

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter provides an overview of the research by discussing its background, key questions, and objectives. It also emphasizes the significance of the study, outlines its scope, and introduces a conceptual framework to guide the analysis. Furthermore, the chapter reviews previous studies to offer context and support for the research approach.

A. Research Background

Vocabulary is a crucial component of language learning because it underpins the four primary skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, students face difficulties in expressing ideas and comprehending texts, which reduces their overall proficiency. In the Indonesian context, where English is taught as a foreign language, vocabulary learning remains a persistent challenge. Junior high school students, in particular, struggle to acquire and retain new words, as conventional teaching methods that emphasize rote memorization often result in boredom, low retention, and disengagement (Jumatri, 2022). National exam results have also shown that vocabulary mastery is one of the weakest aspects of students' English performance, highlighting the urgent need for more effective instructional approaches.

Contextual learning has been introduced as an alternative strategy to address these challenges. Johnson (2002) defines contextual teaching and learning as a concept that connects subject matter with real-life situations, enabling students to build meaningful relationships between knowledge and its practical use. Research supports the benefits of this approach: Azer et al. (2013) found that contextual learning enhances understanding by requiring students to solve real-world problems; Kang (1995) emphasized that vocabulary instruction should move beyond memorization toward meaningful contexts; and Bromley (2014) showed that

interactive strategies, such as discussion and authentic materials, strengthen students' internalization of new words. These findings suggest that contextual learning strategies provide more engaging and sustainable experiences in vocabulary development.

Among various contextual learning strategies, **Task-Based Learning (TBL)** has gained particular attention because it engages students in completing meaningful tasks that mirror real-life communication. Ellis (2019) explains that TBL not only reinforces vocabulary but also fosters problem-solving skills through authentic activities. Similarly, Thomas (2017) highlights that project-based and task-oriented instruction improves critical thinking and collaboration, making vocabulary learning more memorable and practical. In the Indonesian context, TBL aligns with the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes student-centered learning and the application of knowledge in authentic situations.

The effectiveness of TBL, however, depends greatly on teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that teaching methods are shaped by teachers' underlying beliefs, while Nguyen (2017) found that teachers with positive attitudes toward contextualized instruction were more likely to integrate communicative tasks that foster vocabulary growth. This suggests that exploring teachers' perceptions is essential to understanding how TBL can be successfully implemented in vocabulary instruction.

Therefore, this study investigates EFL teachers' perceptions of Task-Based Learning as a contextual strategy to foster students' vocabulary development. By examining teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices, the research seeks to provide both theoretical contributions and practical insights for improving vocabulary teaching in the Indonesian junior high school context.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background above, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the teacher's perceptions of Task-Based Learning (TBL) as a contextual learning strategy to foster students' English vocabulary development?
2. How does the teacher apply Task-Based Learning (TBL) in classroom practice to foster students' English vocabulary development, as observed through classroom observation?

C. Research Purposes

The purposes of this study are:

1. To find out the teacher's perceptions of Task-Based Learning (TBL) as a contextual learning strategy to foster students' English vocabulary development.
2. To find out how the teacher applies Task-Based Learning (TBL) in classroom practice to foster students' English vocabulary development.

D. Research Significances

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions:

1. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to the body of literature on contextual learning strategies, specifically Task-Based Learning (TBL), in fostering English vocabulary development. By focusing on the context of Junior High School (SMP) students, the study enriches existing theories of language learning with practical insights from real classroom practice. It also extends discussions on how contextual learning can be applied in the Indonesian context, particularly within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Practical Significance

For Teachers: The results may provide insights into effective ways of applying contextual strategies in vocabulary instruction, encouraging more engaging and meaningful teaching practices.

For Students: Students may benefit from vocabulary instruction that connects language learning with real-life situations, resulting in improved retention and application of new vocabulary.

For Educational Institutions: The findings may serve as a reference for schools and curriculum developers in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes contextual and student-centered learning.

For Future Researchers: This study may provide a foundation for further research on teacher perceptions, vocabulary instruction, and the use of contextual strategies in different educational contexts.

E. Research Scope

This study is limited to exploring EFL teachers' perceptions and applications of contextual learning strategies in fostering students' vocabulary development. The research is conducted at the junior high school level, specifically focusing on eighth-grade (Grade VIII) students in Bandung. This level is chosen because vocabulary development is a crucial stage for students who are transitioning from basic to more advanced English learning. The scope does not encompass other aspects of English proficiency, such as grammar and pronunciation, and it does not attempt to measure vocabulary acquisition quantitatively. Instead, the study emphasizes teachers' beliefs and practices in applying contextual learning strategies to support the vocabulary development of Grade VIII students.

F. Conceptual Framework

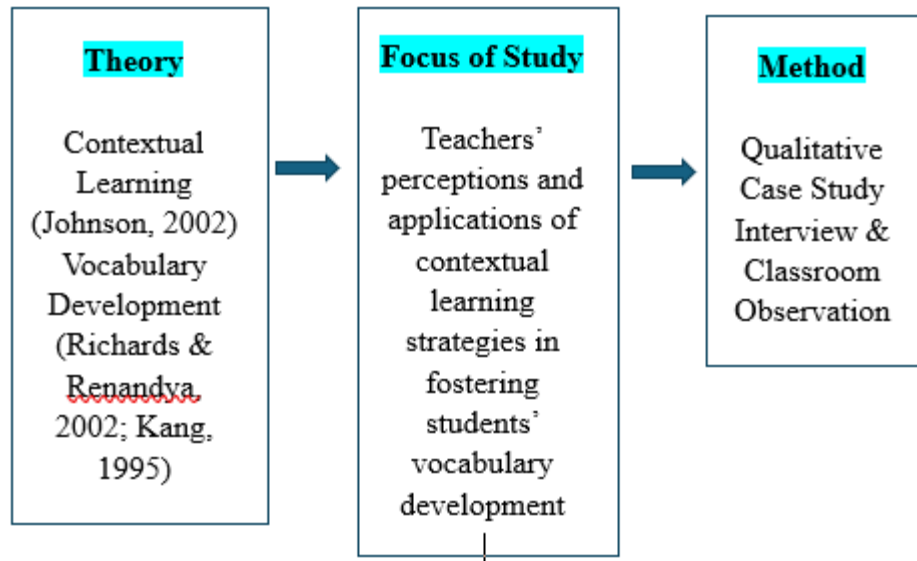


Figure 1.1 Framework Flowchart

This study is based on the theory of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) proposed by Johnson (2002), who defines CTL as a concept that enables teachers to relate subject matter to real-life situations and encourages students to make meaningful connections between knowledge and its application. CTL emphasizes that learning becomes more effective when students are actively engaged in constructing meaning through authentic experiences. This theoretical perspective provides the foundation for exploring how vocabulary instruction can be designed to support meaningful learning.

In relation to vocabulary learning, contextual strategies allow students to acquire new words in ways that are more relevant and memorable. Azer et al. (2013) highlight that contextual learning promotes deeper understanding by requiring students to apply concepts in problem-solving situations, while Kang (1995) emphasizes that vocabulary instruction should extend beyond memorization to include meaning and usage in context. Similarly, Bromley (2014) and Mokhtari and Velten (2015) demonstrate that engaging students in active learning activities, such as reading, discussion, and real-world applications, helps them internalize new

vocabulary more effectively. These perspectives illustrate that CTL can foster students' vocabulary development by making language learning both meaningful and practical.

The implementation of CTL, however, depends significantly on teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that teaching methods are guided by teachers' beliefs, which influence how strategies are applied in practice. Supporting this, Amerstorfer and Freiin (2021) found that teachers' perceptions of student engagement affected their willingness to use interactive approaches, while Nguyen (2017) demonstrated that teachers with positive attitudes toward contextualized teaching were more likely to apply communicative activities that enhance vocabulary growth. These theoretical insights frame the present study, which investigates EFL teachers' perceptions of contextual learning strategies and their application in fostering students' vocabulary development.

G. Previous Studies

Several studies have been conducted on contextual learning strategies and vocabulary development, both internationally and in Indonesia. These studies offer valuable insights into how contextual approaches can enhance language learning, while also highlighting areas that still require further investigation. The following section reviews several relevant studies that serve as the basis for this research.

Hawa (2020) conducted a qualitative study with five English teachers in Makassar to investigate their perspectives on contextual vocabulary instruction. The study revealed that teachers had varying levels of understanding about contextual learning, which influenced how they implemented strategies such as the use of visual aids and real-life materials. These findings suggest that teachers' perceptions play a significant role in determining how contextual strategies are practiced in the classroom.

Building on this, **Palashi (2023)** employed a mixed-method design involving 30 EFL students and three teachers to explore the integration of technology into project-based learning. The results indicated that digital tools and collaborative projects significantly improved students' vocabulary mastery. This shows the potential of combining contextual approaches with modern technology to enhance vocabulary learning.

In another context, **Nguyen (2017)** conducted a case study in Vietnam with eight English teachers, focusing on their attitudes toward contextualized teaching. The results demonstrated that teachers who held positive perceptions of contextual learning were more likely to apply communicative and real-life activities that fostered vocabulary growth. This highlights the importance of teacher attitudes in the success of contextualized instruction.

From the Indonesian perspective, **Adiwijaya (2015)** conducted classroom action research in a junior high school to examine the use of contextual teaching and learning in improving students' vocabulary mastery. The study, which involved 32 eighth-grade students, found that integrating real-life materials and collaborative tasks significantly increased students' vocabulary retention and motivation. This provides evidence that CTL can be effectively applied in Indonesian EFL classrooms to support vocabulary development.

From the studies above, it is evident that contextual learning strategies have been extensively researched in relation to vocabulary development, teacher perceptions, and the integration of technology. However, most of these studies either focus on students' outcomes, emphasize specific techniques, or are conducted outside the Indonesian educational context. This present study is distinct because it specifically investigates EFL teachers' perceptions of contextual learning strategies within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, focusing on how these strategies are applied to foster vocabulary development in eighth-grade students in Indonesia.