

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, research hypothesis and previous studies.

A. Research Background

Vocabulary is a fundamental component in learning English as a foreign language, particularly in EFL contexts where learners have limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. In such contexts, vocabulary becomes an essential resource for language use. Thornbury (2002) emphasizes that vocabulary is central to language learning, as insufficient vocabulary can hinder learners' ability to use language effectively. This suggests that vocabulary is not merely a supporting element, but a core component that enables EFL learners to understand and use English meaningfully. Therefore, in EFL contexts, vocabulary is essential for enhancing learners' English language proficiency.

Considering the importance of vocabulary in EFL learning, reading activities play a crucial role in helping students develop their vocabulary knowledge. Through reading texts, learners are exposed to unfamiliar words presented in meaningful contexts, which enables them to infer word meanings without relying solely on memorization. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning occurs effectively when learners encounter words in context, particularly through reading activities. In this process, context clues in reading text function as linguistic signals found within sentences and paragraphs that help learners determine the meanings of unknown words. Hiebert and Kamil (2005) state that readers can develop vocabulary knowledge by using contextual information to infer word meanings during reading. Furthermore, Brown (2004) emphasizes that effective readers actively use contextual information to make inferences about word meanings while reading. Therefore, the use of context clues in reading text can support students in improving their vocabulary mastery.

Vocabulary mastery refers to learners' ability to comprehend word meanings and apply them accurately in language use. Schmitt (2000) explains that vocabulary mastery involves more than knowing individual word meanings, as learners need to demonstrate control over vocabulary in use. Similarly, Nassaji (2004) notes that limited vocabulary knowledge may hinder learners' ability to understand word meanings accurately. Thus, vocabulary mastery can be viewed as an important aspect of learners' ability to use vocabulary effectively in English.

Initial observations conducted by the researcher at Karya Budi Junior High School, particularly in the eighth grade, revealed that although many students were familiar with common English vocabulary, they still experienced difficulties in determining the meanings of unfamiliar words encountered in reading texts. Most students relied heavily on translation applications or word-for-word translation instead of utilizing contextual information to infer word meanings. As a result, students often failed to interpret unfamiliar vocabulary independently, suggesting that their vocabulary mastery still needed improvement.

Hatch and Brown (1995) explain that vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful when learners encounter words in context rather than memorizing them in isolation. When learners are guided to pay attention to the words and sentences around them, they can use context clues to infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Ideally, this approach helps students reduce their reliance on memorization and translation tools. However, as seen in classroom conditions at SMP Karya Budi, many students have not yet developed the ability to apply a contextual approach to understand unfamiliar words. Therefore, using the Context Clues Strategy is necessary to overcome students' difficulties and support their vocabulary mastery.

One approach that addresses students' difficulties in vocabulary learning is using context clues. Beck and McKeown (1991) explain that context clues are hints found near an unknown word that provide information to determine its meaning. This definition indicates that context clues function as cues embedded

within the surrounding text, enabling learners to infer word meanings by using available linguistic information. Through this process, students are encouraged to actively construct meaning rather than rely solely on memorization or direct translation. Consequently, vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful and supports students' ability to understand unknown words encountered in reading texts.

Learning vocabulary by using Context Clues Strategy is supported by both pedagogical and empirical perspectives. Thornbury (2002) emphasizes that contextual support is especially beneficial for lower-level learners because it provides clearer semantic guidance and helps reduce dependence on rote memorization. This view is further reinforced by research in vocabulary acquisition. Webb and Nation (2017) argues that engaging with unfamiliar words in meaningful contexts promotes deeper lexical processing and enhances long-term retention. Similarly, Schmitt (2000) highlights that active interaction with words in context plays a crucial role in effective vocabulary development. Taken together, these perspectives indicate that the Context Clues Strategy is a relevant and appropriate approach for improving students' vocabulary mastery, particularly for junior high school students who require practical and level-appropriate strategies to understand unfamiliar words encountered in texts.

A number of previous studies have shown that the Context Clues Strategy is effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery. Several studies conducted at the junior high school level reported significant improvements in students' vocabulary achievement after the implementation of context clues (Jamrewav et al., 2021) and (Hidayah et al., 2025). Other studies also found that students taught using the Context Clues Strategy outperformed those taught through traditional methods (Bouknify and Meryem, 2025) and (Umar et al., 2023). In addition, Utama (2019) noted that context clues facilitated students' understanding of unfamiliar vocabulary, although the study primarily focused on reading comprehension.

Despite the positive findings reported in previous studies, several gaps remain to be addressed. Previous studies have examined context clues in

general vocabulary instruction, reading activities, and reading comprehension using various types of texts and educational contexts. However, limited attention has been given to the structured implementation of synonym, antonym, example, and definition or restatement clues through a sequence of narrative-text learning activities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy through narrative texts to enhance the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at SMP Karya Budi using a pre-experimental design.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What is the students' vocabulary mastery before using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text?
2. What is the students' vocabulary mastery after using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text?
3. How significant is the difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text?

C. Research Purposes

Following the research questions, the research purposes of this study are:

1. To determine the students' vocabulary mastery before using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text.
2. To determine the students' vocabulary mastery after using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text.
3. To examine whether there is a significant difference in students' vocabulary mastery before and after using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text.

D. Research Significance

Theoretically, this study provides empirical evidence supporting theories of vocabulary mastery and the application of the Context Clues Strategy in teaching narrative texts within English language teaching. This research supports theoretical views suggesting that vocabulary mastery can be developed when learners are guided to understand word meanings through context clues

within reading activities rather than memorizing vocabulary in isolation. By examining the application of the Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text, this study strengthens existing theories that emphasize the role of contextual learning in helping learners comprehend unfamiliar words and develop vocabulary mastery in EFL classrooms.

Practically, this research gives significance to the following:

1. For an English teacher

This study offers English teachers practical guidance in applying the Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text to support students' vocabulary mastery. The findings can help teachers guide students to understand unfamiliar word meanings through contextual information in Narrative texts, reduce students' dependence on memorization and translation tools, and encourage more active participation in reading activities.

2. For Students

The results of this study help students develop the ability to understand unfamiliar vocabulary by using context clues in narrative text. This ability supports students in becoming more independent readers and enhances their vocabulary mastery.

3. For Schools

This research provides schools with insights into effective vocabulary learning practices through reading text that can be implemented in classroom instruction. The findings may serve as a reference for improving the quality of English language teaching, particularly in supporting students' vocabulary mastery at the junior high school level.

4. For Future Researchers

This study provides empirical findings and methodological references for future researchers who are interested in investigating vocabulary mastery through the use of Context Clues Strategy in narrative text. Future studies may extend this research by employing different research designs, educational levels, or variations of context clues.

E. Research Scope

This study examines the use of the Context Clues Strategy in narrative texts to enhance students' vocabulary mastery, specifically in the aspect of word meaning. The study was conducted at SMP Karya Budi Cileunyi and involved 30 eighth-grade students. The learning materials focused on narrative texts and incorporated four types of context clues: synonym, antonym, example, and definition or restatement clues. In this study, vocabulary mastery was limited to students' ability to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words based on contextual information. However, the data analysis was based on the students' total pre-test and post-test scores. The students' performance in each type of context clue was not analyzed separately, and other aspects of vocabulary knowledge, such as word form and word use, were not examined.

F. Conceptual Framework

Vocabulary mastery refers to learners' ability to assign meaning to words and use them appropriately. Marksheffel (1966) states that mastering vocabulary begins with giving meaning to words as the foundation of understanding. Lewis and Hill (1992) emphasize its importance because English functions as a global language that requires sufficient vocabulary for effective communication. Ismail (2001, as cited in Umar et al., 2023) adds that learners achieve better mastery when they actively use new words and relate them to known vocabulary. Schmitt (2000) further explains that knowing a word goes beyond its dictionary meaning, as it must be used appropriately in context. In line with these views, Amri (2020) defines vocabulary mastery as learners' ability to recognize, understand, and use vocabulary accurately according to context. Accordingly, this study defines vocabulary mastery as learners' ability to recognize meanings, infer unfamiliar words through contextual clues, and apply appropriate meanings based on textual context.

The Context Clues Strategy involves using contextual information within a sentence or passage to understand the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary. Beck and McKeown (1991) explain that context clues are hints near an unknown word that help determine its meaning. The purpose of this strategy is to assist

learners in deducing unfamiliar terms by interpreting information in the text (Karbalaee et al., 2012). Recent research also shows that learners can understand word meanings through contextual information even with limited prior knowledge (Hong and Lanh, 2023). Therefore, context clues strategy supports vocabulary mastery by encouraging independent meaning construction based on context.

Context clues consist of various types. According to Innaci and Sam, as cited in Nurhaeni (2022), context clues can be categorized into four common types, namely: synonym clues, antonym clues, example clues, definition or restatement clues. According to Alzahrane (2019), each category of context clues has a specific signal word, thus helping learners identify the type of clue that appears and interpret the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary.

Narrative text is used as the instructional context in this study because it provides meaningful language exposure that supports vocabulary learning through context. According to Anderson and Anderson (2003), narrative text entertains readers through a sequence of events organized into orientation, complication, and resolution. This structure creates a coherent context that helps learners infer unfamiliar word meanings. Moreover, narrative texts use past tense forms, action verbs, descriptive vocabulary, and temporal conjunctions that provide contextual clues. Therefore, implementing the context clue strategy through narrative texts is assumed to facilitate students' vocabulary mastery by encouraging them to derive meanings from the text.

Based on the theories discussed above, this study assumes that the Context Clues Strategy facilitates students in inferring the meanings of unfamiliar words by using contextual information presented in narrative texts. Through this process, students become less dependent on translation and develop a better understanding of vocabulary in context. Consequently, the implementation of the Context Clues Strategy is expected to improve students' vocabulary mastery.

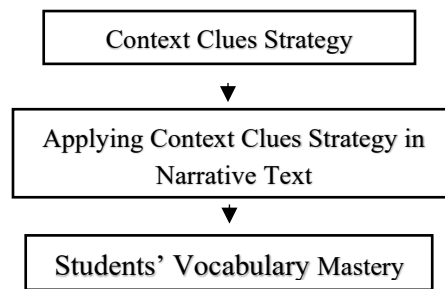


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

G. Research Hypothesis

The preliminary answer to the research problem is referred to as a hypothesis. According to Sugiyono (2013), a hypothesis is a tentative answer to a research question, developed from relevant theories and requiring verification through data analysis. Therefore, a hypothesis should be tested to determine whether it is accepted or rejected.

This research involves two variables. The independent variable (X) is the Context Clues Strategy in narrative text, while the dependent variable (Y) is students' vocabulary mastery. The following is a proposed relationship of the research hypothesis: "Using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative Text to Enhance Students' Vocabulary Mastery: A Pre-Experimental Study at Junior High School".

The research hypotheses are formulated as follows:

1. Null hypothesis (Ho): There is no significant difference in the students' vocabulary mastery before and after using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text.
2. Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant difference in the students' vocabulary mastery before and after using Context Clues Strategy in Narrative text.

H. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined the use of context clues to improve students' vocabulary mastery. These studies generally showed that contextual information helped students determine the meanings of unfamiliar words. However, limited studies have specifically investigated the implementation of

the Context Clues Strategy through narrative texts to enhance the overall vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students in Indonesian junior high schools.

First, Jamrewav et al., (2021) examined how junior high school students' vocabulary mastery through text reading was affected by the use of context cues. 28 students in grades VIII–D at SMPN 52 Makassar participated in this quantitative study, which used a pre-experimental one-group pre-test and post-test design. A vocabulary exam that was given both before and after the treatment served as the study tool. Students' vocabulary skills significantly improved, as evidenced by the average pre-test score of 53.00 rising to 81.64 in the post-test. However, the study focused on general vocabulary improvement through text reading, while further research is needed to specifically examine students' vocabulary mastery through the use of context clues in narrative texts at the junior high school level.

Second, the study "Context clues as a vocabulary enhancement strategy in TEFL: An experimental study" by Bouknify and Meryem (2025) used a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test, context clue intervention, and post-test to evaluate the strategy's efficacy. The study, which involved experimental and control groups (sample size unknown, around 40–60 students), was carried out in a Moroccan second-year baccalaureate school (equivalent to the end of high school). The data came from vocabulary test scores that gauge meaning inference from narrative and descriptive contexts. Results showed that context hints are useful for EFL learners, with the experimental group outperforming the control in vocabulary mastery and retention. However, the lack of longitudinal assessments for long-term retention, limitations of advanced courses, and the lack of attention to junior high school children with poor baseline vocabulary in the Indonesian context form the research gap.

Third, Hidayah et al., (2025) examined the use of Contextual Clues Strategy in improving vocabulary mastery of junior high school students. The application of the Contextual Clues Strategy to enhance junior high school students' vocabulary knowledge was investigated by Hidayah, this study was carried out at SMP Negeri 15 Palu using a quasi-experimental methodology

with a pre-test and post-test control group design. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 60 students. from the 150 seventh-grade students in the study population into an experimental group and a control group. A multiple-choice vocabulary test conducted both before and after treatment served as the research tool. The experimental group's average score increased from 58 in the pre-test to 83 in the post-test, according to the data, whereas the control group's average score only climbed from 63 to 69. The statistical test's findings showed that the Contextual Clues Strategy was successful in raising students' vocabulary knowledge since the t-value (3.14) was higher than the t-table (2.002) at a significance level of 0.05. However, the study focused on the general effectiveness of the Contextual Clues Strategy and did not specifically examine the types of context clues or how students process contextual information while inferring word meanings.

Fourth, Umar et al., (2023) examined the use of narrative-structure-based context clues to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Students in grade VII-A at SMPN 1 Tombolopao participated in this study, which employed a pre-experimental procedure with a one-group pre-test and post-test design. Purposive sampling was used to choose the research sample, which consisted of 25 students. Pre-tests and post-tests of vocabulary were used to gather data, which were then verified by observations made during the learning process. The results showed that students' vocabulary skills improved following the application of the context clues technique, as seen by higher post-test scores relative to the pre-test as well as more student engagement and motivation in learning. There was only one class in this study, and there was no control. However, this study focused solely at narrative texts and was limited to one class without a control group. As a result, more studies including a larger sample size and a more robust experimental design are still required.

Fifth, Utama (2019) examined the use of context clues in improving the reading comprehension of descriptive texts of eighth-grade students at SMPN 10 Depok. Utama (2019) investigated how eighth-grade students at SMPN 10 Depok improved their reading comprehension of descriptive literature by using

context cues. This study employed an experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group as well as a multiple-choice test instrument that was analyzed using an SPSS t-test. The average post-test score of the experimental group (81.89) was significantly higher than that of the control group (77.55), according to the data, and example cues were the kind of context clues that students found most understandable. However, the study primarily focused on reading comprehension rather than vocabulary mastery, indicating the need for further research that specifically examines vocabulary mastery through the use of context clues.

Previous studies have generally reported positive effects of the Context Clues Strategy on students' vocabulary mastery. However, the reviewed studies were conducted using different text types, educational levels, and learning contexts. Although Umar et al. (2023) also used narrative texts, the study involved seventh-grade students in a different school context. Therefore, this study examines the use of the Context Clues Strategy to enhance eighth-grade students' vocabulary mastery within narrative texts at SMP Karya Budi Cileunyi.

