Improving Reading Comprehension through Context Clues Strategy for the Eleventh Grade Students at Vo Thi Sau High School

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ABSTRACT: The goal of this study is to find out how effective teachers use Context Clues Strategy to improve reading skills for students at a high school in Ba Ria – Vung Tau province, Vietnam. The eleventhgrade students at Vo Thi Sau high school were the participants. The research method was classroom action research. The quantitative data was gathered during the tests. According to the results, 11 students (14.6%) passed the Mastery Minimum Criteria on the pre-test, whereas 53 students (70.6%) passed the post-test. The findings showed that student's performance on the post-test had significantly improved. The comparison between the pre-test score (4.86) and the post-test score (7.41) demonstrated this improvement. As a result, Context Clues Strategy was a useful tool for teaching students reading comprehension. Lastly, some limitations and recommendations for further research are also mentioned.

KEYWORDS: Context Clues Strategy, Improving, Reading comprehension, Vo Thi Sau high school.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, as English is becoming a widely utilized language for communication, learning English is becoming more and more popular among students and young learners. Especially, in the age of technology and the influence of " the flat world", learners tend to emphasize listening and speaking skills but forget the function of reading skills when studying English. Many students are unaware of how important reading has always been in academics and how it is regarded as the most crucial of the four language skills. (Al-Nafisah, 2011). Learning to read well is necessary for students' academic achievement. It can aid students in passing standardized exams like the national high school exam or competence assessment exam in many universities. Therefore, it is critical to develop students' reading abilities in the classroom. When reading a text, comprehension is just as important as reading ability. Students who demonstrate comprehension can show that they have read the material and have learned the information it contains.

Actually, in the context of the increasing number of English learners in Vietnam, research on learning strategies in general, and reading comprehension strategies in particular, is still limited. In particular, within the scope of teaching and learning English at high schools in Ba Ria – Vung Tau province, there have been no studies that provide scientific data demonstrating the impact of using Context Clues Strategy on reading skills of students. To that void, this study aims at investigating the teaching and learning of reading comprehension through Context Clues Strategy for students at a high school in Ba Ria – Vung Tau Province. This study addresses the following questions:

1. What Context Clues Strategy do teachers and students use when studying reading comprehension skills?
2. What are the attitudes of teachers and students toward the use of Context Clues Strategy when studying reading comprehension skills?
3. How effective does Context Clues Strategy use help to improve reading comprehension skills of students?

Theoretically, it is hoped that this study will add detailed knowledge on enhancing reading comprehension to the literature on the use of Context Clues Strategy in Vietnam. The results of this study may encourage future researchers and scholars in education to develop methods for incorporating the Context Clues Strategy into English teaching to meet the various needs of students and develop productive learning environments for English in the classroom. Practically, this research may aid English teachers in better understanding how Context Clues Strategy is used in teaching reading comprehension at Vo Thi Sau High School. Additionally, it is hoped that the study will lay a solid basis for other teachers so they will be more inspired to use the Context Clues Strategy in English teaching and research which relates issues to enhance the caliber of English teaching and learning in the Ba Ria-Vung Tau province.

LITERATURE

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to comprehend or understand what people are reading. This occurs before, during, and after reading something and is a deliberate, active element of reading. Understanding what they are reading can help them draw meaning from it and better understand the message the author is attempting to get through. Reading comprehension is significant for a variety of reasons and has numerous advantages. Effective reading skills can enhance both people's personal and professional lives as well as their enjoyment of reading as a whole. People's understanding of some subjects can be increased, and they can pick up new knowledge and skills more quickly if they know how to interpret a text.

Context Clues Strategy

Context clues are terms that are used in conjunction with an ambiguous word to provide hints about that word's meaning (Beck et al., 2002). Students may frequently identify a word's meaning without the aid of a dictionary or an instructor by looking at the context in which it is used. Using context is one technique students can employ to aid in their independence as word learners and to account for the words they pick up outside of structured instruction.

In other words, context clues are words or phrases that help students understand the meaning of a new word (Hartmann & Blass, 2007). Also, contextualization aids in the understanding and efficient use of the target language by language learners. If a context clue is given, it will be easier to understand the various shades of meaning that certain words may have in a certain situation.

The positive and negative effects of "Context Clues Strategy" in reading class

According to Rynette (2010:4), Context Clues Strategy has certain benefits. First, the reader can expand their vocabulary by using context clues to help them understand unfamiliar words. Second, readers can determine how to pronounce words thanks to context clues. Third, readers who can understand what they are reading by using context clues may find reading to be enjoyable. Besides, Context Clues Strategy can improve students' vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills (Al Jumaily, 2021).

The usage of context clues, according to Innaci & Sam (2017), also spares students from wasting time looking up unfamiliar words in dictionaries. Also, it promotes students' confidence and stimulates their critical thinking. Students are not required to consult the dictionary each time they come across a new word. Only by paying attention to the context in which a term is used can students choose the right definition for the situation. Another advantage is that students may complete tests more quickly and simply.

In contrast, Rynette, (2010) mentions that the use of context clues has some drawbacks. First, it takes more time for beginning readers. Context clues call for more flare and inventiveness from novices. Second, sometimes the context information is insufficient and causes the reader to guess incorrectly. Unknown word contexts in literature are not always useful and, in certain situations, can lead students to draw erroneous conclusions about word meanings. Thirdly, prior knowledge is especially important to take intelligence into account when using context clues.

Previous studies

Studies relating to the use of Context Clues Strategy in reading comprehension have been conducted in different contexts. Herinovita et al. (2016) previously looked into the impact of employing the Context Clues Strategy on first-year students' reading comprehension. The results of the data analysis demonstrated a considerable impact of the Context Clues Strategy on reading comprehension. Then, Harahap (2018) researched the impact of eleventh-grade students' knowledge of Context Clues Strategy on their reading comprehension of procedural texts. Before mastering the use of this strategy, students' reading comprehension of procedure material was rated on the mean at 73.23; however, after mastering the use of Context Clues Strategy, their reading comprehension of procedure text was rated on the mean at 85.81.

Students performed better on the reading comprehension test for procedural texts after mastering the use of Context Clues Strategy than they did before. Huynh et al. (2019) explored the impact of Context Clues Strategy on 80 non-majored English students at Hue University of Foreign Language. Results revealed that both groups utilized nearly all of the tactics. They reflectively acknowledged using those tactics at a medium level, despite some disparities in the two groups' levels of English ability. To consciously improve students' lifetime learning, reading strategy training should be given more thought by both EFL teachers and students. Similarly, Indriana & Dewi (2021) completed a survey of the eighth-grade students of SMPN 20 Sigi. The results of the data analysis indicated that when it comes to literal comprehension, the Context Clues Strategy

helps students' reading comprehension. By comparing the experimental group's mean score before and after the treatment, it may be demonstrated. It suggests that by utilizing the Context Clues Strategy, students' reading comprehension might be enhanced.

In short, the studies on the advantages of the Context Clues Strategy showed some beneficial effects on students' reading comprehension. More significantly, teachers and students generally consider the Context Clues Strategy as a useful tool in reading comprehension lessons.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research setting and participants

This study, which adopted mixed methods including qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data, was conducted at Vo Thi Sau high school in Ba Ria – Vung Tau province, Vietnam. 75 students at the age of 16 to 17 were chosen to take part in the research for 6 weeks as the experimental group. Also, five students were chosen to join a semi-structured interview. The other 75 students were the control group. The control group learned reading comprehension without knowledge about Context Clues Strategy. The experimental group was introduced to Context Clues Strategy for their reading comprehension. In addition, five teachers who were in charge of teaching English for grade 11 at Vo Thi Sau High School were invited for semi-structured interviews.

Research instruments

To collect the data, the researcher used tests (pre-test & post-test), a questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. There were 25 multiple-choice questions in the pre-test and the post-test. The questionnaire includes two main sections. Section I consists of 9 items that seek students' attitudes towards the use of Context Clues Strategy, and section II has 17 items asking students' perceptions of the use of Context Clues Strategy. A five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used in the design of all the items. The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was .859, which means the questionnaire indicated high levels of reliability. Regarding the semi-structured interview, five primary interview questions for students and other five interviews for teachers were created. Also, the content of the questionnaire and interviews was translated into Vietnamese to make sure that the students did not encounter any difficulties while understanding and answering the questions.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Before the researcher collected the data, the two research instruments were piloted with five students who had similar characteristics to those in the main study. After being adopted, the questionnaire was given to students. Five students were randomly chosen for semi-structured interviews after two weeks of preliminary questionnaire data processing. With the students' permission, all of the interviews were recorded for later analysis. Besides, five teachers also joined in the interviews which lasted for 10 minutes.

As for data analysis, this study gathered both quantitative and qualitative information from tests, interviews, and questionnaires. The former was processed by the software SPSS (20.0) in terms of descriptive statistics (Mean: M; Standard deviation: SD).

Reliability and validity of the study

After making the pilot for the students, the researcher considered and required some necessary changes in the tests and interviews. In addition, the researcher's supervisor and her experienced colleagues also checked and corrected the tests and the interview. In order to assess the validity of the pretest and posttest, the researcher also calculated Cronbach's Alpha coefficient index.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha of the pre-test and the post-test

Instruments	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Pre-test	0.745	75
Post-test	0.812	75

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The types of Context Clues Strategy that teachers and students use

Most of the teachers asked confirmed that Context Clues Strategies they used in teaching students reading comprehension helped them engage greatly in the reading lessons. It can be sure that Context Clues Strategies being used by teachers including antonyms,

synonyms, definitions, examples, word parts, and analogies can help students at Vo Thi Sau High School improve their reading comprehension abilities a great deal.
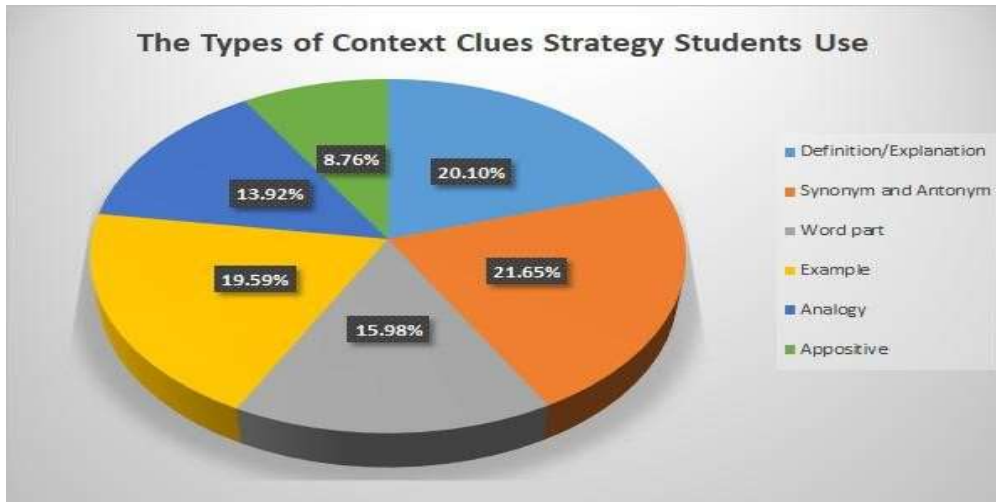

Figure 1. The types of context clues strategy students use

By analyzing the statistics of the questionnaire, the researcher found that students had an interest in using synonyms & antonyms, definitions/explanations, and examples, which is similar to the teachers' opinions.

The students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of Context Clues Strategy
The qualitative result from the interviews with the students presented that Context Clues Strategy is helpful to facilitate their reading comprehension. The majority of the students agreed that after the treatment, their reading comprehension had improved. Additionally, the majority of interviewees expressed their positive feelings towards the use of Context Clues Strategy in learning reading lessons. They were eager, engaged, and confident enough to participate in classes. Students may complete tests more quickly and simply. Also, it helps students stimulate their critical thinking.
Most of the teachers agreed that Context Clues Strategy was useful for the students to develop reading comprehension skill. They supposed that the students need to be inspired confident and fun in learning Context Clues Strategy. Besides, students should be taught suitable strategies for their different levels from the beginning so that they could use these strategies more effectively. Last but not least, students needed to practice Context Clues Strategy frequently to deepen what they had learned about it. **The effectiveness of Context Clues Strategy on improving reading comprehension**

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the control group students and the experimental group students' mean scores in the pre-test

Group	N	Min	Max	Mean	St.D
Control group	75	1.6	7.6	4.47	1.06
Experimental group	75	1.6	7.2	4.86	0.976

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the control group students and the experimental group students' mean scores in the post-test

Group	N	Min	Max	Mean	St.D
Control group	75	1.8	8	5.35	1.03
Experimental group	75	2.6	10	7.41	0.997

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the control group students and the experimental group students' mean scores before and after the treatment

Group	Test	N	Min	Max	Mean	St.D
Control	Pretest	75	1.6	7.6	4.47	1.06
	Posttest	75	1.8	8	5.35	1.03
Experimental	Pretest	75	1.6	7.2	4.86	0.976
	Posttest	75	2.6	10	7.41	0.997

Table 6. Comparative results of the mean scores within each group in the pre-test and the post-test Paired sample test

Pre-test and Post-test	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Control group	-.889	.381	.044	-.997	-.802	-20.21	75	.000
Experimental group	-2.546	.793	.092	-2.73	-2.36	-27.82	75	.000

The results of the pre-test and post-test revealed an improvement in reading comprehension skills between the students in the experimental group and the control group.
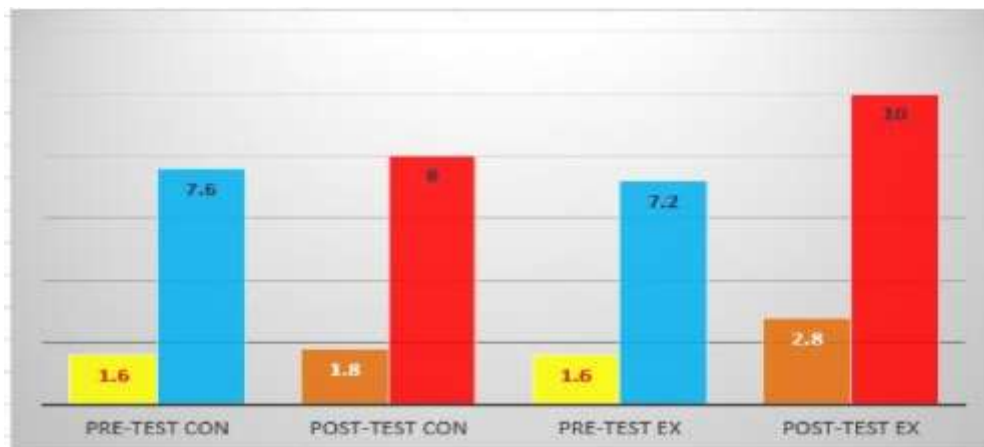

Figure 2. The pre-test and the post-test's score of the control group and the experimental group

The above chart shows the results of the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group and control group. Overall, it is evident that the participants' scores dramatically improved after using the Context Clues Strategy.

DISCUSSIONS

In this study, the results of the pre-test revealed that both groups had the same issue. Both groups had quite low knowledge of reading comprehension before participating in the experiment. The mean score for both groups was lower than 5.00 and few students passed the pre–test.

After the treatment, the mean scores of the post-test of the control group and the experimental group are higher than that of their pre-test. In other words, the Vo Thi Sau High School students in the eleventh grade can increase their reading comprehension by employing the Context Clues Strategy.

The result from the semi-structured revealed that most students felt that the Context Clues Strategy had a favorable impact on their ability to understand what they were reading. When reading a text, they could predict the meaning of unfamiliar words and make inferences about the text. It could also help students develop their critical thinking skills. Finally, the results of the teachers' interviews showed that it was very useful to teach Context Clues Strategy to students. It would bring a lot of benefits for them. When the teachers used a lot of time to arouse the students' interest and teach suitable strategies for their levels, it would make students feel more confident in reading.

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the main findings of the study

Overall, according to the results of the study, teachers and students in grade 11 at Vo Thi Sau High School appreciate several of Context Clues Strategy such as antonyms, synonyms, definitions/examples, word parts, and analogies. Next, the results from the interviews and the questionnaire also revealed that both the students and the teachers had positive attitudes toward the use of Context Clues Strategy in teaching and learning reading comprehension. Moreover, students can improve their reading comprehension by employing Context Clues Strategy. This statement was proved by the better performance in the post-test of the experiment group compared to the performance of the control group. Namely, students' reading comprehension skill has been improved after treating with Context Clues Strategy. They also discovered how crucial the Context Clues Strategy was to their improvement of reading learning. Some students were convinced that applying the Context Clues Strategy would improve their ability to understand reading texts better. As a result, employing Context Clues Strategy can help increase students' interest in learning to read.

Implications of the study

For students, the most important thing to consider is that they should practice applying Context Clues Strategy continually and frequently to ensure a successful application. Next, students should cooperate and interact with their classmates and teachers to share their problems, experiences, or viewpoints during the learning process. Lastly, students should keep practicing inferring word meanings using Context Clues Strategy at home through extensive reading. Students should always use this strategy both inside and outside of the classroom to boost their reading development. Certainly, if students can take advantage of using Context Clues Strategy, it will become a helpful self-learning method for them.

For teachers, first of all, they should persuade students that reading comprehension is not difficult to learn although some reading texts are rather long. In addition, teachers should take time to explain the advantages of using Context Clues Strategy to their students so that they can understand its significance in the reading learning process and develop positive attitudes and motivation for Context Clues Strategy. Second, to keep students' interest, teachers should teach Context Clues Strategy at an easy level and in simple contexts at the beginning. After that, teachers can increase the advanced level gradually so that students understand it clearly, apply it to each situation and find the correct answers. During the teaching process, teachers should also provide students the chance to practice this strategy intensively in reading tasks. Teachers should remember that "feedback in the form of model answers can be effective" (Carnine, Kameenui, and Coyle, 1984), so teachers should give corrective feedback promptly and efficiently. Finally, since some Context Clues Strategy exercises may be difficult for low-level students, teachers should encourage students by having them practice this method in pairs or groups. This will increase the student's enthusiasm in applying this strategy.

For administration, the government and school administration may take into consideration conducting training to acquaint teachers with the Context Clues Strategy to maximize the quality of teaching and learning.

Limitations of the study

There are several of limitations that can not be avoided in this study. First of all, the size of the data was rather small. With the participation of 150 students, the data was not large enough. Besides, the research was only conducted over six weeks. The results of the study might be more generalized if the sample size is bigger and the participants are from different levels. Also, because this research was restricted to grade 11 students at Vo Thi Sau Highschool, its results cannot be considered to be an example for all Vietnamese students. Second, because of the lack of treatment time, the usage of Context Clues Strategy could not be taught more specifically, and students did not have enough time to practice each type intensively. As a result, some low-level students could not use Context Clues Strategy effectively. Finally, to use words that students would not have in their reading, speaking, or listening

vocabularies, the researcher designed the present passages which were sometimes different from usual classroom materials. This limits the generalization of this study's results to classroom materials.

Recommendations for further studies

It is strongly suggested that further studies should overcome all the limitations which were mentioned above. Firstly, other researchers should expand their studies over a longer period, with more participants from different levels, in different contexts. Next, this study only emphasizes the effectiveness of Context Clues Strategy on reading comprehension skills, so the researcher hopes that the impact of the Context Clues Strategy on other skills like grammar, writing, speaking, listening, and vocabulary retention may be the subject of other future studies. Lastly, future research should create passages with vocabulary and structure that have a closer relation to classroom materials. In addition, students that are weak in English should be taken into consideration when designing future studies.

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