

**SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPLOYING CONTEXTUAL CLUES, DICTIONARY STRATEGY AND
COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING (CALL) IN VOCABULARY TEACHING.**

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Abstract

Context cue teaching enhances learners' of English ability to give words meaning from context, enhance their comprehension, understanding and aid their skill to enhance reading independently. Scholars like Nash and Snowling (2006); Yuen (2009); Cetinavci (2013); Dwaik et al. (2013); and Samiyan and Khorasani (2014) has indicated that this strategy has not been explicitly taught in the context of schools. In Nigeria, language learners are assumed to learn the strategy of vocabulary building on their own. Therefore, this study determines the extent to which context cue teaching enhances learners' skill to deduce word meanings from context and to examine learners' views towards this strategy. In this study, twenty-six (26) English language major undergraduates in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, were taught to guess meanings of unknown words using the contextual guessing strategy in three-hour sessions. Achievement tests and learners' reflection done in class were made use of as sources of quantitative and qualitative data. Data from the pre-tests and post-tests showed a significant progress in learners' skill to guess meanings of unknown words using the contextual guessing strategy. Results of twenty-six reflections also demonstrated positive views towards using this strategy. It could be entailed that language teachers should teach and encourage learners to guess meanings of unknown words based on the contextual cues, and incorporate context cue teaching into reading lesson plans to assist strengthen learners' skill to deduce word meaning from context.

Keywords: Context Cues, Contextual Guessing Strategy, Deducing Meaning, Language Learners and Vocabulary Building,

Introduction

Vocabulary is a very complex and challenging feature of reading for learners of language. During the time of reading, language learners are faced with unfamiliar and strange words in context. Although a few unknown words may not hinder and impede their common comprehending of the text, Soria (2011) notes that their reading comprehension may be prejudiced when they lack knowledge of several words or the most essential ones in the text. Alqahtani (2015) acknowledges that vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a vital tool for language learners since restricted vocabulary hampers accurate communication. Also, it is approximately impossible according to Baldo (2010) for learners to comprehend texts without having knowledge of what the majority of the words mean. Therefore, language learners require to be assisted most with training in utilizing strategies with the purpose of overcoming vocabulary challenges in reading.

The application of context cues is one of the major vital learning strategies that have been repeatedly stressed in the teaching of reading. Oguamanam and Diala (2023) assert that context clues are usually obtained from the form of definitions, understanding, paraphrases, explanations or illustrations. Teaching learners to deduce word meaning from context can provide them with a great assistance to comprehend and eventually advance their reading to a great extent. They add that it can in addition provide learners with an efficient means to learn new vocabulary. As a result, this study was carried out to determine the extent to which context cue teaching improves learners' skill to deduce meanings of word from context and to examine learners' awareness towards this strategy.

It attempted to determine this, two questions were formulated:

- (1) To what extent does context cue teaching improves learners' skill to deduce meanings of word from context?
- (2) What is learners' awareness towards deducing meanings of word from context?

Literature Review

Context cues

Sternberg and Powell (1983) cited in Oguamanam and Diala (2023) identify context cues as suggestions contained in a passage that make easy the decoding of the meaning of an unfamiliar and strange word. In the same vein, Oguamanam and Diala (2023) posit that the initial skill that students require to learn is manner of utilising the function of word in a sentence, like noun or verb, adverb, adjective, conjunction and the syntax and semantic context clues from all additional words in the sentence in order to determine unidentified meaning of words. Context cues are the surrounding words through which people can choose suggestions or cues to understand the meaning of strange and unknown word. Readers can detect cues given through synonyms; cues in comparison and contrast structures such as but, in contrast, dissimilar, nevertheless, while, contrary to, and where; examples as cues (for example, such as, for instance, like, including, and especially); or cues in cause and effect structures (because, since, therefore, when...). Understanding these forms of cues can assist sharpen readers' guessing skills and enhance their general reading skill. In addition, Robb (2013) notes that context cues can be found in several types of texts and learners require being aware of these forms of cues to figure out meanings of words when reading.

General forms of context cues found in texts include: definition or synonyms, concrete examples, contrast cues, words or phrases that modify an unfamiliar word, conjunctions that join relationships and ideas, the repetition of an unfamiliar word, and unstated or implied meanings. Gerace (2011) also adds that the part of speech of the unfamiliar word can be regarded as cues in reading. By the time a reader recognizes that the word is a noun or an adjective, he can continue reading intelligently without stopping to look up the meaning of the word. After seeing that word a few more times, the reader will understand its meaning more firmly. The scholar also illustrates that readers can use cues from the text itself.

Five cues that will assist readers guess the word meaning are: punctuation cues, definition cues, contrast cues, comparison cues and example cues. In addition, Sternberg and Powell's theory (1983) presents a set of cues in the context in which new words occur. Such cues, categorized according to the kind of semantic information they provide, are as follows:

1. Temporal cues: cues regarding the duration or frequency of X (the unknown word) or regarding when X can occur;
2. Spatial cues: cues regarding the general or specific location of X or possible locations in which X can sometimes be found;
3. Value cues: These are cues considering the value or attractiveness of X or considering the types of effect X arouses;
4. Stative descriptive cues: These are cues considering physical properties of X like size, shape, colour, odour, feel;
5. Functional descriptive cues: These are cues considering achievable purposes of X, actions X can achieve, or possible uses for X;
6. Causal/enablement cues: These are cues considering potential and achievable causes of or enabling situations of X;
7. Class membership cues: These are cues considering one or more classes to which X belongs or other members of one or more classes of which X is a member; and
8. Equivalence cues: These are cues considering the meaning of X or contrasts like synonym, antonym to the meaning of X.

In this study, four cue types with the highest frequency of occurrence in reading texts are selected to teach learners. They are the most frequent cue types categorized from the major classification of context cues by Ames (1966) and Sternberg (1987). They are also considered to be applied to the Guessing Strategy in a wider context.

Such context cues are presented as follows:

1. Contrast cues: These are cues that are contrast to the meaning of X;
2. Cause-effect cues: These are cues regarding possible causes of, effects of or enabling conditions for X;
3. Descriptive cues: These are cues regarding the physical properties of X (such as size, shape, color, odor, feel, etc.), possible purposes of X, actions X can perform or potential uses of X;
4. Equivalence cues: These are cues considering the meaning of X, involving synonym cues, definition cues, repetition cues, paraphrase cues and examples.

Context Cue Teaching: Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy (1980)

With the intention of making certain learners to fully utilize of context cues existing in texts, Clarke and Nation (1980) recommended a guessing strategy with five steps:

1. Establishing the part of speech of the unfamiliar word;
2. Observing the immediate grammar;
3. Learning the wider context especially the conjunction relationships;
4. Guessing the word; and
5. Checking the guess.

They gave details that determine the part of speech of the unfamiliar word and analyzing the instant grammatical context in addition to the wider context permits learners to guess the word meaning. They also widened a basic list of the likely conjunction relationships that can take place between parts of text, including inclusion, exclusion, explanation, exemplification, contrast, cause-effect, condition, time, arrangement, summary/ conclusion, classification and comparison.

According to the scholars, it is essential to make learners conscious of these unsurprising conjunction relationships in contextual guessing since they will assist learners recognize the context cue types more with no trouble. In their model, real classroom procedures are recommended. Teacher modeling of the strategy is suggested when introducing the guessing strategy in the classroom. The teacher introduces each of the five steps individually and simultaneously verbalizing the entire process. After a review of the 5 steps, the guessing strategy can be put into practice, first in teacher-directed co-operative whole class activity which includes various learners to work on various steps. Subsequently the learners can work in pairs and eventually on their own.

The following detailed steps are suggested by Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy (1980):

Step 1: Observe the unfamiliar word (X) and settle on its part of speech. Is it a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb?

Step 2: Observe the immediate context, i.e. the clause containing X. Discover the pattern X fits into with the words close to it. Make simpler the context if necessary. If X is a noun, what adjective describes it? What verb is it near? What does this noun do? What is done to it? If X is a verb, what noun does it go with? Is it modified by an adverb? If X is an adjective, what noun does it go with? If X is an adverb, what verb is it modifying?

Step 3: Observe the relationship between the clause containing X and the other clauses/ sentences/ paragraphs. Sometimes this relationship will be indicated by a conjunction such as; but or an adverb like however. Both of them indicate contrast, for example. Punctuation may also serve as a cue, e.g. dashes may indicate restatement. Reference words like this and such also provide useful information.

Step 4: Use the knowledge achieved from Steps 1-3 to guess the meaning of X.

Step 5: Check that your guess is accurate and acceptable

a. See that the part of speech of your guess is very similar as the part of speech of X. If it is not identical, then something is wrong with your guess.

b. Replace X with your guess. If the sentence creates sense, your guess is possibly accurate. A notable feature of this strategy is a simple system of checks to make certain if the guess is the best one.

Clarke & Nation (1980) suggested three ways of checking:

1. Check that the part of speech of the meaning that you have guessed is very similar part of speech as the word in the passage;
2. Observe whether the word has a prefix, root, or suffix that might provide a clue to the meaning; and
3. Substitute your guess for the word in the passage and see if it creates sense.

Benefits of Context Cue Instruction

Nash and Snowling (2006) cited in Oguamanam and Diala (2023) examine the impacts of two different methods of teaching vocabulary on both vocabulary understanding and reading comprehension of twenty-four children with poor existing vocabulary understanding. Half the children were taught new vocabulary items using definitions; the other half were taught a strategy for deriving meanings from written context. The results revealed that the context group demonstrated significantly better expressive vocabulary understanding and that they went on to demonstrate significantly better comprehension of text containing a number of the taught words and demonstrated that they could use the newly gained strategy independently to get meaning from context. They concluded that improving skill to deduce meanings from written context guides to enhancing vocabulary understanding, which in turn guides to improvements in reading comprehension.

Teaching Vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary maintains students' development of receptive and expressive vocabularies. This supports students in comprehending what is read and facilitates in the expression of clearly oral and written. Teaching vocabulary has been unavailable distinctive in role within several reading classrooms. Diala and Chukwuezi (2023) assert that vocabulary teaching is an essential component of language classroom that assists learners to comprehend language and communicate meanings. Tompkins (2011) asserts that there are elements of trait that determine the manner of success by which an individual comprehends a text. This is as a result of previous knowledge regarding the subject, well-developed language, ability to create and formulate assumptions and the competence to be self-correcting to solve understanding problems as they take place. Students with great content area vocabularies understand texts better than those with limited vocabularies. Students who are fluent readers differentiate and understand numerous words. They read easier than students who have fewer vocabularies.

Teaching vocabulary creates the foundation of knowledge to formulate relationships to text that enhance and improve reading comprehension and fluency. Wanzek (2014) states that the fundamental nature of vocabulary teaching shows relationships with enhanced learning results. Students with far-reaching vocabulary attain and accomplish better vocabulary than those with imperfect vocabulary. The latter experiences the difficult deprivation of performance. The scholar further states that there is indication that replacing less difficult vocabulary for difficult words and teaching the meaning of extra difficult words enhances comprehension.

Empirical Review

There is moderately small empirical research on the greatest techniques, or combinations of techniques, of vocabulary teaching. Unsurprisingly, it is impossible to teach students vocabulary in several ways that will considerably widen and add value to their vocabulary.

In his study, Yuen (2009) investigated the use of context cues to attain knowledge of new vocabulary during reading with twenty third graders for three weeks. The results showed that teaching students how to use context cues while reading enhances their understanding of new vocabulary and that students became more attentive to their reading throughout intervention, which shows that they are implementing context cue strategies to support their reading.

Maduabuchi (2005) confirms that vocabulary knowledge has a high degree effect on reading comprehension hence it is considered to be important and precise predictor of reading skill. Agwu (2011: 42) points out those thriving readers effortlessly read and achieve meaning from texts since they have a enormous previous vocabulary, additional experience utilising context clues, and greater foundation knowledge. Students' deficiency in vocabulary, reading breakdown becomes inevitable.

Tisga (2017) notes that vocabulary teaching assist students in making causal links in an informational text. This technique was helpful and valuable for students. The use of direct teaching should be provided in context so students can learn how to obtain meaning autonomously. The scholar noted that context activities are most excellent tool as a means of understanding the meaning of unknown and unfamiliar words by discovering sentences with difficult words and writing them down to find the meaning. Knowledge of vocabulary deals with the knowledge of word meanings. Iduma (2016) states that a major reading challenge encountered by students which result to total reading breakdown is the effect of increasing alien vocabulary noticeable in texts.

Lestari (2015) observes vocabulary as the primary element of English and written communication skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which depends solely on the quality of vocabulary the student possesses. Coyne, McCoach, Loftus, Zipoli, Ruby, Crevecoeur and Kapp, (2010) assert that additional requirements are important about how much vocabulary related teaching students desire.

In 2013, Çetinavci carried out a study to examine whether Turkish EFL learners used contextual clues in guessing process or not. A vocabulary guessing test was administered to the respondents who were the students attending prep classes at the School of Foreign Languages of Uludag University. The results indicated that unfamiliar words in a rich context were guessed more successfully than unfamiliar words presented in a poor context.

In the same year, Dwaik and Shehadeh conducted a study by analyzing the correlation between EFL students' general reading proficiency and guessing patterns, and identifying the types of contextual cues actually used by EFL readers of various proficiency levels. Sixty freshman students from two Palestinian Universities participated in the study, and two separate tests were conducted to measure the students' reading proficiency and their guessing patterns. Statistical analyses of the results showed that there is a high correlation between correct guessing from context and text comprehension.

In their study, Samiyan and Khorasani (2014) determined the effectiveness of a textual guessing strategy on vocabulary learning at the intermediate level of twenty participants in Kavosh foreign language institute, Mashhad, Iran. The results showed that there is a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group considering their amount of learning and that textual guessing strategy had more effect on their long-term memory. It was also made known that the words learned through context are used more frequently than those learned in isolation.

Current literature indicates positive effects of using context cue teaching on learners' skill to deduce word meanings from context. The Guessing Strategy formulated by Clarke and Nation (1980) was selected to teach learners because this strategy represents a practical, comprehensive, and gradual procedure for guessing appropriate for learners of all levels. The results of the earlier mentioned studies provide proof to support the idea that implementing the guessing strategy to teach learners how to guess word meaning from context could be potentially valuable to English students of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. For these reasons, the researcher carried out this research to achieve and increase knowledge into the effect of deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words using the context cues.

Methodology

This study is an experimental research design which employed a one-group pre-test and post-test. Throughout this study, the implementation of the Guessing Strategy of Clarke and Nation (1980) indicating the – the independent variable – was monitored and respondents' skill to deduce word meaning in context – the dependent variable – was measured. After the end of the experimental study, learners' suggestions were gathered to obtain knowledge into respondents' views towards deducing word meaning from context implementing. The respondents in the study were thirty English students of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.

Intervention Planned Activity

The intention of context cue instruction was to enhance respondents' skill to deduce word meaning from written context. Exclusively the intervention planned activity provided respondents with a five-step guessing strategy recommended by Clarke and Nation (1980) with detailed instances utilising this strategy.

They were subsequently taught four kinds of context cues through definitions, signaling words and examples. Subsequently, they practiced applying the guessing strategy through group discussions to find out the answers to unfamiliar target words. Context cue teaching occurred in three 60-minute sessions in three weeks.

Following was the teaching procedure:

1. Introduction of the program;
2. Introduction of Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy – examples;
3. Introduction of the context cues: contrast cues, cause-effect cues, descriptive cues and equivalence cues;
4. Initial hands-on strategy practice through the teachers guide;
5. Pair strategy practice of the target cue types;
6. Group discussion: The respondents compare and contrast the guesses in groups and review the five guessing steps again to make a decision which guesses are the accurate ones; and
7. Whole-class discussion and feedback: The teacher obtains ideas from the whole class, and let the respondents negotiate the accurate answers and provide feedback.

Detailed steps of teaching in three sessions were explained thus:

Session A. Class meeting 1:

1. Introduction of the program;
2. Introduction of Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy – examples;
3. Introduction of the context cues: contrast cues, cause-effect cues, descriptive cues and equivalence cues (meanings, usages and examples);

This session began with a general introduction of context cue instruction program. The participants were informed of the aims and contents as well as benefits of using context cues to infer word meaning in reading. Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy (1980) was then introduced, first through an example with the researcher's explicit modeling and explanation of how each step of this strategy was applied.

Next, four common types of context cues were introduced through definitions, meanings, usage, signaling words and examples, in which participants were guided how to guess the meaning of unknown words.

4. Initial hands-on strategy practice through the teachers guide;
5. Pair strategy practice of the target cue types;
6. Group discussion: The respondents compare and contrast the guesses in groups and review the five guessing steps again to make a decision which guesses are the accurate ones; and
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Session B. Class meeting 2:

Performing of contrast cues and cause-effect cues

1. Initial hands-on strategy practice through teachers guide;
2. Pair strategy practice of the target cues types;
3. Group discussion: The respondents compare and contrast their guesses in groups and review the five guessing steps again to make a decision which guesses are the accurate ones;
4. Whole-class discussion and feedback: The teacher gets ideas from the whole class, and let the respondents negotiate the accurate answers and provide feedback.

In this session, the whole class was assisted through some initial hands-on strategy practice, in which respondents practiced the five-step strategy and discussed how they implemented this strategy. The reason of this activity was to illustrate to respondents how to recognize and utilize the two types of context cues: contrast cues and cause-effect cues. They subsequently practiced working in pairs on some target words with

contrast cues and cause-effect cues inserted in thirty short written texts. To promote peer learning, group and class discussion was also carried out. In groups of four, respondents made decision on which guesses were closest to the meanings of the target words.

After that, these groups shared out their experience with the whole class and the researcher in the feedback session. At this point, some advice was proffered on how to tackle some difficulties respondents experienced during guessing procedure.

C. Class meeting 3:

Practice of descriptive cues and equivalence cues

1. Initial hands-on strategy practice (with teacher guide);
2. Pair strategy practice on the target cues types;
3. Group discussion: The participants compare the guesses in groups and review the five guessing steps again to decide which guesses are the correct ones;
4. Whole-class discussion and feedback: The teacher gets ideas from the whole class, let the participants negotiate the correct answers and give feedback. This session took place in the same procedure as session

Data collection and analysis

With a one-group pre-test and post-test design, this study employed these main instruments to collect data: achievement tests, learners' reflections. Pre-test to test learners' background knowledge before the implementation of the guessing strategy; Post-test to test learners' academic achievement after the implementation of the guessing strategy; and reflection to gain more insights into learners' perceptions towards the implementation of the guessing strategy. The pre-test and post-test had the same content in order to evaluate learners' learning process.

There were 20 items, each of which had a nonsense word embedded in a short written text with context cues. Participants were required to write down their guessing in twenty minutes in English. They got 2 marks for a 100% acceptable guess, 1 mark for a partially acceptable one, and 0 mark for an inappropriate guess or omission. The total mark was 40. A 20-item word-in-context test was constructed from various authentic texts extracted from such websites as on 'How to guess words in context articles', and from some articles in *Reading Research Quarterly* – 'Meaning of words as you read' by Gerace (2001).

One target word was taken from each text and replaced with a nonsense word in order to make sure that these target words were unknown to all participants as done in many other previous contextual guessing studies (Liu & Nation, 1985; and Haynes, 1993). Also, using nonsense words could prevent participants from looking them up in the dictionary and remembering their meaning when doing the post-test. The post-test was administered in week 5 after the intervention program. For the research aim, each context for each target word was restricted from one to three sentences in order to ensure that the test could be completed in twenty minutes. After the termination of the intervention program, learners were encouraged to share their feelings as well as their suggestions about the implementation of Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy (1980).

Due to time constraints, this was done through a reflection written by participants in fifteen minutes in class. The reflection focused on the following main points: What learners have learnt from Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy to infer word meaning from context; what problems they still have to confront; and what they would like to suggest for future studies. These reflections could be written in English to ensure these participants could express their feelings freely.

Discussion

The results of the study illustrated that explicit instruction of context cues was efficient in enhancing learners' skill to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words while reading. Furthermore, the results made obvious that learners not only improved their vocabulary understanding through the use of context, but they were capable of demonstrating transfer of the context teaching to new texts and words that they were unable to see during the teaching activity. The more learners practice the guessing strategy, the more they could improve their skill to deduce word meaning, their reading speed as well as their skill to understand texts.

Deduction, according to Omanson, Warren, & Trabasso (1978) is an essential part of understanding and learning from text and of word meaning acquisition from context. The skill then to illustrate deductions may be thought of as a general skill applicable in the learning situations.

Readers who show a greater tendency to employ inferential practicing may be prone to build up a mental representation of text meaning that is well-formed and detailed, thereby increasing the availability and accessibility of information that can be utilized in word meaning acquisition. It is, therefore, evident that using context to understand the meaning of an unfamiliar word is relatively supportive as it appears to assist students in overcoming the vocabulary problem. Kulaç (2011) noted that even if the students may not be able to come up with correct word meanings, they can at least get a wide-ranging idea of the sentences they appear in.

These results are consistent with those of the studies conducted previously in different contexts by Nash et al., 2006; Yuen, 2009; Çetinavci, 2013; Dwaik et al., 2013; Samiyan et al., 2014.

English in Nigerian context is taught as a second language; as a result the exposure to English is usually limited to the academic settings, which results in learners' limited vocabulary understanding. This is the major difficulty that prevents learners from determining the meaning of unfamiliar words based on the context. When learners cannot understand the meaning of the surrounding words, they hardly understand the meaning of the target word. Alsaawi (2013) stated that to some extent, guessing from context is inappropriate for those who do not have adequate size of vocabulary to guess. Also, some exceptional structures in English create difficulty for learners to identify the part of speech of the target word, thereby giving wrong guesses.

Recommendations

The result of findings raises vital recommendations for educational actions as follows.

- Teachers should teach learners' awareness of deducting the meaning of unfamiliar words in context.
- To teach learners' skill in guessing word meaning, in teaching reading, teachers should avoid providing learners with all new words. They should only give learners some vital key words that can assist them gain understanding of the reading text and guess other words.
- Context cue teaching should be extensively used in teaching reading. Learners should be taught a variety of context cues and their meaning as well as their usage in context.
- In addition, the five-step procedure of Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy (1980) should be taught and reproduced on an expected basis.
- Learners should be supported to carry out this type of strategy practice after the initial teaching activity so that they can enhance their strategies in using the context.
- More significantly, learners should be insisted to apply the whole process of the guessing strategy to have successful guesses.

Conclusion

The result of the findings show that contextual guessing strategy assists learners, who were exposed to teaching intervention to this strategy, to gain a footing in the process of acquiring new words and learn more and also about their meanings. The results of the attainment post-test make known that learning that occurred through Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy was well organized, effective, valuable, and efficient, as seen in the significant gains in learner responses' performance in the post-test and favourable reflections although there are still some difficulties to be solved to facilitate implementation of Clarke and Nation's Guessing Strategy to be more rewarding.

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