# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTEXT-BASED VOCABULARY TEACHING ON ENGLISH WORD RETENTION AMONG NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

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**Abstract:**

A common belief in vocabulary acquisition is that learners should prioritize learning vocabulary in the second language context rather than relying on first-language translations. However, this belief is not universally shared among learners. To investigate whether this holds true for Vietnamese students, the present study was conducted. The research involved two tests and a series of interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 88 first-year, non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University participated. The study examined the effectiveness of using context-based guessing as a strategy for vocabulary retention. Findings suggest that the guessing-from-context method is beneficial for vocabulary learning. Additionally, gender appears to be correlated with both vocabulary retention outcomes and learners' perceptions of this method.

**Keywords:** vocabulary, context, method, retention

## 1. Introduction

Vocabulary is widely acknowledged as one of the most critical components in the process of learning a foreign language. It forms the basis for understanding and effectively using a language, serving as the building blocks upon which communication, comprehension, and expression depend. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners face significant limitations in their ability to convey meaning, understand spoken or written messages, and engage in meaningful interaction. In contrast, an extensive and well-developed vocabulary enables learners to communicate more precisely, comprehend a wider range of texts, express themselves fluently, and think more effectively in the target language. For this reason, vocabulary acquisition is not merely an auxiliary aspect of language learning, but rather an essential and central element.

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In practical terms, vocabulary proficiency enhances learners' ability to communicate ideas clearly and efficiently. It enables them to participate in conversations, deliver presentations, write effectively, and comprehend a variety of texts. The more words a learner knows, the more capable they are of grasping subtle nuances of meaning and adapting their language use to different contexts. Moreover, vocabulary knowledge is closely linked to the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—since each skill requires the comprehension and production of words. For example, listening comprehension depends heavily on the listener's ability to recognize and understand vocabulary in real time, while reading comprehension relies on decoding words to extract meaning. Similarly, speaking and writing require the retrieval and application of vocabulary to convey messages accurately and appropriately.

Vocabulary knowledge also plays a vital role in academic and professional contexts. In specialized fields, much of the learning material is written in the target language, particularly in English, which has become the dominant language of science, technology, and international communication. Mastery of vocabulary allows learners to access and process these materials more efficiently, facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge. In the era of globalization, English proficiency—supported by a robust vocabulary—is a significant competitive advantage in the job market. Employers often expect candidates to possess not only general communication skills but also the ability to use domain-specific vocabulary in their professional roles. A well-developed vocabulary, therefore, expands employment opportunities and improves professional performance.

Beyond its functional role, vocabulary also offers cultural insights. Words often carry connotations, historical references, and cultural values embedded in the language. Learning vocabulary thus enables learners to better understand the cultural, social, and historical contexts of the target language. This deeper cultural awareness fosters intercultural competence, which is increasingly important in a world characterized by frequent cross-cultural interactions.

Given the importance of vocabulary, the question of how to teach and learn it effectively has been the focus of considerable attention among language educators. There is a wide variety of methods and strategies for vocabulary instruction, ranging from rote memorization and word lists to communicative approaches, explicit instruction, and contextualized learning. Selecting the most effective method depends on various factors, including learners' proficiency levels, learning styles, goals, and the instructional context. While many studies have acknowledged the significance of vocabulary learning strategies, research into their classroom application—particularly in certain contexts—remains limited.

Hedge (2000) observed that vocabulary has often been undervalued in language education. This underestimation may stem from learners' perceptions that vocabulary acquisition is a personal responsibility rather than a structured part of formal instruction. As a result, learners may pay insufficient attention to developing effective vocabulary learning strategies. Some teachers also believe that explicit vocabulary instruction is unnecessary, assuming that students will naturally acquire vocabulary incidentally

through exposure to the language. Consequently, vocabulary teaching techniques are sometimes neglected in the curriculum.

Nevertheless, research over the past few decades has increasingly recognized the importance of vocabulary instruction and strategies. Seminal works by Oxford (1990), Schmitt (1997), Ahmed (1998), and Nakamura (2000) have explored various strategies for both teaching and learning vocabulary. These studies have emphasized that explicit attention to vocabulary can significantly enhance learners' language proficiency. Furthermore, they highlight that strategy instruction—teaching learners how to learn words effectively—can lead to better retention and more autonomous language learning. Despite this growing body of research, the investigation of vocabulary teaching and learning strategies in certain institutional contexts remains sparse. At Nam Can Tho University, for instance, there has been little research on vocabulary instruction for non-English majors. In basic English courses, vocabulary teaching often occupies only a small portion of class time. The primary focus tends to be on developing the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—largely to prepare students for the university's B1 certification examination. Consequently, there is limited emphasis on equipping students with effective vocabulary learning strategies.

Among the strategies discussed in the literature, teaching vocabulary through context has received particular attention. This method involves presenting new vocabulary within meaningful textual or situational contexts, enabling learners to infer meanings from surrounding information rather than relying solely on direct translation. Contextual learning supports deeper cognitive processing, as learners must actively engage with the text, analyze linguistic clues, and make connections between known and unknown words. Such active engagement has been shown to enhance retention and promote the transfer of vocabulary knowledge to new situations.

However, my teaching experience at Nam Can Tho University suggests that many students lack the skills to infer word meanings from context. Instead, they often memorize bilingual word lists, associating new English words directly with their Vietnamese equivalents. While this approach may yield short-term recall, it often fails to support long-term retention or flexible use of vocabulary in authentic communication. The reliance on translation also limits learners' ability to think in the target language, which can slow down their processing speed and hinder fluency. These observations prompted the central question of this study: Could teaching vocabulary through context lead to more effective retention of English vocabulary among non-English major students?

From a practical perspective, there are several factors contributing to the limited attention given to vocabulary instruction in this context. First, vocabulary is often not directly assessed in formal examinations, which reduces its perceived importance among students. Second, teachers may prioritize other skills that are more heavily tested, such as reading comprehension or writing. Third, with the adoption of the credit-based system, greater responsibility for learning is placed on students, which means that vocabulary study is frequently assigned as independent work outside of class. While this

approach encourages autonomy, it also reduces the opportunities for learners to practice diverse vocabulary learning strategies under teacher guidance.

Furthermore, many students do not dedicate sufficient time to vocabulary learning, and their awareness of effective strategies is limited. Without explicit instruction or encouragement from teachers, students may fail to explore or adopt techniques that could enhance their vocabulary acquisition. This gap in awareness and practice underscores the need for research into vocabulary teaching methods that can be feasibly implemented in the classroom and that yield measurable improvements in learning outcomes.

Given these considerations, this study focuses on investigating the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary through context for non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University. By comparing the retention rates of students taught using contextual methods with those taught through more traditional translation-based approaches, the research seeks to determine whether contextual learning offers a significant advantage in vocabulary acquisition.

The significance of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on vocabulary teaching strategies by providing empirical data from a specific institutional and cultural context where research has been limited. Practically, it offers insights for teachers seeking to enhance vocabulary instruction in their classrooms, particularly in contexts where vocabulary is undervalued or underrepresented in the curriculum. If the study confirms the effectiveness of contextual teaching, it could encourage both teachers and curriculum designers to integrate this approach more systematically into English language courses for non-majors.

In conclusion, vocabulary is not simply one aspect of language learning; it is a central pillar that supports communication, comprehension, and cultural understanding. Despite its importance, vocabulary instruction often receives insufficient attention in certain educational contexts, including at Nam Can Tho University. The method of teaching vocabulary through context offers a promising avenue for enhancing retention and promoting deeper engagement with the language. The subject matter "The effectiveness of context-based vocabulary teaching on English word retention among non-English majored students", is of crucial significance. The findings are expected to benefit both educators and learners by highlighting effective strategies that can improve vocabulary learning outcomes and, ultimately, overall language proficiency. As a result, the topic aims to address the following three research questions:

- **Question 1:** Does the technique of teaching vocabulary in context improve word retention among students in general English classes at Nam Can Tho University?
- **Question 2:** What are students' attitudes toward the context-based vocabulary teaching approach?
- **Question 3:** Are there gender-based differences in the use and perception of the effectiveness of this vocabulary teaching technique?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition, Classification, and Role of Vocabulary in Language Learning

Vocabulary is widely recognized as a cornerstone of language acquisition. It encompasses the words and phrases used to convey ideas and information, functioning as one of the core components of any language. Due to its centrality, vocabulary has attracted significant attention from researchers, educators, and learners. As David Wilkins (1972) famously noted, "*Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed.*" This assertion underscores vocabulary's indispensable role in enabling communication and constructing meaning. Each lexical item carries specific semantic content and can express emotions, describe objects, actions, or situations.

Ur (1996) defines vocabulary as "*the words we teach in a foreign language,*" noting that a lexical unit may consist of more than one word—such as multi-word phrases or idioms. Pyles and Algeo (1970) further emphasize that vocabulary forms the heart of a language, providing the medium through which sounds and meanings come together to enable communication. Words allow us to organize them into sentences, dialogues, and discourse patterns, highlighting their centrality to language use.

Vocabulary can be classified according to various criteria. Semantically, words can be divided into content words and function words. Grammatically, they can be categorized into parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. Frequency-based classifications distinguish high-frequency, low-frequency, and specialized technical vocabulary. From a methodological perspective, vocabulary can be active (productive) or passive (receptive). Active vocabulary comprises words a learner can both understand and use accurately in speaking and writing, whereas passive vocabulary consists of words recognized and understood in context but not readily produced.

The importance of vocabulary in language learning is widely acknowledged. Vocabulary knowledge supports comprehension, facilitates expression, and underpins the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Carmen (2005) argues that understanding key vocabulary in a text is essential for comprehension; without it, learners struggle to grasp the intended message. Recent research reinforces the need for carefully planned vocabulary instruction, integrated with other skills, contextualized learning, and the use of technology to enhance outcomes.

### 2.2 Principles of Vocabulary Teaching

Richard Frost (2001) emphasizes that learners do not need to actively use all the words they encounter; some words only require recognition. Selecting which words to teach is thus a pedagogical decision informed by frequency, usefulness, and learner needs. Nation (2001) outlines that knowing a word involves mastery of its form, meaning, and use. Vocabulary should not be taught in isolation from other language components such as grammar and phonology. Learners must know how a word is pronounced and

spelled—a challenge since orthography and pronunciation often do not correspond directly in English.

Raves (1971) distinguishes grammar as dealing with general linguistic structures, whereas vocabulary addresses specific instances. Gairns and Redman (1999) describe three main processes of word formation: affixation (prefixes and suffixes), compounding, and conversion (changing a word's grammatical category).

Teaching meaning is equally essential. Vocabulary items may have grammatical (functional) and lexical (referential) meanings. Words can also be polysemous, having multiple related meanings, and may carry connotations—positive or negative associations not always found in dictionary definitions. Effective teaching therefore involves selecting the most relevant senses of a word and deciding how many to cover within the constraints of the lesson.

Usage is another crucial dimension. Words may be restricted geographically, socially, or stylistically, and their meanings can shift depending on context. As such, vocabulary instruction should go beyond memorization lists to provide opportunities for authentic and effective use.

## 2.3 Concept of Context

Context refers to the surrounding circumstances—linguistic, situational, or cultural—that provide clues to a word's meaning. Schmitt notes that context aids learners not only in identifying meaning and word class but also in understanding usage across different situations. It is therefore integral to accurate comprehension and application of vocabulary.

## 2.4 Importance of Vocabulary Instruction

Nation (2022) estimates that learners need knowledge of approximately 8,000–9,000 word families to comprehend most general written texts, while 2,000–3,000 of the most frequent words suffice for everyday conversation (Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2023). A lack of vocabulary is often the greatest barrier to L2 acquisition. Rupley, Logan, and Nichols (1998/99) describe vocabulary as *the glue that holds stories, ideas, and content together*," enabling effective communication and concept acquisition. Learners with larger vocabularies grasp new ideas more quickly (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). Given this significance, educators must employ effective vocabulary teaching strategies to maximize learning outcomes.

## 2.5 Common Vocabulary Teaching Techniques

Hatch and Brown (2000) define vocabulary teaching techniques as methods used by teachers to help learners understand and use words. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) assert that no single method is universally optimal; vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly.

Direct instruction involves explicitly teaching specific words—often before reading comprehension tasks. Indirect instruction occurs through exposure in reading or

listening activities, where learners are guided to infer meanings from context. In this study's focus, direct instruction using contextual clues is emphasized. Cooper (1997) suggests a systematic approach to selecting words for direct teaching, including identifying unfamiliar but essential words, determining which can be inferred, and prioritizing those that appear frequently in the text.

Specific techniques include:

- **Using images** (pictures, flashcards, diagrams, gestures, or mime) to illustrate concrete vocabulary and engage learners.
- **Verbal explanation** through definitions, synonyms/antonyms, and translation (with caution, as overreliance on L1 can hinder L2 meaning networks).
- **Context-based teaching**, which encourages learners to deduce meaning from clear, descriptive, or situational contexts.
- **Memory techniques**, including mnemonic devices, imagery, humor, and music.
- **Games and activities**, such as crosswords, matching exercises, and categorization tasks, which create communicative contexts and enhance retention.

## 2.6 Teaching Vocabulary through Context

Teaching vocabulary through real-life contexts means presenting words within authentic situations—such as conversations, films, songs, news articles, or blogs—rather than in isolation. For example, introducing "bookworm" in a library dialogue enables learners to understand both meaning and usage.

Nation (2001) highlights that contextualized learning helps learners grasp grammatical behavior and flexible usage. Ellis similarly notes that context provides real-world practice opportunities, enhancing memory and application. Gu (2003) defines context as the textual or situational environment in which a word occurs. Studies (Kruse, 1979; Nation, 1980; Gairns & Redman, 1986; Oxford & Crookall, 1988) consistently support contextualized instruction as highly effective.

Nation and Webb (2011) found that repeated encounters with words in varied contexts transition them from recognition to active use. Depth of cognitive engagement—such as inferring meaning, creating sentences, or comparing usage—further strengthens retention (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). Contextual teaching is also adaptable to different proficiency levels and learning styles (Oxford, 1990).

## 2.7 Effectiveness of Contextual Techniques for Vocabulary Retention

Research consistently shows that active learner engagement in inferring meaning enhances long-term retention (Hulstijn, 2001; Craik & Tulving, 1975; Brown & Perry, 1991). Oxford & Scarcella (1994) argue that context-based learning provides richer, more memorable representations of word meaning. In contrast, rote memorization of L1-L2 word pairs is less effective, as learners tend to forget such items quickly.

Haastrup (1991) and Ellis (1994) emphasize that inferring meaning from context fosters deeper cognitive processing. Huislijn (1992) explains that meanings derived through inference are more strongly encoded in memory. Krashen (1982) also

discourages heavy reliance on L1 in vocabulary teaching, favoring contextual inference as a means to promote durable learning.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Research Design
In order to answer the research questions, the current study adopts a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to examine the effectiveness of contextualized vocabulary instruction for non-English-major students at Nam Can Tho University. In alignment with the research objective of evaluating the pedagogical efficacy of this instructional technique, quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-intervention tests, supplemented by measures of students' attitudes toward the approach. To further explore gender-related differences in preference and perceived effectiveness, semi-structured interview questionnaires were administered, providing richer qualitative insights into the comparative experiences of male and female participants.

### 3.2 Participants
88 Nam Can Tho University non-English majors who have finished the General English 1 course participated in this study. These students had varied degrees of English competence, were from different academic disciplines and faculties, and used English mostly for academic and future career goals rather than for language specialization. They not only fulfilled the pre- and post-intervention tests but also answered the questionnaire, and 40 among them took part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The interviews were further intended to investigate potential gender-based differences in students' selection of, inclination toward, and perceived effectiveness of the contextualized vocabulary teaching technique implemented in this study.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures
Data were collected from two pre- and post-intervention tests, analyzed using statistical software, and supplemented by questionnaire and interview responses, which served as the primary research instruments for the present study. The data collection procedures are described below.

### 3.3.1 Test Reliability
To assess the reliability of the two tests, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was employed. The reliability coefficient of the first test was .721, while that of the second test was .735. These values indicate that both tests possessed sufficient reliability for data collection purposes in this study.

### 3.3.2 Questionnaire Administration

The research team collected questionnaire data over the course of one week. Each participant was given two days to complete the questionnaire, ensuring ample time to reflect on their responses. The research team personally distributed the questionnaires to students, providing detailed instructions to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results. In contrast, questionnaires for instructors were distributed via email to facilitate efficiency and timeliness. All participants were encouraged to contact the research team for clarification should they encounter any difficulties in completing the questionnaire.

### 3.3.3 Interview Administration

One week after the completion of the questionnaire phase, 40 students were invited to participate in interviews. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes. Participants were interviewed individually and in Vietnamese to ensure the accuracy of the information provided and to prevent the sharing or duplication of ideas. All responses were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed.

## 4. Results

This study employed a pre-test and post-test experimental design involving two groups of first-year students enrolled in basic English classes at Nam Can Tho University. The experimental group (class DH23MAR01) received vocabulary instruction using the contextual guessing technique, while the control group (class DH23LOG01) was taught using traditional methods without the contextual approach.

Both groups took a pre-test consisting of 10 fill-in-the-blank vocabulary questions (see Appendix 1) before the intervention. After the instructional period, a post-test of the same format, containing 10 new vocabulary items (see Appendix 2), was administered. The comparative results of these two tests provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the context-based vocabulary teaching method on students' word retention.

### 4.1 Test Results
### 4.1.1 Pre-test and Post-test Outcomes

The primary objective of the pre- and post-tests was to determine whether students' ability to memorize vocabulary improved following instruction using the contextual vocabulary teaching method. The test scores were recorded and analyzed using SPSS software to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

To begin with, an **Independent Samples T-Test** was conducted to assess whether there was any significant difference in vocabulary retention ability between the experimental and control groups prior to the intervention. This step ensured that both groups were initially at a comparable level in terms of vocabulary knowledge.

Subsequently, a **Paired Samples T-Test** was used to evaluate changes in vocabulary retention within each group and to determine whether the experimental

group, having been taught through context-based methods, showed significantly greater improvement compared to the control group.

In addition, individual group comparisons were made to examine the progress in vocabulary memorization ability before and after the instructional intervention, further validating the impact of the teaching method.

### 4.1.1 Pre-Test Results of the Control and Experimental Groups

To examine the difference in mean scores between the control and experimental groups prior to the intervention, Descriptive Statistics were employed. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.1 below:

**Table 4.1:** Descriptive Statistics of the Control and Experimental Groups Before the Intervention

| Group | Sample Size | Minimum (Min.) | Maximum (Max.) | Mean Standard (Mean) | Deviation (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control Group | 44 | 12 | 21 | 16.95 | 2.780 |
| Experimental Group | 44 | 10 | 21 | 16.70 | 2.425 |

The results in Table 4.1 indicate that the mean score of the experimental group (M = 16.70) was slightly lower than that of the control group (M = 16.95). The minimum score differed between the two groups, with the experimental group scoring as low as 10, compared to 12 in the control group. The maximum score was the same for both groups (Max = 21). The standard deviation of the control group (SD = 2.780) was higher than that of the experimental group (SD = 2.425).

To further verify whether the vocabulary retention abilities of the two groups were equivalent before the intervention, an Independent Samples T-Test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2:** Independent Samples T-Test Results for the Two Groups Before the Intervention

| Group | t | Sig. (2-tailed) | Deviation (SD) | Std. Error Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control Group | -.406 | .686 | 2.780 | .603 |
| Experimental Group | -.406 | .686 | 2.425 | .602 |

The results from Table 4.2 show that $p > 0.05$, indicating that the difference in mean scores between the control and experimental groups was not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two groups were equivalent in terms of vocabulary memorization ability prior to the implementation of the contextual teaching method.

### 4.1.2 Post-Test Results of the Control and Experimental Groups

To examine the difference in mean scores between the control and experimental groups following the instructional intervention, **Descriptive Statistics** were first applied. The results are presented in Table 4.3 below:

**Table 4.3:** Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups After the Intervention

| Group | Sample Size | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control Group | 44 | 15 | 24 | 18.66 | 2.083 |
| Experimental Group | 44 | 17 | 27 | 22.62 | 3.058 |

As shown in Table 3.3, the mean scores of both groups increased after the intervention. However, the degree of improvement differed significantly. The experimental group, which was taught vocabulary using the contextual guessing technique, achieved a higher mean score (M = 22.62) than the control group (M = 18.66). The lowest score in the control group was 15, while in the experimental group it was 17. The maximum scores were 24 for the control group and 27 for the experimental group. The standard deviation was higher in the experimental group (SD = 3.058) than in the control group (SD = 2.083), indicating greater variability in scores.

These results suggest a positive effect of the context-based vocabulary teaching method on students' vocabulary retention. To further confirm the statistical significance of this difference, an **Independent Samples T-Test** was performed. The results are presented in Table 4.4:

**Table 4.4:** Independent Samples T-Test Results After the Intervention

| Group | t | Sig. (2-tailed) | SD | Std. Error Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control Group | 6.576 | .000 | 2.083 | 0.603 |
| Experimental Group | 6.543 | .000 | 3.058 | 0.606 |

As shown in Table 4.4, the **p-value = .000**, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups after the intervention. This confirms that the improvement in the experimental group's vocabulary retention was not due to chance but was a direct result of applying the contextual vocabulary teaching technique.

In summary, the results confirm that the use of the context-based vocabulary teaching method had a substantial positive effect on the learning outcomes of the experimental group. The statistically significant increase in post-test scores supports the hypothesis of this study: "The effectiveness of the method of teaching vocabulary through context on the ability to memorize English words of non-language major students at Nam Can Tho University."

### 4.1.3 Pre- and Post-Test Results within Each Group

To further examine the changes in vocabulary retention within each group, a **Paired Samples T-Test** was conducted. The results are summarized in Table 4.5 below:

**Table 4.5:** Paired Samples T-Test Results for the Control and Experimental Groups

| Group | Test Time | N | Mean (M) | Mean Difference (MD) | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Control Group | Pre-test | 44 | 16.95 | -1.71 | -4.346 | 43 | .000 |
| | Post-test | 44 | 18.66 | | | | |
| Experimental Group | Pre-test | 44 | 16.70 | -5.92 | -15.479 | 43 | .000 |
| | Post-test | 44 | 22.62 | | | | |

The results from Table 4.5 indicate a measurable improvement in vocabulary memorization in both groups, although the degree of change differs significantly.

In the **control group**, the mean score increased from **M = 16.95** in the pre-test to **M = 18.66** in the post-test. While this change (MD = -1.71) was found to be statistically significant (t = -4.346, df = 43, p = .000), the overall improvement was relatively modest. This suggests that conventional teaching methods resulted in some vocabulary gain, though the impact was limited.

In contrast, the **experimental group** demonstrated a substantial improvement. The mean score rose from **M = 16.70** in the pre-test to **M = 22.62** in the post-test, representing a significant difference of **MD = -5.92**. This change was highly statistically significant (t = -15.479, df = 43, p = .000), indicating that the use of the context-based vocabulary teaching method had a strong and positive impact on students' vocabulary retention.

These findings confirm the effectiveness of applying the contextual guessing technique in vocabulary instruction for non-English major students.

## 4.2 Results from the Interview

To further investigate students' attitudes toward the context-based vocabulary teaching technique, 40 students (20 female, 20 male) out of the 88 participants were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews. The interviews were guided by the following four questions:

1) Do you like guessing the meaning of words based on context? Why or why not?
2) Do you often apply this technique when reading? Why or why not?
3) What benefits do you experience when applying this technique while reading a text?
4) In your opinion, which method helps you remember words longer—using the contextual guessing technique or not?

The first two questions focused on learners' personal preferences regarding the technique of vocabulary learning through context. The third and fourth questions explored their perceptions of the technique's effectiveness in facilitating vocabulary retention.

The responses revealed that while many students expressed a liking for the contextual guessing strategy, their perception of its effectiveness varied. Some students preferred the method because it encouraged active thinking and improved reading comprehension. Others, despite acknowledging its benefits, found it challenging and preferred more direct approaches like using a dictionary.

Overall, the interview results highlight a potential gap between students' preference for certain vocabulary learning methods and their perceived effectiveness. This suggests that successful implementation of context-based vocabulary instruction may require additional support and training to enhance student engagement and confidence in using the technique.

## 4.3 Students' Preference for the Contextual Vocabulary Teaching Technique

As previously mentioned, to investigate students' preferences toward the technique of teaching vocabulary through context, two interview questions were posed:

1) Do you like guessing the meaning of words based on context? Why or why not?
2) Do you often apply this technique when reading? Why or why not?

The responses to these questions are summarized in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6:** Students' Preferences and Frequency of Using the Contextual Guessing Technique

| | Context-Based Vocabulary Teaching | | Frequency | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Like | Dislike | Often | Not Often |
| Quantity | 26 | 14 | 28 | 12 |
| % | 65% | 35% | 70% | 30% |

The data indicate that a majority of the interviewed students (65%) expressed a preference for the technique of guessing word meanings based on context. These students generally found the method engaging and helpful for understanding and retaining new vocabulary. Similarly, 70% of participants reported that they often applied this technique when reading, reflecting alignment between preference and practice.

Students who favored this method noted that it enhanced comprehension and memory by encouraging deeper cognitive processing. They appreciated how contextual clues supported the understanding of word meanings without immediately relying on translations or dictionaries.

However, a significant minority (35%) expressed dislike for the technique. These students cited reasons such as difficulty in interpreting context, lack of clarity from the teacher, and the time-consuming nature of the method. Some stated a preference for more direct instruction, believing it to be more efficient. They felt that contextual guessing was often confusing, especially when the surrounding text was too complex or when time was limited during class.

Interestingly, despite these mixed opinions, some students who found the technique challenging still described it as intellectually stimulating and helpful in the long term.

To further examine students' perceptions of the effectiveness of this vocabulary teaching method, an additional interview question was asked. The results are presented in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7:** Learners' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Contextual Vocabulary Instruction

|  | Context-Based Vocabulary Teaching | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Quantity | 23 | 26 |
| % | 57.5% | 65% |

As shown, 57.5% of students believed that teaching vocabulary in context was an effective approach. Furthermore, 65% indicated that learning vocabulary through context made the words more memorable. These students reported that contextual guessing required active engagement, which deepened their understanding and promoted long-term retention. Many also mentioned that learning words in context helped them understand how to use vocabulary appropriately in sentences, thereby improving both comprehension and usage.

Some students highlighted that they remembered vocabulary more clearly when they made initial mistakes while guessing meanings. These mistakes, when corrected through further explanation or context, became learning opportunities that reinforced memory.

In summary, while students held varied opinions about the difficulty and preference for using contextual vocabulary strategies, the majority acknowledged its positive impact on vocabulary acquisition. The findings suggest that although some learners may initially resist the technique, many ultimately recognize its educational value, especially in fostering independent learning and deeper understanding of word usage.

## 4.4 Gender, Student Preferences, and Perceptions of the Contextual Vocabulary Teaching Technique

The interview results from 40 students (20 male and 20 female) suggest that gender may play a role in shaping students' preferences and perceptions regarding vocabulary teaching techniques. Overall, female students showed a stronger preference for contextual vocabulary instruction and also rated its effectiveness more positively than their male counterparts. These findings are summarized in Table 4.8 below:

**Table 4.8:** Gender and Perception of Contextual Vocabulary Teaching Techniques

| Opinion | Gender | Number (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Prefer learning vocabulary through context | Male | 6/14 (43%) |
|  | Female | 8/14 (57%) |
| 2. Prefer learning words in context over non-contextual methods | Male | 4/11 (36%) |
|  | Female | 7/11 (64%) |
| 3. Believe teaching vocabulary in context is more effective | Male | 10/23 (44%) |
|  | Female | 13/23 (56%) |
| 4. Believe learning vocabulary in context helps retain words longer | Male | 7/17 (39%) |
|  | Female | 10/17 (61%) |

These results indicate that female students were more likely than male students to appreciate and benefit from contextual vocabulary teaching techniques. While both genders acknowledged the potential benefits, a greater proportion of female students found the method both enjoyable and effective in supporting vocabulary retention.

## 5. Conclusion

Teaching vocabulary through context significantly supports long-term retention and enhances practical language use. This method is effective and widely applicable and should be actively integrated into English instruction at various educational levels. The experimental results in this study align with previous findings (Qian, 1996; Grace, 1998; Ma, 2008), showing that students taught vocabulary in context retained words more effectively. Contextual learning supports the simultaneous development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, while also enhancing inferencing ability. Moreover, repeated exposure to vocabulary in different situations reinforces long-term memory. However, for beginner-level learners, traditional methods may be more effective in the initial stages (Prince, 1996). Overall, contextual teaching offers sustainable advantages and should be integrated alongside traditional techniques to optimize vocabulary acquisition.

Learners' preferences significantly influence motivation and learning outcomes. Research (Joe, 1998; Webb & Nation, 2017; Chen & Truscott, 2010) shows that students often favor contextual vocabulary learning because it is engaging, practical, and easier to internalize. In this study, most students expressed a strong preference for contextual learning, noting its benefits in helping them infer meaning, achieve deeper comprehension, and apply vocabulary more effectively. Gender can influence learning styles and preferences for vocabulary instruction methods. Previous studies (Gu, 1997; Oxford *et al.*, 1988; Kim, 2009; Yali, 2010) suggest that female learners are more inclined toward contextual learning, as they tend to connect language acquisition with emotions, experiences, and personal relevance. Female students are often more active in tasks such as reading comprehension, storytelling, and meaning inference. However, contrasting findings (Ma, 2008) reveal that some female learners still favor traditional methods, highlighting the role of individual differences. These variations suggest that vocabulary instruction should be adaptable to the diverse needs and preferences of learners. In conclusion, while contextual learning is broadly preferred and beneficial for language development, it should be thoughtfully integrated into communicative and semantic activities rather than used in isolation or in contrast to traditional approaches.

## 6. Recommendations

Vocabulary instruction for university students should be flexible and tailored to suit their academic needs and cognitive development as adult learners. Research (Gu, 1997; Nation, 2001; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2014) emphasizes the effectiveness of combining multiple

instructional approaches rather than relying on a single method. Specifically, integrating contextual learning with structured techniques - such as vocabulary notebooks, flashcards, and reading-writing-discussion activities - can significantly enhance retention and application. Teachers should also provide explicit guidance in strategies such as contextual inference and deep processing (Craik & Tulving, 1975; Brown & Perry, 1991). Nation (2001) outlines four key elements of effective vocabulary learning: rich input, guided output, intentional learning, and active language use. A successful vocabulary program should incorporate all of these components. Studies by Webb (2007) and Dang & Webb (2016) further support the use of both contextual exposure and systematic review through lists, along with consistent practice in speaking and writing.

In addition, learners' motivation and positive attitudes are vital for successful vocabulary acquisition. Many studies have indicated that students tend to favor contextual vocabulary learning due to its intuitive nature, real-world relevance, and ability to reinforce long-term memory. In this study, students described the contextual learning approach as "pleasant," "interesting," and "closely related to real life". Therefore, vocabulary learning through context is not only well-received by learners but also enhances motivation, promotes active participation, and facilitates well-rounded language development. Designing vocabulary instruction around real-life contexts is a highly effective strategy in teaching English as a foreign language.

Vocabulary memorization plays a crucial role in second language acquisition. Numerous studies have affirmed that learning vocabulary through context enables learners to acquire new words more naturally and meaningfully, while also promoting long-term retention compared to traditional rote memorization methods. Contextual learning encourages deeper engagement with vocabulary through activities such as guessing word meanings, constructing sentences, and making personal connections. Based on the research design and related previous studies, the research team believed that a balanced instructional approach that blends intentional learning, contextual exploration, and communicative activities is most effective for vocabulary instruction at the university level. This combined strategy not only meets academic expectations but also prepares students for real-world language use.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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