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Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery Using Context Clues Strategy

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan strategi Context Clues dalam meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris serta mengetahui respons siswa terhadap penerapan strategi tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) berdasarkan model Kemmis dan McTaggart yang meliputi tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Subjek penelitian adalah 32 siswa kelas X SMKN 3 Mataram pada tahun ajaran 2022/2023. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes kosakata berbentuk pilihan ganda dan angket respons siswa, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif kuantitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa nilai rata-rata penguasaan kosakata siswa meningkat dari 71,7 menjadi 93,2 setelah penerapan strategi Context Clues. Selain itu, seluruh siswa (100%) mencapai Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM) yang ditetapkan sebesar 75. Hasil angket juga menunjukkan adanya respons positif siswa terhadap proses pembelajaran menggunakan strategi tersebut. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa penerapan strategi Context Clues berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Inggris siswa dan dapat digunakan sebagai alternatif strategi pembelajaran kosakata di tingkat sekolah menengah kejuruan.
Kata kunci: Context Clues, penguasaan kosakata, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, penelitian tindakan kelas, strategi pembelajaran.

Abstract

This study aimed to describe the implementation of the *Context Clues* strategy in improving students' English vocabulary mastery and to investigate their responses to its implementation. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on Kemmis and McTaggart's model, involving planning, action, observation, and reflection. The participants were 32 tenth-grade students at SMKN 3 Mataram during the 2022/2023 academic year. Data were collected through a multiple-choice vocabulary test and a student response questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive quantitative

methods. The findings revealed that students' mean vocabulary score increased from 71.7 to 93.2 following the implementation of the *Context Clues* strategy. Furthermore, all students (100%) achieved the minimum mastery criterion of 75. The questionnaire findings also indicated positive student responses to the learning process using this strategy. These findings suggest that the implementation of the *Context Clues* strategy contributed to improving students' English vocabulary mastery. Therefore, this strategy can be considered an alternative instructional approach for supporting vocabulary development among vocational high school students.
Keywords: Context Clues, vocabulary mastery, English language learning, classroom action research, instructional strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is one of the essential components of English language learning because it supports students' ability to understand and communicate ideas through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Adequate vocabulary knowledge enables learners to recognize word meanings, construct meaningful sentences, comprehend written texts, and express their thoughts effectively. Vocabulary learning involves not only memorizing individual words but also understanding their meanings, forms, functions, and appropriate uses in different communicative contexts. Vocabulary represents a collection of words understood by an individual, while Hanan et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of selecting appropriate teaching strategies to improve students' English competence. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, vocabulary development is particularly important because students often have limited opportunities to encounter and use English outside formal learning environments. Therefore, teachers need to provide meaningful vocabulary learning activities that encourage students to understand unfamiliar words and apply their knowledge independently.

Despite its importance, vocabulary mastery remains a challenge for many EFL learners, particularly those who have limited exposure to English in their daily lives. Students frequently experience difficulties in understanding unfamiliar words, identifying appropriate meanings, spelling vocabulary correctly, and using words in meaningful contexts. These difficulties may affect their reading comprehension, classroom participation, and confidence in communicating in English. Similar problems were identified during preliminary

observations at SMKN 3 Mataram, particularly among tenth-grade students. The researcher observed that students repeatedly asked their teacher about unfamiliar vocabulary while completing classroom assignments and frequently depended on dictionaries without first attempting to infer word meanings. In addition, some students experienced difficulties spelling words correctly, as demonstrated during classroom activities in which they were asked to introduce themselves and spell their names. These classroom conditions indicated the need for an instructional strategy that could develop students' vocabulary knowledge while encouraging greater independence in understanding unfamiliar English words.

One instructional approach that may address these difficulties is the Context Clues Strategy, which encourages students to identify the meanings of unfamiliar words by examining information provided in surrounding sentences or paragraphs. Rather than relying entirely on dictionary definitions, students are guided to recognize linguistic clues such as synonyms, antonyms, definitions, examples, and explanations that help clarify word meanings. Similarly, Fudhla et al. (2020) investigated the implementation of context clues in EFL classrooms and highlighted the importance of considering learners' vocabulary proficiency when applying the strategy. Imran and Hidayatullah (2020) emphasize the importance of developing reading materials based on learners' needs, characteristics, and learning objectives. Their research highlights the role of appropriate reading materials in supporting students' comprehension and engagement in English learning. This perspective is relevant to the Context Clues Strategy because students need meaningful reading contexts to interpret unfamiliar vocabulary.

Lai et al. (2022) also found that contextual clues could support vocabulary learning and reading comprehension, although learners differed in their perceptions of its usefulness. Furthermore, Zhou and Wu (2024) demonstrated that contextual information generated by learners could facilitate vocabulary acquisition. These findings suggest that contextual clues can provide meaningful opportunities for students to develop vocabulary knowledge through active engagement with written language.

Although previous studies have examined the application of contextual clues in vocabulary learning, several aspects require further investigation in specific educational settings. Apriliyanti (2019) focused on eighth-grade students at MTs Negeri 1 Pontianak,

while Fudhla et al. (2020) investigated contextual clues among university-level EFL learners. Meanwhile, Lai et al. (2022) explored primary school learners' perceptions of contextual clues and morphemic analysis strategies, and Stevani et al. (2022) examined the relationship between contextual clues and reading proficiency among university students. These studies provide valuable evidence regarding the potential contribution of contextual clues to vocabulary development. However, their educational contexts, learner characteristics, and research emphases differ from those of vocational high school students. In particular, the implementation of contextual clues in addressing vocabulary difficulties among tenth-grade students at SMKN 3 Mataram, together with students' responses to the learning process, had not been established by the studies reviewed. This contextual gap provided the rationale for investigating how the strategy could be implemented in a vocational school classroom and how students responded to its use in vocabulary instruction.

Based on these considerations, the present study aimed to investigate the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy in improving students' vocabulary mastery and to examine students' responses to its application in English language teaching. The research was conducted among tenth-grade students at SMKN 3 Mataram during the 2022/2023 academic year. Specifically, the study focused on how contextual clues were integrated into classroom vocabulary activities to help students recognize unfamiliar words, infer meanings from surrounding information, and develop greater independence in vocabulary learning. In addition, students' responses were examined to understand their engagement and perceptions during the implementation of the strategy. Through a classroom action research approach, the study sought to provide classroom-based evidence regarding the practical application of contextual clues in vocabulary instruction. The findings were expected to contribute to the development of appropriate vocabulary teaching strategies for EFL learners, particularly in vocational high school settings where students require sufficient English vocabulary knowledge to support their academic learning and communication.

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve students' vocabulary mastery through the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy. The research

adopted the cyclical action research model consisting of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This approach allowed the researcher to implement instructional strategies, evaluate classroom activities, and reflect on students' learning progress (Burns, 2020).

The study was conducted at SMKN 3 Mataram during the 2022/2023 academic year. The participants were 32 tenth-grade students of Class X TO A/TKRO A (Automotive Light Vehicle Engineering). The research focused on improving students' ability to understand unfamiliar English vocabulary through contextual information in reading texts. The researcher collaborated with the English teacher to implement and observe the teaching and learning activities.

Data were collected through vocabulary tests, questionnaires, and classroom observations. The vocabulary test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions, with five points assigned to each correct answer. The questionnaires were used to identify students' responses to the Context Clues Strategy, while classroom observations documented students' participation and learning activities. These instruments were used to evaluate vocabulary development and students' engagement during the instructional process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis. Students' vocabulary achievement was determined by calculating the mean test scores and the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75. The results were compared to identify improvements in vocabulary mastery following the implementation of the strategy. Questionnaire responses and classroom observations were also examined descriptively to support the evaluation of the learning process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The study investigated the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy in improving vocabulary mastery among 32 tenth-grade students of SMKN 3 Mataram. Classroom Action Research (CAR) was employed through the stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The researcher collaborated with the English teacher, who served as an observer

during the teaching and learning process. The intervention was conducted in August 2023 through four classroom meetings.

During the implementation, students were introduced to the use of contextual information to identify unfamiliar English words. The learning activities involved reading narrative texts, identifying unfamiliar vocabulary, interpreting word meanings through contextual clues, and practicing spelling. One of the narrative texts used was The Legend of Surabaya. Students also participated in group discussions and were encouraged to infer word meanings without immediately consulting dictionaries or online translation tools. These activities were intended to develop students' vocabulary knowledge and encourage more independent reading.

The vocabulary assessment consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions, and the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) was established at 75. It showed initial mean score of 71.7 and a final mean score of 93.2. The comparison indicated a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary achievement following the implementation of the strategy.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Vocabulary Achievement

Indicator	Initial assessment	Final assessment
Number of students	32	32
Mean score	71.7	93.2
Minimum mastery criterion (KKM)	75	75
Students achieving KKM	14	32
Mastery percentage	43.75%	100%

The findings demonstrated an increase of approximately 21.5 points in the reported class mean. Furthermore, all 32 students achieved scores above the minimum mastery criterion in the final assessment, indicating that the predetermined classroom success indicator had been met.

The comparison shows that the final vocabulary score was considerably higher than the initial score. The final assessment results ranged from 85 to 100, suggesting that students demonstrated relatively strong performance after participating in the contextual vocabulary activities.

The classroom observations also indicated positive developments in students'

participation. Students became more actively involved in group activities, paid attention to the learning materials, and participated in identifying and spelling unfamiliar words. Students showed greater interest and enjoyment during the lessons.

Based on the reflection stage, the researcher concluded that the learning activities had fulfilled the classroom success criterion. Consequently, no further instructional cycle was conducted.

Discussion

The findings suggested that the Context Clues Strategy was associated with improved vocabulary mastery among tenth-grade students at SMKN 3 Mataram. The increase in the reported mean score from 71.7 to 93.2 indicated that students performed better in the vocabulary assessment after participating in the instructional activities. Furthermore, the achievement of the minimum mastery criterion by all 32 students suggested that the strategy was successfully implemented according to the classroom action research indicator. These findings were consistent with Apriliyanti (2019), who reported improvements in students' understanding of vocabulary meanings through contextual clues, with mean scores increasing from 60.23 in the first cycle to 73.33 in the second cycle and 89.04 in the third cycle. Although the studies involved different educational settings, both reported favorable vocabulary learning outcomes following contextual instruction.

The improvement could be understood in relation to the learning opportunities provided by contextual vocabulary activities. Rather than relying entirely on dictionaries or memorizing isolated words, students were encouraged to examine surrounding sentences, recognize relevant information, and infer possible meanings. This approach was consistent with Fudhla et al. (2019), who discussed context clues as a vocabulary learning strategy, and Kurniawati et al. (2019), who investigated the effectiveness of contextual clues in vocabulary teaching. The findings suggested that providing students with meaningful textual information could support vocabulary understanding while encouraging them to become more independent in interpreting unfamiliar expressions.

Another important finding concerned students' classroom participation. During the instructional process, students worked collaboratively, identified unfamiliar vocabulary, discussed possible meanings, and practiced spelling. The researcher observed that students

demonstrated greater attention and participation during the learning activities. These observations suggested that contextual vocabulary instruction provided opportunities for students to engage actively with language rather than simply receive word definitions from the teacher. The findings were also relevant to Utara (2020), whose research addressed the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy in reading comprehension. Both studies highlighted the potential value of using textual information to support students' understanding of English reading materials.

The results also indicated that contextual vocabulary instruction was relevant to the difficulties identified during the preliminary observation. Before the intervention, students frequently depended on dictionaries, struggled to interpret unfamiliar words, and experienced difficulties with spelling and pronunciation. Similarly, Hanan et al. (2020) demonstrate that strategic reading activities contribute significantly to reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. These findings suggest that contextual information and active reading processes play important roles in developing students' understanding of English texts. Through the Context Clues Strategy, students practiced identifying word meanings from narrative texts and participated in activities involving vocabulary recognition and spelling. These learning experiences were consistent with the broader importance of vocabulary knowledge in English language learning discussed by Wero et al. (2021). Nevertheless, the present assessment primarily documented vocabulary test performance; separate quantitative measurements of spelling and pronunciation development were not reported. Therefore, improvements in these specific aspects should be interpreted cautiously.

Overall, the findings supported the use of the Context Clues Strategy as a practical approach to vocabulary instruction in the classroom investigated. The combination of reading activities, contextual inference, group discussion, and vocabulary exercises was accompanied by higher assessment scores and positive classroom observations. However, because the study involved one class without a comparison group, the findings did not establish that contextual clues alone caused the improvement. The results should instead be interpreted as evidence of successful classroom implementation and improved vocabulary achievement within the observed instructional setting.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, this study concludes that the Context Clues Strategy is effective in improving the vocabulary mastery of tenth-grade students at SMKN 3 Mataram. The implementation of this strategy helps students identify and understand unfamiliar words by using contextual information in reading texts. The findings show an increase in students' average vocabulary scores from 71.7 to 93.2, with all 32 students (100%) achieving the minimum mastery criterion of 75. These results indicate that the strategy successfully meets the research objective of improving students' vocabulary mastery.

Furthermore, students demonstrate positive responses to the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy. Classroom observations and questionnaire findings indicate that the strategy encourages students to participate actively in learning activities, understand vocabulary in context, and develop greater independence in identifying word meanings. Therefore, the Context Clues Strategy provides a practical and engaging approach to vocabulary instruction and supports students' English learning.

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