Journal of English Language and Education
ISSN 2597- 6850 (Online), 2502-4132 (Print)
Journal Homepage: https://jele.or.id/index.php/jele/index

OPEN ACCESS Article

The Use of Guessing Meaning from Context in Improving Students' Vocabulary Mastery

https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i4.2761

*Rihadhatul Nur Ramadhiani, Nadrun, Andi Patmasari, Abd. Kamaruddin[abcd]
[1234]Universitas Tadulako, Indonesia
Corresponding Author : rrd98653@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of language learning as it supports students' ability to understand and use language effectively. However, many students still experience difficulties due to limited vocabulary knowledge and the use of less effective teaching strategies in the classroom. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of guessing meaning from context in improving students' vocabulary mastery. This research employed a quasi-experimental design involving an experimental group and a control group consisting of 49 eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Mepanga. The data were collected through test (pre-test and post-test) used to measure students' vocabulary achievement. The results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The t-test result revealed that t-count (4.54) was higher than t-table (2.01) at the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the atlernative hypothesis was accepted. Therefore, guessing meaning from context is an effective strategy for improving students' vocabulary mastery.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Mastery, Guessing Meaning From Context, Contextual Learning, EFL, Junior High School*

Article History:
Received 13th June 2026
Accepted 24th June 2026
Published 02nd July 2026

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a fundamental role in language learning as it supports students in developing effective communication skills (Nation, 2013; Schmitt, 2010). Students with limited vocabulary knowledge often experience difficulties in understanding texts and expressing their ideas in both spoken and written forms. This condition is commonly found in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, where vocabulary becomes one of the main obstacles in language acquisition. According to Asyiah (2017), vocabulary learning is closely related to students' perceptions and strategies, which significantly influence their learning outcomes. Likewise, Richards & Renandya (2002) argue that vocabulary knowledge is a core component of language proficiency and provides the foundation for developing the four language skills.

In relation to this issue, vocabulary teaching practice in many classrooms still rely on conventional methods such as memorization without meaningful context. This approach tends to be monotonous and does not actively engage students in the learning process, resulting in low retention and poor understanding. Al Talib (2022) states that effective vocabulary teaching should involve meaningful interaction and appropriate learning strategies to enhance students' comprehension. Similarly, Santosa et al. (2022) emphasize that innovative teaching approaches are needed to improve vocabulary learning, especially in modern educational contexts.

One of the strategies proposed to address this problem is guessing meaning from context. This study enables students to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words by using contextual clues such as synonyms, antonyms, examples, and explanations within the text. Kurniawan (2019) found that the use of guessing meaning from context significantly improves

OPEN ACCESS
© 2021 The Author.This article is licensed CC BY SA 4.0.
visit Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Copyright (c) 2026 Rihadhatul Nur Ramadhiani, et al.

students' vocabulary mastery. Similarly, Mart (2012) explains that this strategy helps students become more independent learners and enhances their reading comprehension skills.

Despite its potential benefits, several studies indicate that guessing meaning from context also has limitations. Mokhtar & Rawian (2012) argue that this strategiesy may not always be effective without sufficient background knowledge and proper guidance. Furthermore, Butowska et al. (2021) found that guessing alone does not always lead to strong vocabulary retention, especially for beginners. This findings suggest that the effectiveness of this strategy depends on how it is implemented in classroom intruction.

In addition to these consideration, recent studies hughliht the importance of cognitive processes in vocabulary inference. Izmalkova & Blinnikova (2024) found that students employ various cognitive strategies when guessing word meanings, which can be observed through eye-tracking analysis. Uchihara et al. (2022) reported that combineng contextual guessing with dictionary use contributes significantly to vocabulary development. However, studies focusing on this strategy at the junior high school level in EFL context remain limited.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of guessing meaning from context in improving students' vocabulary mastery at SMPN 1 Mepanga. This research is expected to provide empirecal evidance regrading the use of contextual guessing strategies in EFL clasrooms.

METHOD

This research employed a quasi-experimental design involving an experimental group and a control group. Both groups were administered a pre-test and a post-test to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the treatment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2023). The experimental group received instruction using the guessing meaning from context strategy, while the control group was taught using conventional teaching methods. This design was selected to determine whether there was a significant difference in vocabulary mastery between the two groups following the treatment.

The population of this study consisted of 128 eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Mepanga. The sample comprised 49 students selected through simple random sampling. Class VIII A, consisting of 24 students, served as the control group. This sampling technique was employed to provide each member of the population with an equal opportunity to be selected, thereby enhancing representativeness and reducing sampling bias. The instrument used in this study was a vocabulary test designed to measure students' understanding of word meanings in context. The test consisted of multiple-choice and matching items and was administered twice as a pre-test and a post-test. Prior to its implementation, the instrument was examined for validity and reliability to ensure that it accurately measured the intended construct and produced consistent results

The treatment was conducted over six meetings. During the treatment, the experimental group was taught using the guessing meaning from context strategy, in which students were trained to identify contextual clues such as synonyms, antonyms, examples, and explanations to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words (Nation, 2013). In contrast, the control group received conventional vocabulary instruction without applying the strategy. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, were used to describe students' vocabulary improvement, whereas inferential statistics, specifically the independent-samples t-test, were employed to determine whether the differences between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). This analysis aimed to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the guessing meaning from context strategy in improving students' vocabulary mastery.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that there was a significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the implementation of the guessing meaning from context

OPEN ACCESS
© 2021 The Author.This article is licensed CC BY SA 4.0.
visit Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Copyright (c) 2026 Rihadhatul Nur Ramadhiani, et al.

strategy. The improvement can be seen from the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. Students in the experimental group showed a higher increase compared to those in the control group. This suggests that the treatment had a positive impact on students' vocabulary learning outcomes.

This section presents the results of the data analysis from the pre-test and post-test administered to the experimental and control groups. The data are presented in tables and explained to show the effectiveness of the guessing meaning from context strategy in improving students' vocabulary mastery. The pre-test was conducted to determine the students' initial level before the treatment was implemented. The results of the pre-test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-test Scores of Experimental and Control Classes

Class	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	25	48.20	16.78
Control	24	46.67	16.79

The pre-test results showed that the experimental group a mean score of 48.20, while the control group scored 46.67. This indicates that both of group has relatively similiar initial abilities before the treatment. The results of the post-test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-test Scores of Experimental and Control Classes

Class	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	25	79.40	11.55
Control	24	65.42	9.92

After the treatment, the post-test results showed that the experimental group achived a mean score of 79.40, whereas the control group reached 65.42. This indicates that the experimental group performed better than the control group. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Improvement of Both Classes

Class	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Experimental	48.20	79.40	31.20
Control	65.42	65.42	18.75

Futhermore, the mean improvement in the experimental group (31.20) was higher than that of the control grou (18.75). To determine whether the difference between the two groups was statistically significant, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The result of the statistical analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent Samples T-Test of Post-Test Scores

Variable	t-Value	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Post-test	4.54	47.	0.000

To examine whether the difference between the two groups was statistically significance , an independent samples t-test was conducted. The result showed that the t-value (4.54) was higher than the t-table (2.01) at the 0.05 significance level in addition the significance value (0.000) was lower than 0.05 this indicates that there was a statistically significance between the experimental and control groups. Therefore, the alternative hyphothesis (H_1) was accepted.

Discussion

The results showed a significant improvement in the experimental group, with the mean score increasing from 48.20 to 79.40, while the control class improved from 46.67 to 65.42. The t-test result (4.54 > 2.01) confirmed that the difference between the two groups was

OPEN ACCESS
© 2021 The Author.This article is licensed CC BY SA 4.0.
visit Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Copyright (c) 2026 Rihadhatul Nur Ramadhiani, et al.

statistically significant. This indicates that guessing meaning from context was more effective than the conventional teaching method in improving students' vocabulary mastery

The improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to the active learning process during the treatment. The students were trained to infer word meanings using contextual clues such as surrounding words and sentence structure. This process encouraged critical thinking and required students to connect prior knowledge with new information, leading to deeper understanding and better retention of vocabulary (Butowska et al., 2021).

In addition, students in the experimental group demonstarted higher engagement and participation compared to those in the control group. They actively analyzed sentences, discussed meanings, and confirmed their answers during the learning process. This interaction fostered a more students-centered learning environment and reduced dependence on the teacher. Such cognitive engagement plays an important role in vocabulary acquisition (Izmalkova & Blinnikova, 2024).

Furthermore, contextual learning helped students understand vocabulary in a more meaningful way rather than through memorization. This approach increased students' confidence in dealing with unfamiliar words and improved their ability to interpret meaning independently. The finding is consistent with previous studies showing that guessing from context supports vocabulary development (Yildiz, 2023). In contrast, the control group showed lower improvement due to passive learning, which limits cognitive engagement (Uchihara et al., 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that guessing meaning from context significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery. The experimental group achieved a higher mean score (79.40) than the control group (65.42), while the *t*-test result (4.54 > 2.01) confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. These findings indicate that guessing meaning from context is more effective than conventional vocabulary teaching methods. From a pedagogical perspective, the strategy promotes active learning by encouraging students to infer word meanings through contextual clues rather than relying solely on memorization. It also fosters critical thinking, learner autonomy, deeper vocabulary understanding, and better long-term retention, all of which support language acquisition. The findings suggest that English teachers should integrate guessing meaning from context into vocabulary instruction to create more engaging, meaningful, and student-centered learning experiences. This strategy can serve as an effective alternative to traditional vocabulary teaching approaches. Future research should examine its effectiveness across different educational levels, larger samples, and diverse learning contexts or combine it with other instructional strategies to maximize vocabulary learning outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the headmaster of SMPN 1 Mepanga for granting permission to conduct this research. Appreciation is also extended to the English teacher and students of the eighth grade for their cooperation and participation in this study. The author also thanks her academic supervisors and all parties who have provided support, guidance, and encouragement throughout the research process. Their contributions were invaluable in completing this research successfully.

REFERENCES

Al Talib, S. K. (2022). The Principles of Teaching and Learning Vocabulary Effectively. *Communication and Linguistics Studies*, *8*(2), 45–52.

Asyiah, D. N. (2017). The Vocabulary Teaching and Vocabulary Learning: Perception, Strategies, and Influences on Students. *Jurnal Bahasa Lingua Scientia*, *9*(2), 293–318.

Butowska, E., Hanczakowski, M., & Zawadzka, K. (2021). You Won't Guess That: On the Limited Benefits of Guessing When Learning a Foreign Language. *Memory & Cognition*,

OPEN ACCESS

© 2021 The Author.This article is licensed CC BY SA 4.0.
visit Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

49(8), 1600–1615. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13421-021-01254-2

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2023). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education* (11th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Izmalkova, A., & Blinnikova, I. (2024). Cognitive Strategies of Second Language Vocabulary Inferencing: An Eye-Tracking Study. *Education Sciences*, *14*(5), 490. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050490

Kurniawan, I. (2019). Improving Students' English Vocabulary Using Guessing Meaning from Context. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*, *12*(1), 63–77.

Mart, Ç. T. (2012). Guessing the Meanings of Words from Context: Why and How. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *1*(6), 177–181. https://doi.org/10.7575/ijalel.v.1n.6p.177

Mokhtar, A. A., & Rawian, R. (2012). Guessing Word Meaning from Context Has Its Limit: Why? *International Journal of Linguistics*, *4*(2), 288–305. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i2.1237

Nation, I. S. P. (2013). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS Survival Manual*.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*.

Santosa, I., Nurkhamidah, N., & Arianti, T. (2022). Tren Pemanfaatan Teknologi Pembelajaran dalam Pengajaran Kosakata Bahasa Inggris pada Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Ilmiah PGSD*, *6*(2), 101–110.

Schmitt, N. (2010). *Researching Vocabulary: A Vocabulary Research Manual*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Uchihara, T., Eguchi, M., & Clenton, J. (2022). The Contribution of Guessing from Context and Dictionary Use to Vocabulary Knowledge. *Language Teaching Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221122138

Yildiz, M. (2023). An Investigation into EFL Learners' Ability to Guess Grammatical Class and Meaning of Unfamiliar Words from Contextual Clues. *International Journal of Language Academy*, *11*(4), 463–475.

OPEN ACCESS

© 2021 The Author.This article is licensed CC BY SA 4.0.
visit Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.