contextual clue technique to further enhance students' vocabulary, especially in selecting appropriate words. However, there are still areas in this study that need improvement. Future researchers should focus on refining their teaching approaches to help students better understand and learn English easily.

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