

**IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION  
THROUGH CONTEXTUAL GUESSING TECHNIQUE  
AT THE SECOND GRADE STUDENTS OF SMA NEGERI 1 PALOPO**

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**Abstract**

The objectives of this research were to find out the extent to which contextual guessing technique can improve the students' reading comprehension and also to find out the students' attitudes toward the use of contextual guessing technique in reading comprehension. The research used pre experimental design with one group pretest and posttest design. The research used purposive sampling technique where the sample consisted of 33 students who were taken in one class. The result of this research shows that there is significant difference between pre test and post test ( $5.03 < 8.90$ ). The result of t-test value and t-table ( $17.31 > 2.037$ ) also implies that there is a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the treatment. It means that by using Contextual Guessing Technique is effective in improving students' reading comprehension. Based on the classification table from the data of questionnaire, the writer found that the students' attitudes toward the use of contextual guessing technique in reading comprehension is very positive. It is approved from 33 students whose their attitude have been researched, it is found that 18 (54.55%) students are classified as very positive, 14 (42.42%) students are classified as positive, 1 (3.03%) student is classified as doubt, and none of them are classified as negative and very negative.

Keywords: reading comprehension, contextual guessing technique

**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan peningkatan kemampuan siswa dalam membaca dan sikap siswa terhadap teknik contextual guessing. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain pre-eksperimental dengan pre-test dan post-test. Teknik pengambilan sampel menggunakan purposive sehingga diperoleh 33 siswa. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat peningkatan yang signifikan dari nilai pre-test dan post-test ( $5.03 < 8.90$ ). Nilai uji t (t-test) ( $17.31 > 2.037$ ) menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan pada kemampuan membaca siswa. Selain itu, berdasarkan hasil kuesioner dapat disimpulkan bahwa sikap siswa terhadap teknik Contextual Guessing sangat positif. Dari 33 siswa yang menjadi subjek penelitian, 18 siswa (54.55%) termasuk kategori sangat positif, 14 siswa (42.42%) termasuk kategori positif, dan hanya satu orang (3.03%) termasuk kategori ragu-ragu.

Kata kunci: reading comprehension, teknik contextual guessing

## **Introduction**

Reading is a necessary skill that any learner needs. Unfortunately, Reading is not given due care in some schools. In the past, according to the traditional view, reading begins with the child's mastering the names of the letters, mastering the letter-sound relationships, then, learning some easy words in isolation, and, finally, reading simple stories with highly controlled vocabularies (Harp and Brewer, 1996: 17).

According to writer's observation, during doing Teaching Practice, most of students are not able and not understood what they have read. They only read the material without knowing what they have read. So, reading activities in the classroom is not useful for them if they did not know and understand what information they have read.

In the interview with some students, they said that they got difficulties in identifying the implicit and explicit information of the text. Besides, many students have low motivation in reading class. The students' lack of understanding on reading lesson is mainly caused by an inappropriate teaching technique that is used. When the teachers attempted to explain reading materials, the teacher only used one technique namely conventional technique. In reading class, the teacher presented a subject in the text book and asked students to read whether silently or loudly, and then the students have to answer the questions that follow. Consequently, the reading lesson becomes monotonous and boring, students lack of motivation to read, even if they read, they show negative attitudes. As a result, the students are not able to get good scores in their reading achievement.

Reading cannot be separated from comprehension. That is why there appear a lot of problems dealing with reading comprehension. Many English learners find it difficult to understand the English text. Very often, they get stuck because of some problems, such as unfamiliar words, their inability in understanding the context, being reluctant, and so forth.

Reading needs identification and also interpretation processes which require the reader's knowledge about the language structure used in the text and his knowledge about a given topic. It is the complexity that makes some students

less interested in this kind of activity. They find it difficult to understand what is on the reading passage since they do not know the technique which can help them to read more effectively and efficiently. This phenomenon happens in almost every language class.

To be able to achieve the purposes of reading comprehension, one should have some basic reading skills as follows; (1) literal skills (getting the central thought and main idea, recalling and recognizing of facts and information, finding answer to specific questions); (2) interpretive skills (drawing conclusions, generalizing, deriving meaning from context); (3) critical skill (determining the writer's purpose); and (4) creative skills (applying information into daily life).

The technique of finding the meaning of an unknown word through its use in a sentence and then guessing how it is pronounced is known as contextual guessing or context identification, or the use of context clues. Contextual guessing is the most important skill used by most readers in attacking new words. It is closely related to comprehension and this is one of the most practical skills student learn. Contextual clues have several uses in reading. The procedures for developing abilities in contextual guessing can be incorporated in class reading presentations or special exercises. Before we go further analyzing contextual guessing, we must consider a few preliminary questions concerning this skill. These questions pertain to the usefulness and to the trainability of the guessing skill.

Related to the issue and the assumption that the teaching reading by using contextual guessing technique can be used to stimulate the students to comprehend any English text, so the writer formulates research questions as follow:

1. To what extent can contextual guessing technique improve the students' reading comprehension?
2. What are the students' attitudes toward the use of contextual guessing in reading comprehension?

## **Review of Related Literature**

### ***Definition of Reading***

Walker (1996: 15) defines that reading is an active process in which readers shift between source of information (what they know and the text says), elaborate meaning and strategies, check their interpretation (revising when appropriate), the use context to focus their response. It means that reading activity needs a comprehension to interpret (read between the lines) messages from written text.

According to Williams (1996: 11) reading is a process of obtaining meaning from written text. Readers carry out knowledge of the writing system, knowledge of the language, and the ability to interpret meaning from a text.

According to Aebersold and Field (1997: 15) reading is what happens when people look at a text and assign meaning to the written symbols in that text. The similar definition stated by Nunan (1998: 33) that reading is a process of decoding written symbols, working from a smaller unit (individual letters) to larger ones (words, clauses, and sentences). Based on the theories above, it can be concluded that reading is a more much complex process to obtain ideas or meaning from a text, which is symbolized in written or printed language.

### ***Level of Reading***

Some people say that the act of reading only consists of pronouncing words. They consider that comprehension is not important. Concentrating on pronouncing words rather than comprehending the essence of the passage is a waste of precious time. Based on the idea above, the teacher needs to emphasize the basic comprehension skills. According to Burns et. al (1984: 177) there are four levels of comprehension:

a. **Literal Reading**

Literal reading or reading for literal comprehension which involves acquiring information that directly stated in a section, is important and also prerequisite for higher level understanding. At this level, the readers are able to comprehend what the author has said.

b. **Interpretive Reading**

Interpretive reading involving reading between the lines or making inferences, it is the process of deriving ideas that are implied rather than

directly stated. At this level, the readers are able to understand what the author means.

c. Critical Reading

Critical reading is evaluating written material comparing the ideas discovered in the material, which is known standards and drawing conclusion about their accuracy, appropriateness. Critical reading depends upon literal comprehension and grasping implied ideas is especially important.

d. Creative Reading

Creative reading involves going beyond the material presented the author. It requires readers to think as they read, just as critical reading does, and it also requires them to use their imagination. In teaching reading, a teacher must teach the four levels of comprehension level. First, use a discussion or questioning technique that brings out just what the author said or in other words, in pre-reading; a teacher ask questions related to the topic before he starts his reading. It is probably more effective to develop desire to read the article and help them arrive at a literal understanding of the piece to be read. Then, after the students have completed reading the assigned section, teacher and students should discuss it.

According to Aebersold and Field (1997:213) the strategies that can help students read more quickly and effectively include:

1. Previewing: reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection
2. Predicting: using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content
3. Skimming and scanning: using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions

4. Guessing from context: using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up
5. Paraphrasing: stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text.

### ***Definition of Reading Comprehension***

Reading comprehension is influenced significantly by a student's level of word knowledge, which includes vocabulary and spelling skills, as well as the ability to decode words in print. "Knowing words" involves understanding both the structure and meaning of words at various levels of complexity. Teachers can facilitate the growth of word knowledge through the explicit teaching of word patterns and word-solving strategies within the context of a word-rich classroom. The goal of instruction in reading, spelling, and vocabulary is to help students develop "word consciousness" and to become independent word-solvers in all subject areas.

Reading comprehension is a complex undertaking that involves many levels of processing. One of the most fundamental aspects of comprehension is the ability to deal with unfamiliar words encountered in text. Readers who struggle with word-level tasks use up valuable cognitive space that could be allotted to deeper levels of text analysis. It is not enough to rely on context cues to predict the meaning of new words, since this strategy often results in erroneous or superficial understandings of key terms, especially in content-area reading (Paynter, Bodrova, & Doty (2005: 13). Mature readers need to possess a basic knowledge of "how words work" and a set of strategies for approaching new words encountered throughout the day.

### ***Developing reading comprehension***

Anderson (1969: 107) points out some specific and method of improving reading comprehension, they are :

- a. Determine the purpose of reading. Ask your self what you want to gain from reading the passage of selection

- b. Pay attention to words each subject in the curriculum has its own special vocabulary and the students' success will depend on some extent on their mastery of it. The students' should look at all words carefully.
- c. Utilize context clues. The use of surrounding context can help the students' derive the full meaning from a passage.
- d. Use the six WH question in all reading. Comprehension is based on the questions who, where, what, when, why and how.
- e. Phrase reading not only reduces the usual number of fixation per line, but also makes the meaning clearer.
- f. Examine the structure paragraph.

### ***The Role of Reading Comprehension***

One of the most important aspects of teaching reading is the selection of the reading text. There are some fairly considerations. The reading selection should not contain market dialects or slang leatures (many pocket books are unsuitable in this aspect) or old fashioned language use (which rules out many classics in their original versions). The selection should have high interest value to the student and the simple way of establishing this by asking the students their opinions of the readings and the eliminating low interest selection from future curricula. The content should not contrast with is interesting and ideologically compatible, at least at the early stages. Anderson (1972: 50-59).

Michael west argues against using reading with a local setting as it result in a vocabulary of low frequency: Bullock being much less frequent than horse is the example he gives. We should argue the opposite: student need the vocabulary of what is relevant to their world. It is also easier to learn to read when the culture background is familiar and students can be interested on cultural information in the coding process. Actually we have had very good result with Asimov Science. Fiction Nine Tomorrow, which tends to be culturally neutral. On the intermediate and advanced levels the student also need to be exposed the type of writing other than narrative and dialogue which are the basic staple of elementary level text. They need practice with critical reading decoding and evaluation, explanation and analysis, argument and persuasion summeries and non fictional narration such us news reporting, history and biographies.

### ***Categories of Reading Comprehension***

Comprehension involves thinking. As there are various levels of comprehension. Smith (1997: 107) divides the comprehension skill into four categories:

a. **Literal Reading**

Word, idea, sentence in the text. This is a fundamental skill to any level of reading skill.

b. **Interpretative reading**

Interpretative reading involve between the lines or making inferences. Interpretative level of comprehension goes beyond the literal comprehension to supply meaning which is not apparent in word presented. The reader must read between one line to get inferences or implied from the text.

b. **Critical reading**

Critical reading is higher level than other two categories because it involves evaluation the meaning of personal judgment on the accuracy, value, truthfulness of what is read.

c. **Creative reading**

Creative reading uses different thinking skill to get beyond the literal comprehension, interpretation and critical reading level. In creative reading, the readers tries to come up with new or alternate solution to these presented by the writer. In this skill, the readers recognizes the idea from new printed into new pattern and he can express the recognized learning through various media.

### ***Definition of Contextual Guessing Technique***

Guessing from the context is one of the most useful skills learners can acquire and apply inside and outside classroom and, more importantly, can be taught and implemented relatively easily Thornbury (2002 : 202). Fukkink and De Gloppe (1998:98), using a meta-analysis of 22 instructional treatments aiming at enhancing the skill of deriving word meaning from context during reading, revealed that deliberately deriving word meaning from context is amenable to instruction and the effect of even relatively short instruction is awarding.

Contextual clue instruction appeared to be more successful than other instruction types.

Contextual guessing is using context to discover the meaning of unknown words to comprehend a reading text. By contextual guessing readers can identify important words in reading and can in fact make semantic predictions about their relationship to one another. Aspatore (1984:98) suggests that contextual guessing is asking students to underline unknown words without looking up the meaning in the dictionary, to use contextual clues to guess the general meaning; to skip unknown words; and to focus on cognates, roots, prefixes, and suffixes while reading a text Chastain (1988 : 238).

Contextual guessing, memorizing, and repeating of new English words are some of the VLS (Vocabulary Learning strategy) commonly used. Schmitt (2000:16) compiled a list of VLS categorized according to the following two purposes: 1) strategies that discover a new word's meaning; and 2) strategies that consolidate a word once it has been encountered. Each strategy comprises of important skills that learners use in the process of acquiring new English words. Of all the VLS commonly recognized today, arguably the most widely encouraged is guessing of the meaning of unknown words from context or referred to as "guessing strategy". Guessing strategy has a long history of research with the great majority of studies demonstrating its value. One of the claims in support of the guessing strategy is that it involves generalizable skills of interpreting surrounding text, predicting and testing predictions while reading which enhance reading skills as a whole Coady & Nation (1988:75). In addition, guessing has been advocated instead of dictionary use because stopping to use a dictionary interrupts the flow of reading Brown (1972:87).

The technique of finding the meaning of an unknown word through its use in a sentence is known as contextual guessing or context identification, or the use of context clues. The context in which an unknown word is used limits the number of words that could be correct. The problem then is to select from the possible synonyms the exact word used. When the students know the probable meaning of the word and have two or three synonyms in mind, it is easier for them to use structural and phonics analysis to identify the word. Contextual

guessing is the most important skill used by most readers in attacking new words. It is closely related to comprehension and this is one of the most practical skills students learn. Context clues have several uses in reading. The four uses named below are of special importance to readers of foreign languages: First, context clues help readers to derive the pronunciation and meaning of a known word from its uses in a sentence. Second, context clues also help to determine the pronunciation and meaning of an unknown word from its use in a sentence. When context is used for this purpose, a student reads around an unknown word, gets the general meaning of the sentence and then guesses at the pronunciation and meaning of the unfamiliar word from the way it is used. Third, context determines how the accentuation of similar words used in different contexts or with different grammatical usages affects their meanings. Fourth, context provides clues to the meanings of words that vary according to the subject area in which they are used. Context clues can function only if the material is suited to the reader in terms of difficulty and familiarity or interest. If the context is too involved, or if there are too many unknown words, context is of little value. When the material deals with unfamiliar concepts or is dry and dull to the reader, he is not likely to be able to develop a continuous line of thought suitable for anticipating an unknown word. All reading materials, therefore, should be chosen with these criteria in mind:

- a. Reading materials should be of interest to the reader
- b. Concepts developed in the material should be in line with the reader's experience background
- c. There should be no more than one unfamiliar word to among 20 conceptive words in materials used for contextual guessing training
- d. Upper-grading reading materials should include pictures, graphs, charts and tables
- e. Sentence structure should be appropriate for the achievement level and language maturity of the students.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The finding of statistical analysis implies that through contextual guessing technique, the students' reading comprehension can be improved. The result of the data analysis based on the students' test shows that t-test value (17.31) is

higher than t-table value (2.037) at the level of significance = 0.05. It implies that there is a significant difference between the result of the pre test and post test.

In the classification table and rate percentage of the students in pre test, shows that the students' reading comprehension through contextual guessing technique in idiomatic reading text is poor. It is approved from 33 students whose their ability have been researched, it is found that none of them got excellent and very good. There is only 1 student got good score, 2 students got fairly good score, 10 students got fairly score, 16 students got fairly poor score, 4 students got poor score.

In the classification table and rate percentage of the students in post test shows that the students' reading comprehension through contextual guessing technique in idiomatic reading text is excellent. It is approved by the table above, from 33 students whose their ability have been researched, it is found that there are 13 students got excellent score, 8 students got very good score, 8 students got good score, 4 students got fairly good score.

The result of test shows that mean score between the pre test and post test are significantly different. In the pre test, the students' mean score is 5.03 and in the post test, the students' mean score is 8.90.

Based on the comparison of pre test and post test result, it can be seen that in pre test most of the students have low ability in reading comprehension before treatment and they reach a significant improvement when they have already given treatment using contextual guessing technique. In post test, the result implies that students can increase their test score result.

Based on the classification table of the data from questionnaire, the writer found that the students' attitudes toward the use of contextual guessing technique is very positive. It is approved from 33 students whose their attitude have been researched, it is found that 18 (54.55%) students are classified as very positive, 14 (42.42%) students are classified as positive, 1 (3.03%) student is classified as doubt, and It can be seen that none of them are classified as negative and very negative. So that, by looking the classification and the percentage of students above, we can conclude that most of the students have very positive attitudes toward the use of contextual guessing technique in reading comprehension.

## Conclusions

After analyzing the data in the previous chapter, the writer concludes that using Contextual Guessing Technique is effective to improve students' reading comprehension at SMA Negeri 1 Palopo. The data also shows that the students have good score. It is approved by the mean score of the students in post test (8.90) is higher than the mean score of the students' in pre test (5.03). moreover, the attitude of the students at SMA Negeri 1 Palopo toward the use of contextual guessing technique shows that most of the students give very positive attitude.

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