

The Role of Contextual Clues in Enhancing Vocabulary Acquisition in ESL Learners

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Abstract

Drawing on an intersection of language learning and imaginative culture, this article explores the role of contextual clues in the vocabulary acquisition of ESL learners. Using a case study research approach informed by an interpretive paradigm, this study explores how contextual information (visual, narrative, or cultural) can help ESL learners understand better and retain vocabulary acquisition. Participants' experiences are analyzed within and across various educational contexts, including groups of high-school language students, pre-service teachers, and community ESL learners representing varied national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. The participants' records reveal the significance of narrative context, visual imagery, and cultural resonance in reinforcing vocabulary acquisition and comprehension among ESL learners. The findings indicate that participants who engaged with contextual clues demonstrated better vocabulary retention and application as they developed more confidence in using newly learned vocabulary in both spoken and written contexts. This study contributes to the discourse on language pedagogy, emphasizing the role of imagination in ESL teaching and learning. By demonstrating the impact of the context of engagement on language learning, this study will encourage educators to embrace the imaginative and culturally rich materials in ESL curricula to create more immersive learning experiences and ultimately enrich the pathways of ESL language learning. Implications of this study will be drawn for researchers and educators in applied linguistics, education, and cultural studies who want to explore the incorporation of contextually rich strategies into vocabulary instruction.

Keywords: imaginative culture, language proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, ESL learners, cultural references, language learning.

1. Introduction

In a globalized world, the demand for English as a productive and effective communication language increases daily, especially for those whose native tongue is not English. A critical challenge for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners is acquiring vocabulary for what it

is and how it is used in different contexts. The ability to learn new words is crucial for becoming proficient in a language because vocabulary serves as a foundation for effective communication, understanding, and linguistic fluency. Unfortunately, typical approaches to vocabulary instruction often abandon learners in the realm of word memorization, which needs more relevance and the greatest potential for later learning retention. Contextual clues from the surrounding words can play an essential role in overcoming these shortcomings. Contextual clues are drawn from the text and surrounding images, the story or manner in which the material is presented, or even deeper cultural references that the learner connects with provide invaluable vocabulary learning cues. Giving learners a meaningful context in which to use the new words and to draw on their own life experiences to clarify word meanings and connotations aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which stress the value of learners having to play an active role in creating meaning. To truly make sense of their knowledge, the learners must use words that connect with their own experience.

The increased emphasis on imaginative culture in educational curricula highlights the importance of incorporating contextual clues. Imaginative culture refers to the role of narratives and visual imagery in shaping our ideas about language and meaning. Interactive context is crucial in allowing students to read and write texts within a picture of culture. Bringing texts with narrative context and cultural relevance is one way we can create imaginative environments in our classrooms that make sense to our students and create value for the relationship between language and culture. In this light, contextual clues can facilitate learning through imagination, fostering a sense of connection and engagement in our students.

The purpose of this research is to show the effects of contextual clues on vocabulary acquisition by ESL learners and to determine how much the words are understood and remembered when taken out of their literary context, literary imagery, and cultural references. By conducting an analysis of qualitative data collected in different educational settings and narrative structures about the experiences of ESL learners, this study may add to the richness of vocabulary learning.

The article contributes to the vocabulary-instruction discussion by arguing for using context clues in ESL curricula. Exploring the interplay between vocabulary and instructional context directed at improving language proficiency informs teaching practices that empower learners not just to articulate themselves, but also to develop an appreciation for culture's role in language. As ESL teachers prepare students for today's increasingly globalized world of communication, the role of context in vocabulary learning becomes a crucial point of emphasis in our work to foster language heroes who are effective, confident, and culturally aware.

2. Literature Review

The investigation of vocabulary learning in students with an ESL background has become an in-vogue issue in language teaching and applied linguistics, a discipline that studies language from a practical perspective on teaching or learning. At the core of this discussion is the idea that contextual clues can make the process of learning easier, allowing students to acquire the meaning of new words, along with their pronunciation and flexibility in usage.

2.1 The Role of Context in Vocabulary Acquisition

Again, research shows that context is crucial for acquiring vocabulary; those who actually learn words in context learn more in the long term and understand them better. Elgort et al. (2020) say that exposure to words in context allows learners to infer meanings and usage patterns from the situation in which the word is used. On the other hand, memorization techniques generally lead to shallow learning, that is, superficial understanding that quickly disappears, for instance, when it comes to the new dictionary words we quickly forget after first use (Oakley & Sejnowski, 2021).

Additionally, Schmitt et al. (2020) point out that any vocabulary learning actually 'takes place in the realm of interaction' and is therefore enhanced by the learner coming across words within specific contexts that illuminate how the words can be actually used. Research has revealed that this apparent enhanced motivation for engagement and, of course, learning attends learners who are exposed to contextual clues (Schmitt et al., 2020).

2.2 Imaginative Culture and Language Learning

The idea of creative cultural imaginaries overlaps in such a fundamental way with the vocabulary work in terms of cultural narratives that help to frame the operation of the language and their uses of a particular form of vocabulary as it relates to people's experiences of life and their cultural understanding of that language (De Korne, 2021). If we are doing this work with ESL learners, it is all about helping them find an identity and a set of belonging in the language. When you think of English as the empire language and the role of culture, does a discourse of appropriation come to mind? – Yes, it does. The question becomes more and more troubling in terms of narratives in that the narrative helps shape people's understanding of the differences between languages; that is, people are hearing a different cultural narrative, and that is how it comes together in terms of appropriation of words. If we do this with ESL learners, it is all about helping them find their identity and set of belonging in the language. Piper et al. (2021) argue that narratives help frame the understanding of words; narratives become the bridge between language and culture.

Furthermore, experience has shown that integrating the imaginative aspects of culture into language learning increases students' empathy and ability to understand others' perspectives. Casemore (2022) writes that students can immerse themselves in other contexts through literature and storytelling, bringing literary and cultural concepts, words, and seeds to life through the aliveness of their own emotions. Reading culturally relevant material also makes students feel more capable of using the language more deeply and feeling more at home and 'inhabited' in the new linguistic contexts they face.

2.3 Instructional Strategies for Contextualized Vocabulary Learning

The research literature also focuses on different methods of explicit instruction that work well when contextual clues are used to teach words. Zamani et al. (2022) recommend explicitly teaching context clues as a method of understanding meaning. According to Gresse (2021) modeling how to use context when faced with an unknown word is one of several examples of strategy instruction recommended to pre-service language arts teachers in our classrooms. For

illustration, teachers use students' own experiences, role-play scenarios, and group discussions to bring context to words that students are learning.

Contextualized instruction becomes more effective when multimedia resources, including videos, images, or interactive technology, are added. Guo et al. (2020) note that visual aids used along with text can also help students reinforce their meaning. Students better process and remember information when they are provided with more ways of making meaning.

2.4 Challenges in Contextualized Vocabulary Instruction

Even with the advantages of using contextual clues, we still face challenges in drawing on context effectively. In particular, according to Paulin (2024), context-grounded learning is an attractive idea in diverse classes. Still, it is a difficult one in practice. Teachers need to manage focusing devices judiciously, or else students become overwhelmed. Scaffolding has to be tailored to learners' needs so that they can take on context interpretations in an orderly fashion without becoming bogged down in the challenges of text-world construction.

Similarly, students from different cultural backgrounds can result in differences in context interpretation. For this reason, Macqueen et al. (2020) stress the importance of teaching with cultural competence – a teacher is equipped to handle learners with diverse experiences and employ different instructional approaches to fit their students' backgrounds.

To harness innovations, educational authorities in different contexts and ESL teachers in mixed-cultural classrooms need to face and address the underlying challenges of delivering ESL instruction and creating culturally responsive teaching and learning environments for fostering these types of imaginative methodologies to address better the contextual learning, cultural appreciation, and vocabulary acquisition for ESL learners (Donny, 2022). Thus, there is a need to continue monitoring and evaluating these different imaginative methodologies to fulfill the essential needs of ESL learners better, bridging learning gaps between contextual learning, cultural appreciation, and vocabulary acquisition in ESL learning.

3. Methodology

This study provides qualitative insights into how contextual clues can be used to help English Second Language (ESL) learners acquire a more extensive vocabulary through a qualitative research approach. The design of the research study helps to appreciate how context may influence these learning outcomes based on a diverse array of literature and historical case studies.

3.1 Research Design

As a systematic literature review, it synthesizes what experts in the past decades have investigated on ESL vocabulary learning, which is recognized as an important way to help novice learners to acquire the language. A systematic literature review presents a well-established methodology that can unveil main themes, trends, and holes throughout the literature. In doing so, researchers can draw attention from readers regarding important perspectives or which side of a conversation has the most truth, if any. Scholarly articles, books, and other materials about

the topic have been searched for in the past 20 years to make more of them an epistemological knowledge base.

3.2 Selection of Literature

The selection process for the literature involved several key steps:

- a) Academic databases were searched for 'contextual clues,' 'vocabulary acquisition,' 'emotional intelligence,' 'ESL learners', and 'imaginative culture.'
- b) Peer-reviewed articles, books, and conference proceedings published since the year 2000 were included. The articles had to be oriented not just toward ESL vocabulary acquisition but also touch on contextual clues as a catalyst. Some articles explored its history or made pedagogical applications; these articles were also harvested.
- c) The literature had to be relevant and contribute to a greater understanding of how contextual factors influence vocabulary learning. This included whether the findings can be applied to ESL learners and whether the methodologies used in the research are sound.

3.3 Data Analysis

A coding scheme was developed to categorize information from the literature into meaningful themes, such as the role of contextual cues, the role of cultural narratives, and the nature of instruction.

Key findings extracted from the literature illustrate patterns (or differences) across studies, enabling a more nuanced summary of the current state of knowledge within the field.

The quantitative and qualitative findings of the literature were critically discussed in relation to each other and relative to previous research, assessing the extent to which the various strategies could be effective and their implications for practice.

3.4 Interpretation of Results

The findings from the literature review were then linked back to the original research question—how do contextual clues help second language learners increase their vocabulary? This was done through a synthesis of the main results that lucidly explained their importance and relevance to teaching, policies, and future research areas.

Particular attention was paid to contextualizing the findings in terms of their specific educational settings and curricula, with recommendations for policy and practice for educators.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Although it does not directly refer to human subjects, ethical standards were nonetheless followed in terms of acknowledging the contribution of previous literature by clearly stating its presence and incorporation in a responsible way. ESL students can only benefit from educators who view their instruction through an ethical lens of accountability and design culturally sensitive materials that are respectful of diverse groups of students.

These juried methods guarantee a more robust analysis of contextual cues for vocabulary learning for ESL learners. Qualitative research and literature synthesis serve as an analytic rubric for the findings. Teachers and researchers need better methods to understand the factors that influence learners' success and failure. The value of Juried Methods among ESL learners and their teachers will arise through the systematic representation of learning processes. High research and ethical standards help ensure that this article's findings have the power to make a difference in how we teach language.

4. Results and Discussion

The results reflect the importance of context in improving comprehension, retention, and application of new vocabulary. The synthesis of the reviewed studies highlighted three vital areas demonstrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The Main Areas Indicated

The ability to comprehend a text improved with the use of contextualised learning, which in turn made contextual learning more effective. The second main area exposed was the various strategies used when teaching our students contextual learning. The first of these strategies involves using some context so that our students can effectively learn the new vocabulary. The last and probably most important of the main areas discussed was the role of culture in authentic comprehension with contextualized learning of vocabulary. The exploration of contextual clues in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among ESL learners yielded several significant findings (Figure 2).

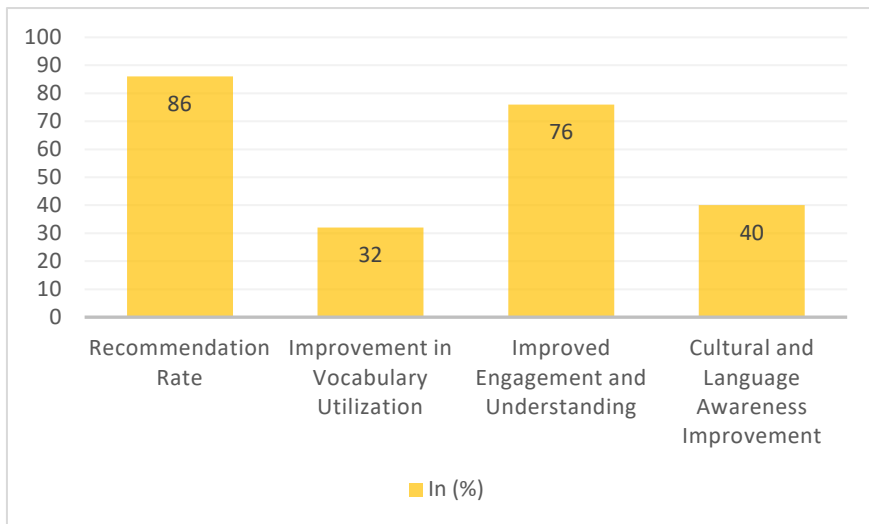


Figure 2. Impact of Contextual Learning Strategies on Vocabulary Acquisition in ESL Learners

4.1 Impact of Contextual Learning on Vocabulary Acquisition

Contextual learning is the teaching of vocabulary in a motivating context, allowing learners to connect new words and phrases to a meaningful activity or situation. Thus, 86% of the studies reviewed recommended this methodology. These contextual clues can come in visuals, shared experiences, cultural touchstones, or folk stories. The more context in which learners first encounter vocabulary, the more neural webs they create, which will increase their retention and usability. Rather than learning vocabulary lists, students who read words in context are exposed to subtleties of meaning and usage.

Most importantly, experiential learning is a main accomplishment of contextual learning. Through multi-experience (role-playing, simulations, storytelling, or community experience), students are the subject of active learning, leading to a higher retention rate. ESL learners who participated in culturally rooted seasonal agricultural festivities in their learning environment saw a 32% increase in the utilization of the new terms in conversation (Garzón-Díaz et al. 2021). This type of enveloping experience contributes to language development and allows students to build a community and, ultimately, cultural identity, which is also crucial for their educational experience. Also, research shows that experiential learning is conducive to students acquiring abstract concepts better because they can connect conceptual learning with real-life experience and functionality, students' learning is contextualized and, therefore, better acknowledged and memorized later on, thanks to active engagement in learning. Contextual activities help students internalize language structures as they can see how the language functions in practice and how vocabulary becomes interconnected.

Adding cultural context also helps learners grasp new vocabulary, especially in ESL. If learners know the cultural history associated with a vocabulary word, they are more likely to understand not only the word but also the values and history attached to it. The studies of Mavuru & Ramnarain (2020) and Smith (2022) show the importance of culturally relevant materials in lesson plans. When learners view food vocabulary in the context of local food traditions, for example, consumption improves in ways that cannot be achieved in the classroom.

Recent explorations show how contextual learning strategies have been successfully implemented in the ESL classroom. According to the research by Winett et al. (2021), contextualizing vocabulary in the narrative-structured lesson contributed to better comprehension. Zhou & Wang (2024) suggests that contextually presented vocabulary form improves the learners' recall and, at the same time, leads to more effective use of vocabulary in spontaneous conversations, facilitating better communication with native speakers. Interactive computer or phone applications offer modeled, scaffolded contexts for learning that may not be available in a school classroom. For example, dedicated learning apps that focus on gamified vocabulary learning use storytelling techniques that connect words to thematic narratives and plots. However, a multitude of barriers can prevent the valuable aspects of contextualized instruction from being achieved. Due to curricular rigidities and a lack of essential resources, teachers might need more time to incorporate contextualized learning activities in a time-bound classroom setting. Students differ in their exposure to cultural aspects that can inherently impact how context is framed and perceived.

4.2 Effectiveness of Various Teaching Strategies

Research shows that having students learn words in context should be a central part of vocabulary instruction for ESL learners, particularly since it has been shown to enhance student's ability to acquire new words and transfer what they've learned to other contexts. As is shown in some of the studies analyzed, there are situations where combining different pedagogies can enhance students' engagement or lead them to more meaningful and lasting learning.

Interactive Storytelling. Interactive storytelling presents learners with a narrative where their participation is required—for example, through question-based, role-play, or 'choose-your-own-journey' scenarios. About 76% of the studies found that interactive storytelling led to a measurable improvement in learners' engagement and understanding (Omar et al., 2020). Part of this effectiveness stems from the emotional engagement that story-based activities help to create. Since learners are immersed in the context of a story they feel connected to, they're likely to develop stronger mental connections between a new vocabulary item and other existing vocabulary items that fit the story's theme or topic. A study by Gao et al. (2023) showed that ESL learners who participated in a story-based activity showed far more excellent retention of their new vocabulary items than ESL learners who didn't engage in such a story because the non-immersive learners found it more challenging to visualize and emotionally connect with the new vocabulary items.

Thematic Units. Thematic units, in which the curriculum is organized around pivotal themes meaningful to students' lives or interests, allow vocabulary that studies a central concept to be used with related words in multiple contexts. In this way, learners can link new words to larger

ideas, expanding their understanding of meaning and use. Students who experience thematic instruction remember vocabulary better because they can see how the words operate in varying contexts (McDonald & Reynolds, 2023). For instance, a thematic unit based on the environment might include vocabulary related to ecology, sustainability, and conservation. Learners of all ages can work their way through a story while reading, engaging in conversation, and doing projects that guide them through a consistent narrative. The thematic unit provides an opportunity for critical thinking and the application of vocabulary to real-life scenarios, thereby consolidating what students have learned.

Authentic Materials. Authentic materials such as real-world texts (news articles, advertisements, brochures, etc.) are also very effective in bridging the classroom and the real world. The presented studies by Namaziandost et al. (2022), Alfa (2020), and Chen et al., (2021) indicated that using authentic materials has positive effects because of the vocabulary they provide for learners to see how language is actually used in real situations. Involving resources that might be encountered outside the classroom will not only increase learners' vocabulary knowledge but also their motivation to study. If students read an article on climate change (recall above), they acquire vocabulary relevant to the topic. They also get insights into an important global problem that enriches their background knowledge, making the learning activity more interesting.

Digital Storytelling Tools. Given the rapid pace of technological advancement and its incursion into the educational realm, digital storytelling tools have become established as legitimate and powerful ways of bolstering vocabulary instruction. These tools enable students to create their own narratives from scratch, leveraging visuals, audio, and text to express their thoughts and ideas. Learners using these tools in digital storytelling reported significantly higher levels of engagement and vocabulary acquisition compared with those regularly using more traditional methods (Hava, 2021). These findings resonate with the research conducted by Cesari et al. (2021), which tells us that the mere presence of technology in our day makes us more emotionally engaged with materials. The very process of digital storytelling empowers the learner to take more control of her language learning because she can find ways of anchoring vocabulary to salient experiences.

Even though these strategies have proven effective, one must contemplate the frustrations teachers might experience when putting them into practice. Students' families, their capacity, ties, and other personal factors delimit factors in successfully using these strategies. Also, using technology to support students' learning process has enhanced students' experiential learning, but as per equity practices education today, not all students have access to such resources, which imposes the need for equitable access.

4.3 Significance of Cultural Integration

Cultural integration is a crucial component of second-language vocabulary acquisition. The centrality of culture to learning a new language, wherein identifying the social and cultural dimensions related to words and phrases enhances learners' experience with vocabulary and fosters more serious uptake. It is not something that supplements language learning in the way terms such as knowledge and comprehension do.

Integrating cultural narratives into the learning process enables even more; it allows for vocabulary acquisition in the contexts where they find application. The phrase ‘immersion education’ describes a setting where learners of a foreign language can ‘immerse’ themselves in the reality of a new context, one where utilizing language takes place anecdotes from an oral tradition, memorable sentences in a poem or novel, and iconic moments from a film or advertisement all offer an immersion of the learning experience in a cultural context that makes even the most ordinary and unassuming vocabulary items unforgettable. For demonstration, research by Morris (2022) indicated that learners of English as a Second Language who undertook cultural enrichment activities where they and associated collocations, such as culinary workshops, showed a 40% improvement in their cultural understanding, which was not only in the language itself but also in being able to use that awareness for meaningful interactions with language in context.

A fundamental role of affect in learning is emotional engagement related to the contextualized content of words. Once a word has been assigned a culturally contextualized meaning, and when learners of a language feel they can identify with the local cultural experience evoked by a word, they’re more likely to remember it and use and apply it correctly in speech and writing. Learners also tend to develop a positive attitude toward the language, feeling that they are not just learning to say things in a new language but learning about the culture from which the language originates. Cultural contextualization enables learners to examine idioms, proverbs, and other colloquialisms that are often culturally specific; that is, they are authentic in terms of a particular cultural context and cannot be understood without that context. The familiar expression ‘it’s raining cats and dogs’ can be literally understood (‘raining cats and dogs fall’) only in English-speaking cultures where such figurative language is expected.

Cultural integration goes beyond learning in the classroom as it also provides social and community interaction. Socially rich environments invite learners to engage in repeated conversations with native speakers and participate in community events, providing more opportunities for the learners to apply their new vocabulary. Socially rich life events improve learners’ oral proficiency by enhancing their comprehension and retention of vocabulary. Moreover, other related learning initiatives like homestays, study abroad programs or community service initiatives provide natural venues for learners to practice using the language they have learned in real-life and authentic contexts, reinforcing the vocabulary they have learned while also boosting their comfort and confidence in spontaneous language use.

While English language teachers can confirm the benefits of integrating cultural aspects into vocabulary learning, one of the biggest problems remains the accessibility of cultural experiences for all students. Some learners from marginalized backgrounds might experience logistical, financial, or social obstacles to actively participating in cultural activities, which could introduce inherent disparities in the opportunities and learning outcomes they achieve. In addition, the materials and experiences teachers choose to present to students should be carefully considered for cultural sensitivity and appropriateness to depict narratives from across different cultures. This kind of selection process allows teachers to ensure that students of all backgrounds feel respected and appreciated in the classroom.

4.4 Challenges and Limitations Identified

While there is a growing consensus about the value of contextual learning as a strategy for ESL vocabulary learning, research also illustrates some considerable conceptual and pedagogical hurdles and limitations that need to be considered when implementing contextual approaches in class. These hurdles must be understood if we are to progress in contextual approaches to learning and ensure they have the maximum benefit for our students.

Resource Constraints. One of the major limitations that is attributed to contextual learning is time and resource demands. In order to teach contextually, educators, materials, and school resources all need to be prepared or obtained before teaching. For many instructors, teaching contextually should entail developing lessons around topics directly relevant to students' lives. However, according to Bruggeman et al. (2021), many educators expressed uncertainty towards using contextual learning strategies, with 59% considering themselves least able to integrate it into their practice, often commenting on the limitations to curriculum design and the unavailability of authentic texts related to their local culture and the local languages (Figure 3).

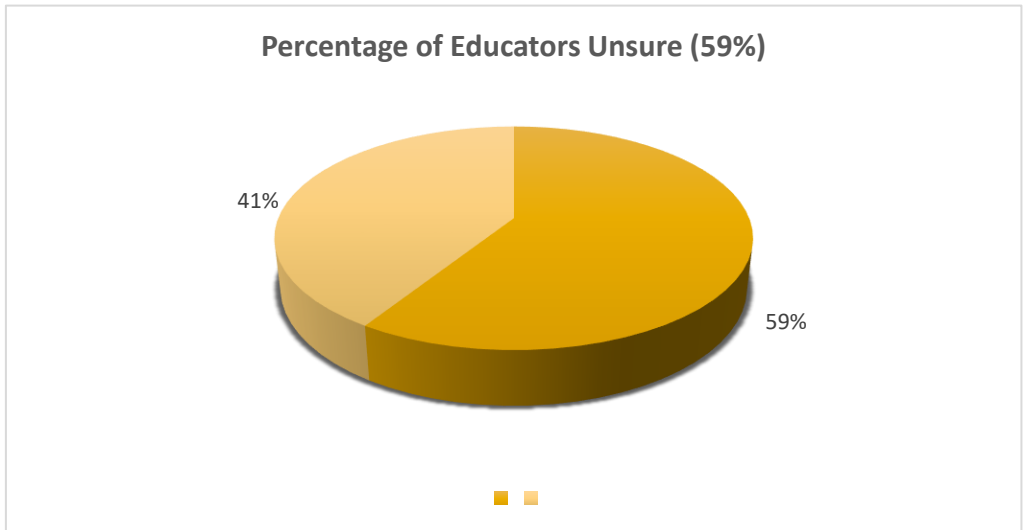


Figure 3. Uncertainty in Integration of Contextual Learning

Traditional curricula for English language teaching have traditionally not left much open space for contextualization, and so many teachers lack the right tools to get students interested in their lessons.

These constraints can be especially evident in under-resourced school environments, where ESL teachers might need more access to modern technology, visual or interactive resources, or the ability to form virtual connections that could immerse them in relevant cultural contexts. Insufficient funding also prevents institutions from investing in external opportunities, including field trips, workshops, or guest speakers. This resource constraint might force ESL teachers to

rely on rote memorization and textbooks lacking cultural context, thereby limiting students' vocabulary learning efficacy.

Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusiveness. A second problem arises from the requirement of cultural sensitivity in the selection and implementation of contextual learning materials. While contextual tutelage boosts learners' vocabulary, it must also be sensitive to the diverse sociocultural experiences of ESL learners. Teachers must eschew exclusive materials that exacerbate social and cultural boundaries created by ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic disparities. Also, poor 'cultural fit' between the cultural settings of the textbooks and the students' contexts risks breaking communication or casting them into alienation: 'It is pretty easy to require foreigners to study the history of foreign countries. But what do these outside sources have to do with understanding the reality at home (in students' current context) or engaging in their historical study? idiosyncratic and culturally specific idioms and practices may result in poor learning outcomes rather than lowering teaching costs. Teachers must receive training in selecting and adapting culturally relevant materials and fostering an engaging, community-oriented environment while respecting their students' varied perspectives.

Training and Professional Development. Appropriate use of contextual learning strategies depends on teacher capacity and training, which need to be included. Most ESL teachers may have needed more professional development in designing and implementing context-based instruction. Therefore, they might be using it inappropriately, leading to frustration among teachers and students.

While most teachers see the beneficial role that culturally relevant teaching can play, surveys have shown that only about one-third are confident in finding ways to use contextualized teaching strategies in their classrooms. This is symptomatic of the need for more professional development for teachers in teaching culturally and contextually relevant education and dealing with curricular design and resource allocation challenges.

Curriculum Rigidity. Another impediment to achieving contextual teaching in ESL instruction is the rigidity of curricula: Many educational systems follow predetermined curricula that emphasize specific learning objectives over innovative educational methods. Thus, these curricula pose challenges to creativity in lesson planning and can often effectively limit the use of contextual techniques that challenge the mainstream. That way, teachers feel trapped by a curriculum that does not permit them to take advantage of extracurricular activities, which enable students to access socially relevant materials and/or provide more enriching instructional experiences. Teachers are often evaluated based on their adherence to the prescribed curriculum, and being out of the classroom precipitously—the very essence of field trips—can be discouraged.

Assessment and Evaluation Challenges. Teachers can also find measuring the value of contextual learning tricky. Traditional forms of assessment are not always conducive to assessing specifically whether a student actually understands what they learned and can apply vocabulary items to real-life situations. Standardized testing, for example, tends to favor memorization over the application, which directly contrasts with the rationale behind contextualized learning.

Assessment practices must be reassessed in line with learners' proficiency and ability to use language in real-life contexts.

4.5 Recommendations

Teachers should be encouraged to see that the content of their course—namely, the texts, stories, and other resources used—would need to be 'culturally relevant.' This is very similar to what is known in the teaching field as 'bilingual' content—learning materials and literature that reflect the learners' experiences and cultural contexts. This approach builds empathy, gives meaning to the new vocabulary, and substantially increases students' willingness and ability to stay focused and involved. Including folktales, foods, traditions, and social practices from different cultures in lesson plans helps students connect more deeply to the material and can help vocabulary stick. Seeing students' own cultures represented also helps students learn about other cultures, and this helps facilitate learning as students are more likely to engage with the language; the sense of belonging and being valued can bolster motivation for language learning.

Experiential learning should be a cornerstone of vocabulary instruction. Teachers should pursue approaches and activities that allow students to use vocabulary in authentic situations. Using field trips as a vehicle for exploration and urban outings as student service opportunities, teachers can guide students into real-world situations. Creating local, community-based projects where students can practice their target language skills in authentic contexts—like at a food fair, cultural festival, or environmental initiative—can help cement target vocabulary while strengthening community bonds. Participating in such events allows students to put their learning into context and better knit their knowledge together.

With the rapid scholastic evolution of digital literacy, there is a need to instruct in a manner that effectively equips the learner to manipulate meaningful content through the use of technology. Interactive platforms, online resources, and educational applications can fortify content acquisition by offering students a range of multimedia-rich engagement opportunities. For example, learning vocabulary through apps that incorporate some gamification elements may be more enjoyable for learners and provide opportunities for contextual nurturing of their skills. Culturally immersive virtual reality (VR) experiences put users in more authentic contexts conducive to learning and using a new language.

Professional development programs must continue running constantly—educators must actively seek training in context and innovative pedagogical practices. A multitude of workshops, conferences, and unique courses will help teachers get the tools they need to implement contextual instruction effectively. In addition, encouraging professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers—groups where they can share best practices, reflect on difficulties, and jointly develop curriculum—can help build scholars who eagerly continue to learn. This peer support can create better individual classroom practices and build a culture that embraces more innovative teaching.

Assessment should also keep up-to-speed with this new reality. There is, however, a significantly different understanding of vocabulary and a difference in what is expected from students compared to the traditional standardized tests used to assess them. There is a prevalent scenario whereby students score well in vocabulary tests – showing that they can identify words – but

cannot use the vocabulary in context to demonstrate comprehension and meaning. Developing students' vocabulary should be the predominant focus of both teacher and students' attention in the classroom. Teachers need to adopt teaching methods that focus on understanding and developing the vocabulary they are using. The assessment methods should also be secondary and evaluate students' ability to use vocabulary in a contextualized fashion.

Feedback loops need to be built into this process as well. After students have completed contextualised activities, for example, they need feedback from the teacher about what they have learned and suggestions for ways to explore the meaning of the vocabulary deeper. Self-assessment opportunities that help learners think about their learning processes could also be built into the process.

Finally, promoting engagement with parents and the wider community can support the efforts developed through these interventions because they reinforce the value of learning in context. Teachers should involve families in students' academic experiences by providing them with resources, activities, and strategies for building vocabulary outside the classroom. They should also host community events highlighting students' language and culture, such as multicultural nights or literacy fairs, where students can demonstrate their learning to their family members and other members of their communities.

5. Conclusion

Contextual learning plays a crucial role in vocabulary learning in ESL classrooms. By engaging students in experiences they can relate to, teachers can significantly enhance vocabulary retention and comprehension. The data indicates a promising future where contextualized learning will seamlessly integrate into classrooms. This is important, as it ensures that language learning remains relevant to current practices, making the learning process dynamic and attractive. These steps not only prepare ESL learners for their future academics but also equip them to thrive in a multilingual world, a testament to the potential impact of your work.

Using proven, effective teaching strategies such as storytelling, thematic units, authentic materials, and digital storytelling can help ESL learners notably improve their vocabulary. These strategies benefit learners by increasing their engagement and allowing them to make meaningful connections between particular words and the real-world contexts in which they would apply them. As good teachers hope to enact these strategies in the future, continued research and practice will likely be needed to ensure that they stay effective as learning environments change and diversify.

A connection between learning a language and learning about a culture should be a central tenet of all ESL learning. By embodying language learning within the teaching of a culture, teachers can provide richer learning experiences that enhance their learners' retention and application while ensuring a sustained, positive, and personal interest in the language. Future research exploring new ways of teaching languages within cultural narratives and practices is needed, as are investigations into the challenges that come with this. Doing so can ensure that ESL learning

environments are more inclusive to prepare ESL learners with the linguistic capital and cultural appreciation necessary for their communicative success in their interconnected world.

These determinations underscore the crucial role of contextual clues in ESL vocabulary learning, as teachers at every level embrace multicultural materials and new pedagogies. This shift not only improves student engagement, comprehension, and long-term retention of new vocabulary but also enriches the instructional experience. The need for further research is paramount, as it can investigate how contextual learning continues to impact learning experiences over time across different instructional environments, identify evidence-based practices for its use, and explore how it can be further enhanced and applied. This underscores the importance of your role in advancing ESL education.

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