

Contextual Clues Vocabulary Strategies Choice among Business Management Students

Siti Nurshafezan Ahmad¹, Ahmad Mazli Muhammad¹ & Aini Akmar Mohd Kasim¹

¹ Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia

Correspondence: Siti Nurshafezan Ahmad, Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia. E-mail: nurshafezan@gmail.com

Received: February 22, 2018 Accepted: March 22, 2018 Online Published: March 24, 2018

doi: 10.5539/elt.v11n4p107 URL: <http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n4p107>

Abstract

New trends in vocabulary learning focus on strategic vocabulary learning to create more active and independent language learners. Utilising suitable contextual clues strategies is seen as vital in enabling and equipping language learners with the skill to guess word meaning accurately, moving away from dependency on a dictionary to improve their academic reading experience. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to investigate types of contextual clues selected and the extent of learners' ability to obtain accurate word meaning through contextual guessing. The participants were Business Management students of various programmes who were taught contextual clues strategies and tested using class work sheet to analyse their utilisation of the strategies. Results indicated most participants depended on variety of contextual clues strategies, particularly cognitive strategies. The participants were also observed to be independent in guessing word meaning by making conscious decisions, as well as showing minimal reference to the instructor when attempting to utilise the strategies taught. Nevertheless, other interesting results indicated unsuccessful accurate guesses by some participants despite similar strategy choice. Overall conclusions indicated a degree of successful language learners who self direct themselves by making conscious and informed strategy choices. This leads to more emphasis on the importance of teaching and learning how to utilise suitable contextual clues strategies in continuous effort in improving and utilising the skill.

Keywords: strategic vocabulary learning, contextual clues strategy choice, accurate word meaning, accurate guesses, independent and active language learners

1. Introduction

There has been an increasing interest in creating more independent language learners who can manage their own learning through strategic vocabulary learning. In order to master academic reading in the second language more effectively, language learners need to possess considerable vocabulary learning skills to learn word meaning more accurately. Vocabulary learning skills are vital as it could equip learners with the ability to improve their experience reading in the second language by learning vocabulary more systematically. Mart (2012) illustrates vocabulary as "indispensable part of language" and stresses learning through context as meaningful for vocabulary learning. He also describes vocabulary as "the vital organs and the flesh" of language. Vocabulary could be learnt through learning strategies method of applying a systematic set of vocabulary strategies. This is particularly for guessing word meaning from context; moving away from total dependence on a dictionary which might offer limited word meanings. Every university offers academic reading courses for the purpose of improving academic reading, in which the skill of learning from context is the first skill to be taught and mastered. Reardon (2011) opines that English vocabulary is immersed when teaching language skills and using and understanding English words will create progress in those skills. The importance and strength of learning vocabulary through context are emphasised by proponents such as Mart (2012), Hirai, Borrego, Garza and Kloock (2010), Shokouhi and Askari (2010), as well as Stahl (1999).

There are still many second language learners who possess limited vocabulary knowledge and struggle to master reading for academic knowledge. They also depend fully and blindly on a dictionary, unaware of the intended meaning in text, consequently select the wrong word meaning. They lack the deeper knowledge of inferring accurate word meaning. Nagy (1995) emphasises how a dictionary can be limited and how words have the habit of changing its meaning based on context. She strengthens the need to learn word meaning more effectively and

independently through context. Reading for academic purposes requires learners to possess substantial vocabulary to improve their reading ability and to master the necessary knowledge. According to Ahmed (2013), problems in reading arise when there are many difficult words to learn that learners cannot remember for long and depend too much on the dictionaries. On the other hand, Awwad Osman (2013) describes the learning situation faced by language learners as *“One of the greatest problems confronting advanced foreign students”*, in a situation where *“...a heavy load of difficult words and expressions that do not retain even after they have read them and checked their meanings in dictionaries many times”* and learners as to *“... read without any specific method for remembering new words”*. Many students do not possess certain vocabulary methods to acquire and remember new words. This applies with many university students who need to be equipped with a strategic and systematic set of vocabulary strategies that they can apply in and outside the language classroom, actively and independently. In the local context of this study, there is always a constant interest to improve Malaysian students' second language learning experience.

This requires more studies on second language learners' preference and ability on the use of contextual clues strategies. This is to observe how useful systematic vocabulary strategies are for more independent and active second language learners. This is to further understand their choice of strategies and utilise the data for further improvement on the teaching and learning of this skill.

This issue is important to be researched in the pursuit of improving ways to learn vocabulary in the second language. Language learners need to be equipped with the necessary vocabulary skills by providing a “tool” without depending too much on the dictionary. Previous studies in the potential use of contextual strategy type done in other countries are significant in creating further interest in observing how Malaysian students use contextual strategies when reading in the second language. This interest can be mirrored in the research questions focusing on types of contextual clues utilised by the participants and the extent of the strategies in leading to their accurate guesses. Strategic vocabulary learning using contextual clues strategies works along the line of The Oxford Self-Regulated learning (S²R) Model (1995) which indicates that students are more independent and active when they apply strategic learning. The use of strategies allows for a self directed learning where learners are described as independent in selecting suitable strategies to achieve their learning goal. Self-regulated learning is placed “at the heart of second or foreign language acquisition”. The research questions will be answered by observing real time classroom learning and teaching of contextual clues. This is to reveal how well the students could guess accurate word meaning through intelligent guessing after being taught the strategies. The results could indicate how learners self-regulate their learning when selecting the taught contextual clues strategies in making independent and informed decisions. This results in knowing how much emphasis is needed to stress the constant use of contextual clues strategies in every reading class. Therefore, there is a need to observe the significance of vocabulary strategy learning through context in order to evaluate how far this vocabulary strategy can take them in the pursuit of improving their vocabulary learning experience.

2. Literature Review

The need to teach and learn contextual clues strategies stem from the interest to create more active and independent language learners through self-regulated vocabulary learning. Readers are seen as the “heart” or “core” of the whole reading experience, as well as the ones who can manage their own learning. Learning is seen to begin with the learners (Griffith, 2004). She also describes learners as the ones who do the learning part. Successful language learners are seen as able to employ vocabulary learning strategies and do it independently. Pikulski and Templeton (2004) describe vocabulary learning strategies as “the greatest “tool” besides education, and its ability to function in the diverse social and economic environment which is highly determined by language skills and word knowledge. Utilisation of contextual clues strategies can also be associated with successful and unsuccessful language learners in utilising language strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995). The framework of this study lies in the workings of Oxford's taxonomy for language learning strategies (1990), which categorises contextual strategies as reading strategies. The taxonomy lists contextual strategies as part of a continuum of strategies indicating different strategy levels where learners control content, identify structure and create links. The self-regulation model, the Oxford's (1995) S²R Model, postulates how learners actively and independently learn through a systematic series of strategies. Self-regulated learners are expected to have multidimensional approaches to strategies; characteristics similar to successful learners. Such learners utilise useful learning strategies, according to Rasekh and Ranjbari (2003). The systematic process of learning vocabulary via context can also be understood in a five-step suggestion by Nation and Coady (1988): first, look for part of speech of the unfamiliar word, then focus on the direct context of the unfamiliar word and simplifying it if need be, followed by observing the bigger context. Next, guess its meaning and end it by checking whether it is a correct guess. Meanwhile, Thornbury's (2002:148) steps to using context are: first to decide on part of

speech of the unknown word, followed by looking at the collocates of the unfamiliar word, for example whether there is an article if the word is a noun. Then, look at the larger context, look at the word form, guess the meaning and finally keep on reading the text further to confirm the meaning.

Vocabulary learning strategies create multiple benefits in acquiring accurate word meaning through the help of context. Hirai, Borrego, Garza and Kloock (2010) opine that contextual practice allows students to acquire “depth of knowledge of words” that enables students to comprehend and apply words in ways that are meaningful. It is also clear that with the importance of context for academic language literacy, it is vital that they “encounter” words in many different contexts. Prince (1996:489) mentions three benefits of contextual learning: first, learners are obliged to create strategies such as anticipating and inferencing in order to assess word meaning in context, which is seen as learners progressing into independent learners; a milestone to proficiency. Contextual meaning also unearths what wants to be communicated, and finally shows how the words are utilised. Contextual skills enable students to see how the learnt word functions grammatically and better remembered. Meanwhile, Thornbury (2002:53) feels words learnt in context make students appreciate the word’s collocations and grammatical structures. A study found significant differences in students who were exposed to Dictionary Strategy, Contextual Clues and CALL. On the other hand, Reardon (2011) mentions a study on Latino English learners who were taught contextual clues strategies such as the use of synonyms, antonyms, definition, examples, appositive words or phrases and punctuation, as well the use of Spanish and English cognates. The results showed positive feedback received from the teachers and students on how useful these two strategies are in extending the students’ ability to derive meaning from text. Meanwhile, Cetinavci (2013) reveals how “rich context” helped successful guessing compared with “poor context”. Tian (2015) found that contextual words created positive impact on pre-text learning, oral and writing interaction and word- meaning inferring.

Learning word meaning through context is an indirect reflection of degrees of successful and unsuccessful language learners. Sharifabad and Vosoughi (2013) reveal that good readers outdid poor readers in using metacognitive reading strategies when analysing the use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. The overall results indicate positive relationships between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. A strategy study between high and low groups reading hypermedia text found the high group to be using mostly skimming and background knowledge, while the lower group mainly used paraphrasing and translating into first language and using the dictionary. Javadi, Yaghoobbi, Hassanzade, and Ebadi (2010) investigate the connection between metacognitive strategies awareness of reading strategies and students’ academic level, and found that much higher proficient students utilised more complex cognitive and metacognitive strategies than lower proficient ones, as well as correlation between metacognitive awareness and academic success. A study on Japanese students revealed that the respondents who used variety of general language learning strategies were found to be utilisers of mostly metacognitive strategies compared with the least used social strategies. The findings were obtained by employing Oxford’s SILL Questionnaire to acquire their choice of strategies on six hundred Japanese subjects to investigate which strategies were applied and useful for them. The most favoured strategies used were bilingual dictionaries, written and spoken repetition and strategies emphasised on form which affirm that strategy patterns could shift as a learner matures or become increasingly proficient. Rokni and Niknaqsh (2013) found that their experimental group who used different types of context clues did better than the ones who were no trained for it. Other studies that revealed positive results in success in vocabulary and contextual strategy use are: by Shokouhi and Askari (2010), who found the effectiveness of contextual guessing strategy (CGS) than non-context strategy, Rahimi and Katal (2012), who reviewed previous studies on the success of the use of metacognitive strategies, Ebrahimi (2012), who found more proficient students who utilised more strategies, Kolahi, Azam and Kehtari (2013), who discovered that contextual clues created significant effect on the guessing of unknown words among Iranian EFL students, Reftari, Sharifahabad and Vosoughi (2013), who reviewed studies on contextual strategies found positive relationships between strategy instruction in improving reading comprehension, as well as the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies, and Dwaik and Shehadeh (2013), who discovered a close relationship between context use and text comprehension, as well as high use of local contextual clues. Ghafournia (2014) revealed that successful learners utilised cognitive and metacognitive language learning strategies, with successful ones who were found to employ more variety of strategies which includes the use of context.

With previous studies showing positive results on the use of vocabulary and contextual clues strategies in various nations, it can also be significantly interesting to investigate the use of such strategies in the local context of this study. This study is generally similar to previous studies which primarily focused on types of contextual strategy use. Nevertheless, the difference lies in their correlational approach to reporting significant data. The current study also focuses on similar aspect but not emphasising on correlations. In comparison, this study takes an

empirical approach of a naturalistic observation of the teaching and learning of contextual strategies, as well as analysing vocabulary strategy choice. Such observations and analysis of vocabulary strategy selections will create substantial and practical analysis to the research question on contextual strategy use. Then data from the observation will explain the going-ons in the teaching of contextual strategies and the analysis from the worksheet will reflect participants' strategy choice and their justification of such choices.

It is also imperative to understand how teaching vocabulary strategies is necessary in aiding language learners to learn to select suitable strategies. Formal instructions enable learners to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and practice to select strategies efficiently before leaving it to the learners to test their own knowledge on this skill. A study by Yang (2014) revealed that strategy instruction done on Chinese university students elevated their strategy use and English vocabulary proficiency. Moreover, learning vocabulary through context requires instruction that will assist them learn new word knowledge and develop strategies so that they can increase depth of knowledge through time (Texas Reading Initiative, 2002).

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The current study takes an empirical, direct and practical approach to obtaining and reporting data. The findings of this study were reported in a direct and observational manner, as opposed to a correlational approach to analysing and reporting results. A linear approach to analysing does not always reveal everything as data can be more complex (Ghafournia, 2014 p.65). Language learning experience in a language classroom can be insightful and unique than a linear approach to reporting language based data. Thus reporting what was observed could provide more detailed language learning process. It was set in a naturalistic setting with no intervention controlling certain aspects of this study. The results were reported based on the instructor's actual experience and observations teaching contextual strategies in language classrooms. Data obtained were analysed in a form of a qualitative report of observation of the teaching and learning of contextual clues strategies, followed by statistical data on correctly guessed meaning based on given words in the worksheet, as well as contextual strategy types chosen to answer the research questions.

3.2 Participant

The participants of this study comprised of four groups totalling 77 Business Management from various business programmes from a local university. They were second year students taking English for academic reading course. All participants were the researcher's own students. These participants were a representation of a total population of students from various Business Management programmes.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

The participants were convenient samplings. They were researcher's own students who were taught a reading course for the semester. Real time language classroom setting according to a reading course was the setting in which the data were obtained.

3.4 Materials

One of the materials used to collect data on choice of types of contextual clues strategies was the actual teaching materials consisting of a set of contextual clues strategies adapted from a reading course book. This teaching material had been utilised during previous semesters by the researcher. It was used to teach the participants during actual class time according to the syllabus. The next material utilised was a worksheet prepared consisting of a set of items intended to observe the participants' level of understanding on the utilisation of contextual clues strategies that had been taught earlier. The worksheet, which had also been employed during previous semesters, required the participants to guess given words, indicated which strategy they employed to make the guess, whether they used another strategy to further assist guessing of word meaning and reason for their choice of strategy. This was to evaluate the participants' performance on the ability to utilise suitable contextual clues strategies to guess meanings of the given words in the worksheet.

3.5 Procedure

In the first week of the semester, the participants were first taught various meanings of commonly used words such as "bank", "school" and "file" to establish to the participants the dynamics of meanings of commonly used words. The participants were tested on their knowledge of meaning of such words. They were shown a total of 8 commonly used words with various meanings from various contexts. Next, the participants were taught 6 contextual clues strategies by the researcher. Each strategy was taught in detail using the said teaching material with a given example of a sentence to demonstrate how the strategy was utilised based on given context. In the

second week of the semester, the participants were tested on their understanding of the use of the most suitable strategy individually by completing the exercise in the worksheet based on given words in context (Refer to Table 1). They were given the entire 2 class hours to respond to the items stipulated. They were not allowed to consult each other for answers. However, the participants were allowed to refer or consult the instructor should they required assistance in utilising contextual strategies.

Next, data obtained from the first week of teaching were reported based on the researcher's observation of the class. Data from the worksheet were analysed in a quantitative form based on correct guesses of word meaning made by the participants, which strategy taught was selected, whether there was another strategy employed to further assist their attempt to guess the word meaning and reason for their strategy choice. Data obtained were then summarised in percentages in a form of tables to indicate patterns of correct answers and contextual clues strategy choice. Data based on other items in the worksheet were reported in the following sub sections.

4. Results and Discussion

Percentages of correct answers and patterns of strategy choice are reported in the following tables, followed by reports on data obtained from items from the worksheet on another contextual strategy choice made and reason for the participants' choice of strategy.

Table 1. Summary of correct answers guessed by all four groups of participants

| Worksheet Item | BM2413N | BM2403M | BM2443L | BM2443M |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Percentage | Percentage | Percentage | Percentage |
| Item 1 (Question 2) – “ <i>allergens</i> ” | 30 | 75 | 90.4 | 80 |
| Item 2 (Question 3) – “ <i>malicious</i> ” | 70 | 50 | 90.4 | 45 |
| Item 3 (Question 4) – “ <i>manic</i> ” | 40 | 37.5 | 66.6 | 30 |
| Item 4 (Question 5) – “ <i>aspiration</i> ” | 60 | 56.25 | 76.1 | 55 |
| Item 5 (Question 6) – “ <i>valid</i> ” | 65 | 62.5 | 66.6 | 50 |
| Item 6 (Question 7) – “ <i>chronic</i> ” | 55 | 0 | 80.9 | 15 |
| Item 7 (Question 8) – “ <i>premeditated</i> ” | 55 | 75 | 90.4 | 70 |
| Item 8 (Question 9) – “ <i>dominate</i> ” | 20 | 31.25 | 23.8 | 20 |
| Item 9 (Question 10) – “ <i>sociology</i> ” | 50 | 37.5 | 47.6 | 35 |

Table 1 indicates high percentages of correctly guessed word meaning from all the four groups of participants for the given words “*allergens*” according to given context. Only two high percentages from the two groups managed to guess “*malicious*” accurately. Only one group with the highest percentage guessed the meaning of “*manic*” accurately. Two groups with high percentages guessed the meaning of “*aspiration*” correctly. On the other hand, three groups of participants managed to guess “*valid*” accurately, although not in significantly high percentages. Interestingly, a very high percentage from one group of participants reported to guess “*chronic*” accurately, while surprisingly none from another group obtained accurate word meaning of the same words. Three groups of participants with significantly high percentages guessed “*premeditated*” correctly in context.

Furthermore, although the positive results lent support to previous studies on benefits of using contextual strategies for accurate guesses of word meaning, this result was unique from other findings reported in previous studies on benefits of contextual clues. It also reflected a considerable percentages of participants who failed to guess the word meaning accurately. This could be seen in the low percentages of correctly guessed meaning based on context. This indicated that less than half of the total percentages of participants from various groups, obtained inaccurate guesses, mostly for “*dominate*”, “*sociology*” and “*manic*”. This implies that the contextual strategies taught did not assist all the participants. They seemed to possess the inability to use the taught strategies well to assist them in making accurate guesses. This could also possibly indicate different cognitive processing of each individual learner, which could also relate to different levels of proficiency that warrant for more future investigations.

Table 2. Summary of pattern of results on the mostly chosen contextual clues strategies

| Word Item | BM2413N | BM2403M | BM2443M | BM2443L |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| | Strategy choice | Strategy choice | Strategy choice | Strategy choice |
| Q2- <i>allergens</i> | Strategy 3 (Example clue) | Strategy 3 (Example clue) | Strategy 3 (Example clue) | Strategy 3 (Example clue) |
| Q3- <i>malicious</i> | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q4- <i>manic</i> | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategies 4 (General sense/background knowledge), 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 4 (General sense/background knowledge), 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q5- <i>aspiration</i> | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q6- <i>valid</i> | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 4 (General sense/background knowledge), | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q7- <i>chronic</i> | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 2 (Contrast clue) | Strategy 4 (General sense/background knowledge), | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q8- <i>premeditated</i> | Strategy 2 | Strategy 2 (Contrast clue) | Strategies 2 and 5 | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q9- <i>dominate</i> | Strategy 2 (Contrast clue) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |
| Q10- <i>sociology</i> | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategies 5 (Clue from another sentence) | Strategy 1 (Definition clue) | Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) |

Table 2 indicates patterns of the most selected contextual clues strategy types by the four groups of participants. The most selected strategies reported were determined by the percentages of correct word meaning guesses shown in Table 1. Most of the correct guesses were derived from the strategies selected by the participants. Strategy 5 (Clue from the next sentence) was seen as the most dominating strategy among the participants. This choice contributed to the majority of the correctly guessed meanings of most of the given words in the worksheet. This was followed by Strategies 2 (Example clue) and 3 (Contrast clue). On the other hand, Strategy 6 (Word structure clue) was the least chosen by the participants. Minority of the participants utilised this strategy to guess the meaning of “*chronic*”, “*premeditated*” and “*sociology*”. However, the word structure strategy contributed to the most inaccurate guesses of word meaning made by the participants. This indicated that most of the participants probably was still unfamiliar with the use of suffixes and prefixes to derive word meaning.

Moreover, the dominating choice of Strategy 5 (Clue from another sentence) portrays that most of the

participants were seen to depend mostly on cognitive strategies; particularly by processing the relationship between given information in multiple contexts to make sense of accurate word meaning. This also indicated that most of the participants were seen to prefer extra clues or information from another or other sentences. This implies preference of more rich clues to assist them in making a more informed and accurate guesses of word meanings. This confirms a study by Cetinavci (2013) on how helpful a rich context is.

Significantly, the use of Strategy 5 also contributed to the most inaccurate guesses by some of the other participants for several of the given words in the worksheet. Strategy 5 did not seem to aid some of the participants to accurately guess the meaning of “chronic”, “dominate” and “sociology”. To illustrate, many of the participants guessed the meaning of “chronic” wrongly by guessing it to mean “serious” in the context of “chronic disease”, instead of understanding the meaning in terms of duration of time of a disease. This happened despite the clear clue “short-term” given in the first sentence and the contrast clue “yet” indicating contrast in meaning in the next sentence. For “sociology”, many guessed the meaning wrongly, as to mean “socialising”. The participants seemed unaware of a clear clue they could obtain from the suffix “-logy” which means “a study of”. This seems to indicate that some of the participants had either chosen the wrong contextual clues strategy or could not master the use of word structures such as suffixes that could assist them to guess word meaning accurately.

Another significant result on the choice of contextual strategy type made was that the strategy choice was not necessarily made due to corresponding clues. For example, there were participants who did not use the Example strategy simply because the sentence contained an obvious example clue. They referred to another clue which they felt was more helpful. This shows that other clues could assist them to guess word meaning. For instance, some used their background knowledge on the given context or word besides the obvious clues provided in context.

Overall, the choice of contextual strategy reflected a variety of preference of a type of vocabulary strategy selection. The strategy choice reported answered the quest to investigate the extent to which contextual clues strategies could assist learners in successfully making accurate word meaning guesses based on context and contextual strategy choice. This also seem to indicate that not all learners were successful in guessing the given words correctly. This is probably due to wrong strategy choices made, characterising unsuccessful learners. This reflected that not all of the participants managed to accurately guess despite similar strategy choice. Thus, there is a need for more formal and guided instructions, as well as constant practice on using contextual clues strategies more effectively.

4.1 Significant Findings on Reasons Given by the Participants for Choice of Strategy

The participants’ ability to give a reason for their strategy choice could be an indication of their awareness of their strategy choice and their independent decision made on contextual strategy choice. There were many high percentages of the participants, which involved 3 out of the 4 groups, who obtained correctly guessed answers for the meaning of “allergens”, “valid” and “premeditated”. These groups utilised Strategy 4 (Example clue strategy). The reason given by the participants for their choice of the example strategy was due to the clear clues of examples given in context: “pollen” and “dust”. Another mostly chosen strategy by many majorities of the participants was Strategy 2, (Contrast clue). The reason given by most of the participants was due to the obvious clues “while”, “yet” and the symbol “...;...” to guess the meaning of “chronic”, “aspiration” and “premeditated”. The participants seemed to depend on direct and clear strategies. Overall, most of the participants were aware of their choice of strategies as the reasons given corresponded to their strategy choice.

4.2 Significant Findings on Another Strategy Selected by the Participants

Another significant result obtained from the worksheet was that there was no inclination among most of the participants towards the need for another strategy to further assist them to guess meaning of the given words. Most of them indicated in the worksheet that they did not select any other strategy besides what they had selected earlier. They indicated “none” or did not place any answer in the worksheet. It could be inferred that one strategy choice was sufficient to assist them. It could also indicate that they were confident enough in selecting one suitable or the right strategy for an accurate guess.

4.3 Significant Findings in Relation to being Self-Regulated Learners

On the other hand, the use of contextual clues strategies reflects strategic language learning, a reflection of a self-directed language learners. This study could indicate a degree of being self-directed learners among the participants, as reflected in Oxfords’ 1995 S2R Model. This could be seen based on observations on the on goings in the learning sessions. First, their awareness could be seen when they chose certain contextual clues

strategies with minimal need for guidance from the instructor. This indicated that they could become independent learners who self-directed their vocabulary learning by making conscious choices of contextual clues strategies that they deemed fit for their learning goal. The use of contextual clues strategies seemed to be able to make the participants more confident in making their own choices when asked for the reason for them to select a strategy, indicating awareness in what they are learning. Results on most of the correct answers, as indicated in Table 1, showed that they had successfully selected suitable strategies they deemed fit to guess given word meaning accurately. This result is also congruent with Ghafournia's 2014 study, who strongly supported more use of language learning strategies in creating more self-regulated learners.

Nevertheless, this study is limited in the aspect of types of words given for the participants to guess accurately based on context. The given words were common words used which carry many different meanings given the words' general nature. However, it is significant to have a first look at basic or general words and how able were the participants in guessing familiar words correctly based on the knowledge of the dynamics of word meaning especially in exclusive contexts. This is pertinent before participants are tested with more exclusive words in a much richer context. This was to serve as a preliminary study on context use for vocabulary building. Similar patterns of results may be obtained from a larger population of business management students as they possess approximately similar level of English proficiency. At the same time, a contrasting pattern of results across business programmes could also be found as there are students who possess significantly higher proficiency levels.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study was an empirical approach to investigating contextual strategy choices made by language learners from various business programmes. This stems from the concern on improving the vocabulary learning experiences among second language learners through a more guided and active approach to vocabulary learning. With many second language learners still struggling to master accurate meanings of words from academic and even common context, learning vocabulary from context has always been a primary focus in the university's reading courses. Many learners still depend heavily on a dictionary, resulting in a lack of knowledge on how meaning is actually derived from texts. Overall results indicated significant positive and negative patterns of results on the use of contextual strategies in helping the participants guess word meaning accurately. There were participants who had successfully employed contextual clues strategies to enhance their vocabulary learning experience, while there others who were surprisingly unsuccessful in guessing word meanings accurately, despite using the same contextual strategy. Majority of the participants who guessed word meanings accurately by selecting the most suitable contextual strategy could be, at a certain extent, characterised as successful learners. Their level of self-directed learning shown indicated independence in contextual strategies made and displayed awareness based on the reason given for their strategy choice.

These results reflect the focus of this research; how the use of contextual clues strategies could guide the students in learning vocabulary, as well as reflecting them as successful, unsuccessful, and independent language learners. It is a reflection of how a more strategic vocabulary learning can help language learners to be more guided and in control in learning a target language on their own. Not only that, the contextual clues strategies employed by the participants show the ability to create more independent and directed language learners, in and outside the classroom. Nevertheless, the results also show how much is still needed for students to be guided to refine their skills in using the strategies.

The findings of this study are similar with previous studies which found positive results in assisting learners to obtain correct guesses. In contrast, this study is more distinguished in revealing that there are participants who are unsuccessful in making correct guesses of word meanings despite similar strategy choice, yet made inaccurate word meaning guesses. This study also differ in which the results are reported in a more naturalistic and empirical manner, as opposed to a correlational approach to reporting data. This is to reflect this study's more observational approach to investigating and reporting vocabulary learning in the classroom.

Instructors need to teach and guide learners to make more effective use of contextual clues strategies they deem necessary. This is so that learners can be more confident and informed in making the most suitable strategy choices to assist their vocabulary learning. Moreover, with many learners still making inaccurate guesses of even commonly used word in exclusive contexts, the teaching of contextual clues need to primarily focus on creating awareness among language learners on the multiple and dynamic meanings of words before teaching them to guess from more specialised context for academic purposes. This could help instructors to first fine tune the teaching of vocabulary strategies according to learners' proficiency level and increase learners' awareness of multiple word meanings. This will also increase their awareness on taking a more careful decision in making

learning strategy choices to further improve their academic reading experience in managing knowledge of multiple disciplines. Furthermore, language learners should always continuously utilise contextual clues strategies by applying these strategies in and outside the classroom for further improvement. This is to reduce the habit of depending on a dictionary without knowing how meaning is derived. Instructors need to keep encouraging learners to depend more on context which can enhance their cognitive ability to read so that they can be more motivated to learn word meaning on their own outside the language classroom.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our fellow colleagues who have given a lot of feedback and guidance based on their extensive experience in research writing in completing this paper.

References

- Ahmed, A. O. A. (2013). Lexis development: the importance of contextual clues. *European Scientific Journal*. <https://ejournal.org/index.php/esj/article/download/2202/2087>
- Alsaawi, A. A. (2013). To what extent guessing the meaning from the context is helpful in teaching vocabulary. *ARECLS*, 10, 130-146. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2819537>
- Cetinavci, B. M. (2013). Contextual factors in word meaning from context in a foreign language. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.633>
- Dwaik, R. A., & Shehadeh, A. M. (2013). Guessing patterns of Palestinian college students. *The Reading Matrix*, 13(1). Retrieved from https://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/april_2013/dwaik_shehadeh.pdf
- Ebrahimi, S. S. (2012). Reading strategies of Iranian postgraduate English students living at ESL context in the First and Second Language. Paper presented at the 2012 International Conference on Education and Management Innovation, Singapore. Retrieved from <https://scholar.google.com.my/citations?user=pxDp-VEAAAAJ7&hl=en>
- Hirai, D. L., Borrego, I., Garza, E., & Kloock, C. T. (2010). *Academic language strategies for adolescents: A "how to manual" for educators*. USA: Routledge
- Gafournia, N. (2014). Language learning strategy use and reading achievement. *English Language Teaching*, 7(4). <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n4p64>
- Griffiths, C. (2004). Language learning strategies: theory and research. Retrieved from https://www.crie.org.nz/research-paper/c_griffiths_op1.pdf
- Introducing the strategic self-regulation (S2R) model of language learning: the strategic self-regulation (S2R) model of language learning, (n.d). Retrieved from <https://catalogue.pearsoned.co.uk/assets/hip/gb/hip-gb.../samplechapter/0582381290.pdf>
- Javadi, M., Yaghoobbi, M., Hassanzade, A., & Ebadi, Z. (2010). The Relationship between metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and students' academic status in Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. *Iranian Medical Science Journal*, 3(10), 246-254.
- Kolahi, S. H., Azam, A., & Kehtari, M. (2013). The Comparative Effect of Types of Contextual Clues on Iranian EFL Learners' Prediction of the Meaning of Unknown Vocabularies. *Science and Education Publishing*. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-1-8-1>
- Mart, C. T. (2012). Guessing the meaning of words from context: why and how. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 1(6).
- Nagy, W. E. (1995). On the role of context in first and second language vocabulary learning. *Technical Report No.627*, Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED391152.pdf>
- Norhiza, I., & Liyana, Ab Jabar. (n.d). A study on the language learning strategies used among UHB 1412 Students. (English for Academic Communication). Retrieved from https://eprints.utm.my.../A_Study_On_The_Language_Learning_Strategies_Used_Among_
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition. In M. H, Long, & J. C. Richards (Eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524490>
- Pikulski, J. J., & Templeton, S. (2004). Teaching and developing vocabulary: key to long term reading success. Current Research in Reading/Language Arts. Retrieved from https://www.eduplace.com/marketing/nc/pdf/author_pages.pdf

- Promoting vocabulary development: components of effective vocabulary instruction. (2002). *Texas Reading Initiative*. Texas Education Agency. <https://buildingrti.utexas.org/sites/default/files/booklets/redbk5.pdf>
- Rahimi, M., & Katal, M. (2011). Metacognitive strategies awareness and success in learning English as a foreign language: an overview. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 31(2012), 73-81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.019>
- Raihany, A. (2012). Learner's strategies in learning English vocabulary. *ejournal STAIN*. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.stainpamekasan.ac.id/index.php/okara/article/view/416/402>
- Reftari, S., Sharifabad, E. D., & Vosoughi, M. (2013). Reading research strategy in Iran. *Elixir Social Studies*, 55. Retrieved from [https://elixirpublishers.com/articles/1360924367-55%20\(2013\)52012785-12790.pdf](https://elixirpublishers.com/articles/1360924367-55%20(2013)52012785-12790.pdf)
- Reardon, K. T. (2011). To what degree will learning to use context clues impact students' reading comprehension scores. University of Wisconsin, River Falls, Retrieved from <https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/.../Reardon.pdf?.../>
- Rokni, S. J. A., & Niknaqsh, H. R. (2013). The effect of context clues on EFL learners' reading comprehension. *ELT Voices-India*. Retrieved from https://eltvoices.in/Volume3/Issue_6/EVI_36_7.pdf
- Sharifahabad, E. D., & Vosoughi, M. (2013). Reading strategy research in Iran. *Elixir Social Studies*, 55. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239521399_Reading_strategy_research_in_Iran
- Stahl, S. (1999). The importance of vocabulary development. <https://www.readnaturally.com/research/5-components-of-reading/vocabulary>
- Shokouhi, H., & Askari, H. (2010). The effect of guessing vocabulary in reading authentic texts among pre-university students. *Arizona Working Papers in SLA & Teaching*, 17, 75-89.
- Takallou, F. (2011). The effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on EFL learners' reading comprehension performance and metacognitive awareness. *Asian EFL Journal*, 13(1), 272-300.
- Thornbury, S. (2002). How to teach vocabulary. Guessing the meaning of words from context: why and how. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 1(6).
- Tian, H., (2015). The application of contextual expressions to improve effectiveness of learning in ESP classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(6), 1232-1239. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0606.10>
- Yang, C. (2014). Vocabulary learning instruction with Chinese EFL learners: an intervention study. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(2), 186-200,
- Zuraina, A., Jeyakaran, M., Ahmad Fauzi, M., A., & Roselan, B., (2011). The effectiveness of using contextual clues, dictionary strategy and computer assisted language learning (CALL) in learning vocabulary.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).