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Analyzing Learners' Knowledge to Guess The Meaning of Vocabulary from Narrative Text

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Abstract: This study investigates learners' knowledge to guess the meaning of vocabulary in narrative texts. The background emphasizes the significance of vocabulary in mastering English, especially for communication and comprehension. This study aims to determine students' knowledge in guessing the meaning of vocabulary in narrative texts. Students also have difficulty understanding the meaning of the text given because of their lack of vocabulary knowledge. The research employs a quantitative descriptive method, focusing on 8th-grade students at a junior high school. Data were collected using narrative texts and vocabulary lists in open-ended tests. Findings show that most students struggled to guess word meanings from context, with 74.01% classified as having no knowledge, 18.19% having full knowledge, and 6.17% partial knowledge. students cannot find the meaning of the vocabulary in the narrative text that has been provided. Most of them do not know the meaning of the context of the textThe study suggests using contextual learning strategies to improve vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords: Guessing, Knowledge.Narrative, Vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Language is an expression that contains the intention to convey something to others. According to Chaer and Agustina (2004:15), the primary function of language is as a means of communication. Every country has its language, but it should be noted that to start communicating with outsiders or native speakers, you need to communicate using an international language, namely English. English is an international language used for communication. The government has chosen English as the first international language to be taught in public schools. In this case, it encourages people to learn English to communicate efficiently. Vocabulary is a collection of words a person knows and uses for communication. According to Tarigan (2011:72), vocabulary is the set of words a person knows or is part of a language, particularly used by someone to compose a new sentence. Vocabulary is the most essential language component in learning various languages. The first step in understanding a foreign language is not only needed for learning written texts, because no language learning process is possible without studying the vocabulary of that language. According to Destiyanti, Amin, and Putera (2021:8), "vocabulary containing simple words is a simplified version of difficult ones, a word that participants frequently encounter in everyday English." Also, Putera, Nurtaat, and Chrysthy (2022:224) stated that before moving on to more difficult vocabulary, we must first master basic vocabulary.

Vocabulary has an important role in students' communication skills. Ulrich (2007:3) states that "words are our gateway to the world; words are a means of communicating between humans; words enable us to think; and words are the basis for communicating with each other." Vocabulary can even be called the key to learning a foreign language because the richness of a person's vocabulary also determines the quality of that person's language skills. According to Richards et al. (2009:185), vocabulary is relevant to all sub-skills, and general language proficiency can perhaps be reinterpreted, at least to some extent, as vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary plays important role in learning a foreign language. Hardjono (1988:71) states that students in the teaching and learning process must master all fundamental aspects of a foreign language, and vocabulary is the most important aspect.

Rivers in Nunan (1991:117) argues that acquiring an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use.

Guessing from the context is one of the most valuable skills learners can acquire and apply inside and outside the classroom, and, more importantly, can be taught and implemented relatively easily (Thornbury, 2002 : 202). The difficulty in remembering words was due to the difficulty in interpretation. Guessing from the context, was effective in gaining knowledge and coping with new words. Guessing meaning strategy also improves their vocabulary, making them understand the whole text easily, and they do not rely on the dictionary. Moreover, it is known that the guessing meaning strategy is suitable for implementing reading a text because the students can understand the basic things before understanding the whole text. Most of the words would be known to most learners, which might influence the guessing efficiency. Knowing one word's meaning was not enough. Consequently, by guessing the meaning of words from the context, learners would acquire a range of meanings for a single word.

Narrative text is one of the learning materials taught to learners in the textbook, about the structure, and also a type of text that tells a series of events with an imaginative chronological system. Narrative is the representation of events and consisting of story. (Herman 2007). Narrative texts typically include an introduction to the characters, place, plot, storyline, conflict, climax, and resolution or conclusion. Fictional narratives such as fairy tales, folk stories, legends, myths, and so on are standard formats for this writing. The purpose of narrative text is to entertain, amuse, and educate the learners, readers, or listeners about the story. This study focuses on the 8th grade of SMPN 9 Mataram learners. When conducting observations, the researcher discovered that students had problems understanding vocabulary during English lessons. This problem is obvious when students are asked by their teachers to answer or understand questions. Students also have difficulty understanding the meaning of the text given because of their lack of vocabulary knowledge. The lack of understanding of students' vocabulary prompted researchers to examine students' vocabulary knowledge using narrative text.

METHODS

This research uses a quantitative descriptive method. According to Manuel and Medel (1998), descriptive research describes the truth and what it is. It involves describing, recording, analysing, and interpreting current phenomena or objects' nature, composition, or process. It focuses on the prevailing conditions or how a person, group, or thing behaves and functions in the present. This can often involve some comparison or contrast. This study was conducted at SMPN 9 Mataram, as indicated by its intent and title. The data source was the 8th-grade learners' knowledge of the meaning of vocabulary used in a narrative text. The total population was 168 students, and the sample consisted of 30% of the population, or two classes (51 students).

Data collection was carried out using an open-ended vocabulary test. The instrument consisted of a narrative text, "The Legend of Malin Kundang," and a vocabulary list. Students were given time to read the narrative and answer 30 vocabulary items based on their understanding without external help. Researcher Analyzing students' responses classified their knowledge into full, partial, and no knowledge categories. The method that the researcher used in this research was the quantitative descriptive method. Creswell in Alsa (2012) stated that quantitative research works with numbers, where the data is in the form of numbers (scores or values, rankings or frequencies)and To analyze the data and find out the percentage, the researcher applied the following steps:

$$S = \frac{R}{N} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

S = SCORE
R = Right Answer
N = Total number of test items

After finding the students' score, the next step was to find the mean deviation score of full, partial, and no knowledge. used the formula as follows:

$$M = \frac{\Sigma fx}{N} \quad (2)$$

Where:
M = Mean
Σfx = Total score
N = Total respondents

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

To address the research question, which aimed to evaluate the vocabulary knowledge of students at SMPN 9 Mataram, the study revealed that the majority of students were unable to accurately interpret the meaning of the target vocabulary. Many exhibited difficulties in understanding the words, with most failing to provide correct answers, even at a partial knowledge level. The findings suggest that students generally faced challenges in interpreting word meanings, especially when required to rely on contextual understanding. To assess this, the researchers conducted a vocabulary test and classified the students' responses into three categories: full knowledge (correct meaning derived from context), partial knowledge (correct meaning but unrelated to the context), and no knowledge (incorrect answer). This categorization provided deeper insights into students' levels of vocabulary comprehension and underscored the importance of enhancing vocabulary instruction that emphasizes contextual learning. Additionally, the researchers examined the distribution of transitivity process types in students' narrative essays by analyzing their individual responses. The narrative text used for the task, *The Legend of Malin Kundang*, contained 30 selected vocabulary items presented in bold. Students were asked to determine the meaning of each word based on contextual clues. Their responses were assessed using a predetermined answer key. This method enabled the researcher to evaluate students' vocabulary knowledge as reflected in their understanding of the context within the narrative.

Table 1. Score of students and percentage score

No	Name	FK	prctg	PK	Prctg	NK	Prcntg
1	R	16	53,3	8	26,6	6	20
2	NWIS	12	40	7	23,3	11	36,6
3	BAS	3	10	0	0	27	90
4	SAKN	1	3,3	3	10	26	86,6
5	IAA	1	3,3	2	6,6	27	90
6	RAD	14	46,6	6	30	10	33,3
7	RSK	5	16,6	0	0	25	83,3
8	CAF	14	46,6	5	16,6	11	36,6
9	NPDA	12	40	4	13,3	14	46,6
10	MSA	11	36,6	3	10	16	53,3
11	NI	2	6,6	2	6,6	26	86,6
12	KBS	10	33,3	2	6,6	18	60
13	IGT	4	13,3	0	0	26	86,6
14	F	3	10	3	10	24	80
15	MR	1	3,3	0	0	29	96,6
16	LVL	4	13,3	2	6,6	24	80
17	YP	5	16,6	2	6,6	23	76,6
18	IGP	2	6,6	0	0	28	93,3
19	N	2	6,6	0	0	28	93,3
20	SA	2	6,6	0	0	28	93,3
21	R	2	6,6	0	0	28	93,3
22	YHA	13	43,3	4	13,3	13	43,3
23	IME	2	6,6	0	0	28	93,3
24	JA	2	6,6	0	0	28	93,3
25	J	4	13,3	1	3,3	25	83,3
26	MH	13	43,3	1	3,3	16	53,3
27	F	7	26,6	1	3,3	22	73,3
28	DAL	4	13,3	1	3,3	25	83,3
29	SRP	3	10	1	3,3	26	86,6
30	BSN	5	16,6	1	3,3	24	80
31	ATSN	4	13,3	1	3,3	25	83,3
32	D	6	20	1	3,3	23	76,6
33	SHY	3	10	1	3,3	26	86,6
34	RM	8	26,6	3	10	19	63,3
35	INAS	1	3,3	0	0	29	96,6
36	IKAT	7	23,3	1	3,3	22	73,3
37	IMWJ	8	26,6	2	6,6	20	66,6
38	NWCS	8	26,6	2	6,6	20	66,6
39	JCP	8	26,6	2	6,6	20	66,6
40	MS	4	13,3	1	3,3	25	83,3
41	FWP	7	23,3	3	10	20	66,6
42	AIA	8	26,6	2	6,6	20	66,6
43	NWYL	7	23,3	2	10	21	70
44	MZH	5	16,6	1	3,3	24	80
45	WAS	7	23,3	3	10	22	73,3
46	SH	6	20	2	6,6	22	73,3
47	R	6	20	2	6,6	22	73,3
48	S	1	3,3	1	3,3	28	93,3
49	RDP	9	30	2	6,6	18	60
50	IKSW	5	16,6	2	6,6	23	76,6
51	AM	5	20	1	6,6	24	80
Total			928,1		315		3.651,3
			18,19		6,17		74,01

Based on the data obtained from the table above, students with low guessing ability have a percentage of 18.19, students with partial ability in guessing, 6.17 percent, and students who cannot guess the word or are entirely wrong, 74.01 per cent. From these data, it can be concluded that students' ability to guess words is still very low. Even students who guess the meaning of the word are still many wrong. Following data analysis, the researchers discovered that students' responses varied and struggled to comprehend the vocabulary. This is evident from the pupils' responses, which are not grounded in the context of the narrative text. Some students gave accurate answers without

considering context, whereas others gave wrong answers regardless of context.

Discussion

Based on the data obtained and the discussion presented in the previous study, it was found that students had difficulty guessing the meaning of vocabulary tests and also could not find the meaning based on the context.

Tabel 2. Findings on Students' Application of Knowledge

No	Vocabulary	FK	PK	NK
1	Village	45	0	6
2	Coast	0	0	51
3	West	4	0	47
4	Named	8	30	13
5	Country	8	10	33
6	Ocean	8	0	43
7	Returned	4	2	45
8	Replace	7	3	41
9	Work	19	1	31
10	Adult	18	0	33
11	Merchant	4	1	46
12	Became	4	1	46
13	Rich	28	0	23
14	Learn	21	0	30
15	seamanship	0	0	51
16	Crew	2	3	46
17	Marriage	0	18	33
18	Saw	6	1	44
19	Believed	7	0	44
20	Sending	15	1	35
21	Seeing	14	2	35
22	Shabby	1	4	46
23	Knew	13	1	37
24	Embarrassed	3	1	47
25	Received	1	0	50
26	Treatment	0	12	39
27	Storm	7	0	44
28	Praying	13	5	33
29	Anger	17	0	34
30	Rock	25	0	26

The table above shows that the word order most known by students based on the context of narrative text is Village, rich, rock, learn, work, adult, anger, sending, seeing, praying, knew, named, country, ocean, replace, believed, storm, saw, west, return, merchant, became,embarrassed, crew, shabby, received, coast, seamanship, marriage, treatment.

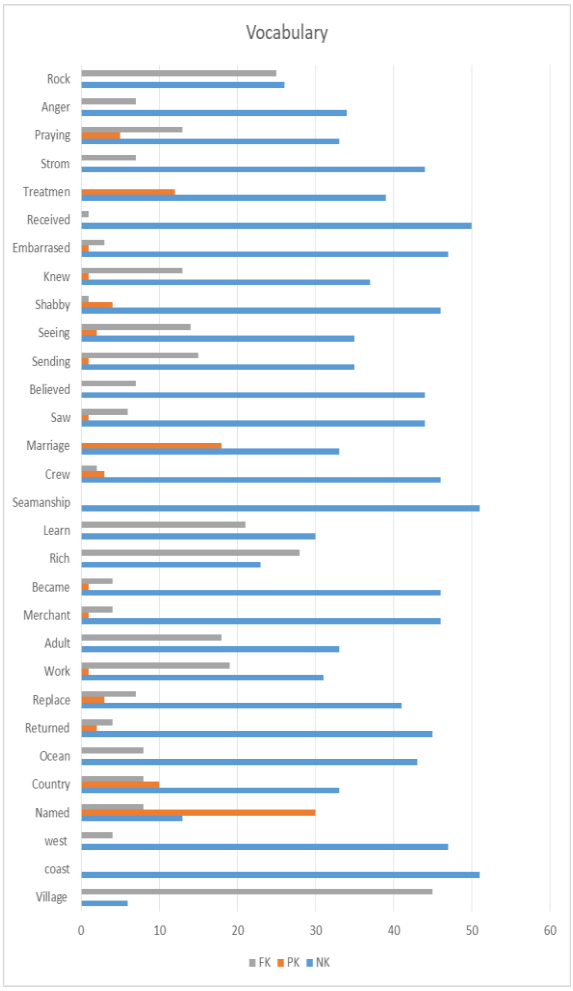

Figure 1. Students' vocabulary knowledge answer scores

The graph above shows that students with no knowledge are more than those with full and partial knowledge. The graph shows the answers of 51 students based on Full knowledge, Partial knowledge, and no knowledge from 30 vocabulary lists. Moreover, the data revealed that students struggled to infer word meanings during vocabulary tests and were unable to determine meanings from contextual clues. The purpose of this study is to explore how students can develop the ability to infer vocabulary meanings. The results from a test conducted on 51 students showed that many faced challenges in deducing

word meanings from context in narrative texts, as indicated by a higher number of incorrect responses compared to correct ones. The findings also revealed differences in students' performance based on their level of word knowledge: 18.19% of the students could provide correct meanings of the words, demonstrating full knowledge of target vocabulary. 6.17%, of the students showed partial understanding of the word meaning (partial knowledge), and 74.01% of them are unable to provide correct translation, showing no knowledge of the target words.

This study specifically investigates students' skills in interpreting vocabulary within narrative texts. The vocabulary items were selected directly from the narrative texts and were selected based on their relevance to student learning needs. To support comprehension, the researcher presented vocabulary in context. Narrative texts were chosen as the medium for applying the guessing-meaning strategy because they include fantasy stories, fictional adaptations of real events, and fairy tales. This genre is considered adequate for implementing such strategies, as understanding the overall narrative requires grasping the meaning of individual sentences, which in turn depends on the ability to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words. They will try to guess the word's meaning by looking at the clue around the word in one sentence. Narrative text also contains many words that may be unfamiliar to them compared with the language they often use daily, so it will make a good text to train the guessing meaning strategy. Several studies on the guessing meaning strategy to help students in reading activities showed that the strategy can successfully deal with a large proportion of the unknown words (Clarke & Nation, 1980).

Guessing vocabulary

This study highlights the potential of *guessing from context* as an effective strategy for learning new word meanings, particularly for students struggling with vocabulary comprehension in narrative texts. Thornbury (2002) emphasizes that guessing from context is one of the most valuable and practical skills language learners can acquire and apply both in and beyond the classroom. Importantly, it is a skill that can be taught and practiced with relative ease. As learners are exposed to more texts and are encouraged to infer word meanings from surrounding linguistic clues, their chances of encountering and internalizing those words increase—thus supporting vocabulary growth over time. Thornbury (2006) further stresses the advantages of learning vocabulary in context over memorizing isolated word lists. Contextual learning helps learners not only understand individual words but also grasp typical usage patterns, collocations, and grammatical structures. This exposure builds a more robust and functional vocabulary base, which is essential for fluent reading and effective communication.

In the context of this study—conducted at a school in Mataram—students were tested on their ability to determine the meanings of words embedded in a narrative text. The findings revealed that many students struggled to interpret word meanings through contextual clues, despite their attempts to do so. This suggests a gap in their ability to apply contextual inference strategies effectively. Nation (1995, 2001) supports the idea that contextual guessing can promote implicit vocabulary learning and raise learners' awareness of new words. It can be taught deductively for younger learners or inductively to help students learn how to use context clues strategically. Given these insights, the study underscores the importance of integrating guessing-from-context strategies into vocabulary instruction. Doing so can help students become more independent readers, improve their comprehension, and expand their vocabulary more effectively through meaningful, text-based engagement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis presented in this study, it can be concluded that the majority of students faced significant difficulties in determining the meanings of vocabulary items within the narrative texts provided. While some students could recognize word meanings, their understanding was often disconnected from the context in which the words appeared. This indicates a lack of skill in applying contextual clues to infer meaning—an essential component of reading comprehension. From the test administered to 51 students, the results revealed three distinct categories of vocabulary knowledge. Only 18.19% of students demonstrated full knowledge of the target vocabulary, while 6.17% showed partial understanding. The majority, 74.01%, fell into the category of having no knowledge of the words tested. These findings highlight a critical

need to emphasize context-based vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Moreover, the results suggest that integrating strategies such as guessing word meaning from context could enhance students' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. It is recommended that future instructional practices focus on developing students' skills through regular exposure to contextualized vocabulary in authentic texts. This approach may not only support vocabulary development but also foster deeper understanding of various text types, especially narrative genres. In conclusion, vocabulary instruction should go beyond memorization and promote critical thinking and contextual analysis, helping students become more autonomous and effective readers.

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