Students' Ability in Using Context Clues at English Education Program UNP

Zahrani Esa Muliya[1] and Yetti Zainil[2]
[12]Universitas Negeri Padang
Email : raniesamulia@gmail.com

Article History	Abstract
	This research aims to find out the abilities of the first-year and the third-year students of English Education Program of Universitas Negeri Padang in using Context Clues and to know the difficulties faced by the students in using Context Clues. This research was a descriptive research. The population of this research were the first-year and third-year students of English Education Program UNP. The total sample of this research was 80 students consisting of 45 first-year students and 35 third-year students. The instrumentations of this research were Context Clues test consisting of 30 questions and an interview. The test result showed that the average score of first-year students was 51.3 and the third-year students was 54.7. The average score indicated that the students' ability in using Context Clues was in Fair level. Furthermore, the interview result showed that there were three difficulties faced by the students in using Context Clues: not understanding the context of the sentence, lacking vocabulary mastery, and having difficulty in finding the meaning of unfamiliar words by using Example and Antonym clues.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English has used widely in many aspects of our life, such as technology, economics, politics, education, etc. There are four English skills that must be mastered. One of them is reading. Reading is one of the skills that cannot be separated from learning. Haris (2021) stated reading is an activity of seeking and obtaining information and messages contained in written text by doing an analysis and interpretation. Through reading, students will get a lot of knowledge from what they read.

In the field of education, reading has being one concern that must be studied and mastered. The curriculum of the English Education Department of Universitas Negeri Padang place reading as a compulsory course in four semesters, starting from

Basic Reading, Intermediate Reading, to Advance Reading, and then continuing with Critical Reading and Thinking course. All those courses train students to be good at reading, not only reading the text but also capturing content, understanding the structure and the implicit meaning of a text.

However, understanding the text is certainly not easy. In reading English text, there are words that are difficult to be understood; so, it makes the students cannot understand what the text discussed about. In the first semester of English Education UNP, there is a Basic Reading course where students learn Context Clues, which is a strategy that helps students understand unfamiliar vocabulary and infers the meaning of a sentence through a written context (Fudhla et al., 2019). This strategy makes students easier to understand the text. Students do not need to spend time opening the dictionary or other things when they want to know the meaning of unfamiliar words.

There are several types of Context Clues based on the type of the clue. Bauman et al. (2005) classified Context Clues into five types, there are definition/explanation (the meaning of the word found in the sentence itself), synonym/Restatement (the meaning of the word explained using another same word), antonym/contrast (the meaning of the word explain using the opposite definition of the word), example (the meaning of the word explain by giving the example) and general/inference (the meaning of word explain by the related words to the unfamiliar words).

Context Clues give a positive impact to improve reading skill and vocabulary mastery. The research conducted by Oclarit and Casinillo (2021) entitled "Strengthening the Reading Comprehension of Students' Using Context Clues" found that Context Clues increased students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study conducted by Astuti, et al. (2019) stated that the implementation of Context Clues can improves students' critical thinking skill, analysis skill and reading skill.

In fact, context clues are not easy to be used in Reading Activity. Based on the researcher's experience in studying context clues at the Basic Reading course, context clues are not that easy to learn. Moreover, the preliminary survey conducted at one class of English Education Program of Universitas Negeri Padang. 24 out of 25 students stated Context Clues technique is quite hard to be used. They have difficulty in understanding the context of the sentence.

Putri and Fitrawati (2019) has conducted the research to see correlation between Context Clues strategy and students' reading comprehension ability which found that the second-year students of UNP has average level in using Context Clues. The other studies about Context Clues mostly focused on the implementation of Context Clues in high school students using various approaches.

Context Clues are very important to help students improve their reading skill and vocabulary mastery; also, it has to be mastered considering Context Clues technique often appears in English test, such as TOEFL, IELTS and so on in reading section. Through this research, the researcher conducted the research to answer the following research question: 1) how are the abilities of the English Education Program of UNP students in using Context Clues, and 2) what are the difficulties faced by the students in using Context Clues?

METHOD

This research is a descriptive research. Gay et al. (2012) stated that descriptive research is research that specifies and define how thing is; involves collecting numerical data to test hypotheses or answer question about the subject of the study. In this research, the researcher wants to describe the abilities and the difficulties of the first-year and third-year students of English Education Program of UNP in using context clues.

The population of this research was the students of English Education Program of Universitas Negeri Padang in the academic year 2021 and 2023 which total 370 students. The researcher chose them as the population because they have learned about context clues at the beginning of the first semester in the Basic Reading course. The sample of this research were 80 students, consist of 45 first-year students and 35 third-year students. Furthermore, the instruments used in this research were Context Clues test to find out students' ability and Stimulated Recall Interview (SRI) to find out students' difficulty.

In collecting the data for test, the researcher gave the test on Google Form to the students. There are 30 test questions consist of 5 types of Context Clues. The researcher gave 30 minutes for students to do the test. After students did the test, the researcher analyzed the data using the formula below:

$$Score = \frac{\text{Students' correct answer}}{\text{Total number of items}} \times 100$$

After found students' test scores, the researcher then calculated the means score of each year students score, the researcher used the formula from Gay (2019, p.479):

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

Where:
$\bar{x}$ = mean
$\sum x$ = the total score
n = the total number of students

Then, the researcher calculated the percentage of students' ability scores in each type using the formula below:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where:
P = Percentage of students' ability scores
F = Frequency of answering correctly
N = Number of students

After classified data of the test, the students who got Poor score were interviewed. The interview conducted to 10 students; 5 first-year students and 5 third-year students. After conducted the interview, the researcher transcribed the
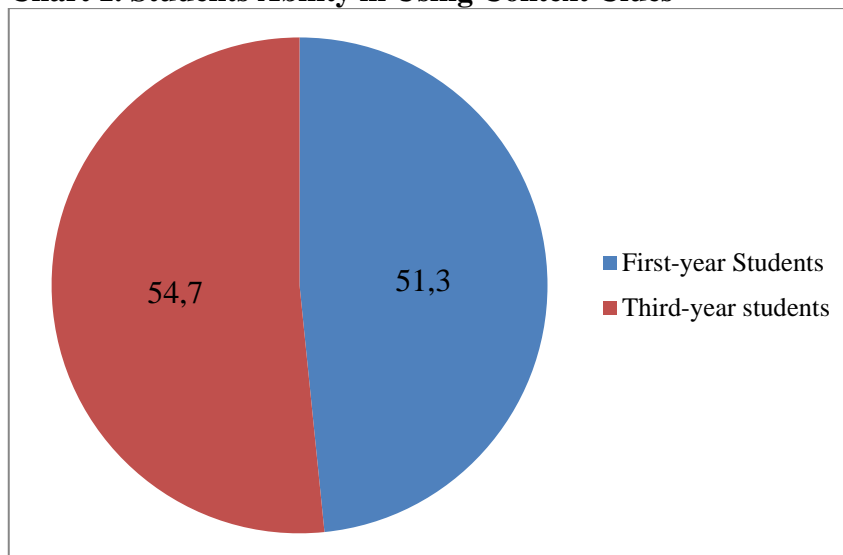
audio recording of the interview into the text. Then, the researcher segmented the data, classified the students' answers into the same categories.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
### *Research Finding*
Students Ability in Using Context Clues
Chart 1. Students Ability in Using Context Clues

From the chart, the average scores of third-year students' in using Context Clues is higher than the first-year students', where the average score of third-year students were 54.7, and the average score of first-year students were 51.3. It can be concluded that the ability of both years of students are at Fair level. Then, the data descriptions were also presented in the forms of students' scores in each type of Context Clues. The researcher grouped the data based on the number of students' correct answers for each type as follow:

Chart 2. The Percentages of Students' Correct Answer
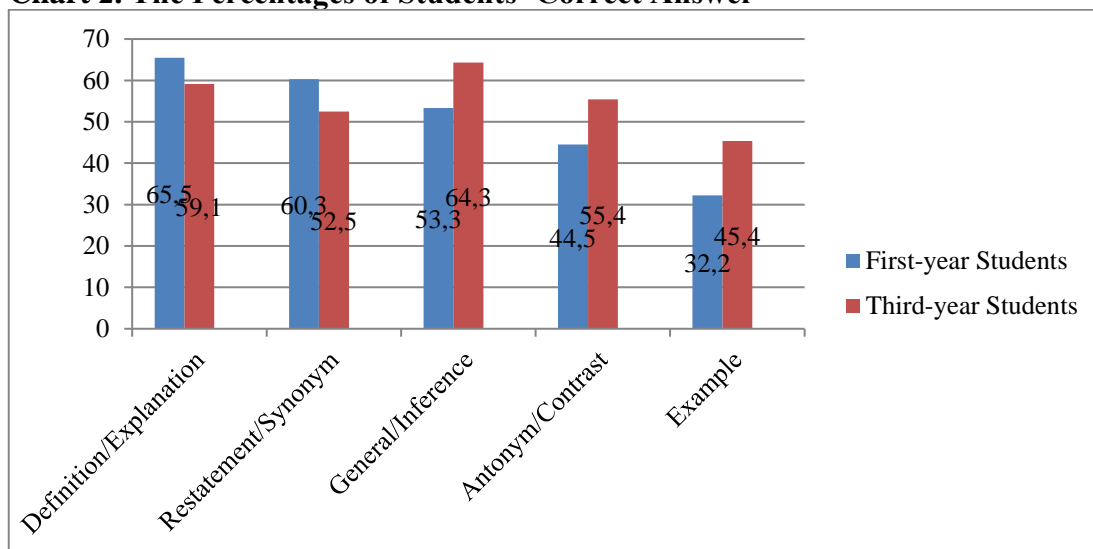
Overall, the percentages of students' correct answer in Context Clues test were at Moderate level in all types of Context Clues. From the chart above, we can see that the highest percentage of first-year students' correct answer was in Definition/Explanation clue, which total 65.5%. Whereas, the highest percentage of third-year students' correct answer was in General/Inference clue, which total 64.3%. In contrast, the lowest percentage of both years students' correct answer was in Example clue, which total 32.2% (Low) and 45.5% (Moderate).

Definition/Explanation Context Clues

For Definition/Explanation Context Clues, the ability of first-year students in answering the question is higher than third-year students. Students' score in this type are classified as moderate. The question with the lowest percentage of correct answer was the question number 8, *"The surgeon asked for a **probe**—a long instrument—when he examined the wound of the patient"*. It was clear from the sentence that there is a clue provided to answer this question, but only 15 out of 35 out of third-year students answered the question correctly. It is assumed because the third-year students have likely forgotten the material taught in Basic Reading Course, that one of the punctuations used in definition/explanation clue is dashes (-).

Restatement/Synonym Context Clues

From the chart above, it can be seen the first-year students have higher ability than third-year students in this type of context clues. Students' score in this type are classified as moderate. The lowest percentage of first-year students' correct answer is the question number 13. The question is *"Australia was once a **penal colony** or a colony for convicts or criminals"*. The answer to this question is provided in the statement. One of the signal words to answer the question Synonym/Restatement clue is "or", so the answer to this question should be *"a colony for convicts or criminals"*. However, only 15 out of 45 first-year students and 13 out of 35 third-year students who answer the question correctly. It is assumed because the students did not identify the sentence well. It is assume that the student did not use Context Clues to answer this question or they did not know the signal words of Synonym/Restatement clue.

General/Inference Context Clues

A general/inference clue asked the students to guess the meaning by concluding the whole sentence to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words. From the chart, the third-year students have higher ability than first-year students in this type of context clues. Students' score in this type are classified as moderate. The lowest percentage of third-year students' correct answer is in the question number 28, *"At the end of the semester, both the students and the teachers feel **inundated** with the assignments and exams. The students are overwhelmed in completing the assignments and preparing for the exams, while the teachers are overwhelmed with paperwork"*. 16 out of 35 students answered 'flooding' which is not appropriate to express what the sentence wants to convey.

Antonym/Contrast Context Clues

The first-year and third-year students tend to have difficulty in answering this question. Students' score in this type are quite low. The third-year students have higher ability than first-year students in this type of context clues. Students' score in this type are classified as moderate. The lowest correct answer is in number 23,

"*Although my sister seems to be **aloof**, she is actually very friendly once you know her better*". The students are asked to answer the question by finding the meaning of unfamiliar word by finding the opposite meaning of the word provided in the sentence. In this question, it is assumed because the students did not know the theory of context clues, so they did not use 'although' as the signal word to find the meaning of 'aloof' from the contrast word of 'very friendly'.

Example Context Clues

This type is the lowest score of students' ability in using Context Clues. The ability of the first-year students classified as low and the third-year students classified as moderate. It can be said that the students' have difficulties in understanding and determining the meaning of unfamiliar word using Example clue. This types of Context Clues asked students to answer the question by giving the example of the unfamiliar words as the clues. The lowest percentage of students' correct answer is the question number 30, "*Spanish **explorers** in the New World, such as Columbus and Hernan Cortes, did more than explore because their mission was to conquer the Native American and colonize their land*". Only a small number of students answer this question correctly. Most of the students' answers '*adventurer'*, meanwhile the meaning of '*explorers'* in this context of sentence is '*the conqueror or colonizer*'. They probably did not identify the sentence until the end; even though, the clue is placed at the end of the sentence

Students Difficulty in Using Context Clues

The low scores obtained by the students in Context Clues test indicates that the students have difficulty in using Context Clues. It led the researcher to conduct the interviews with the students to explore the difficulty they faced when using Context Clues technique in doing test. The research concluded that students tend to get difficulty in using Context Clues technique as it influenced by the following problem:

Cannot Understand the Context of the Sentence

Based on the interview result, the difficulties faced by the students in using context clues arised because they have difficulty in understanding the context of the sentence. Students cannot use context of the sentence as a clue to find the meaning of unfamiliar word because students also do not understand the context of the sentence. 6 out of 10 students stated the difficulty they faced in using Context Clues to interpret the meaning of unfamiliar word is they do not know the context of the sentence.

Lack of Vocabulary

The problem that students faced in using context clues was lack of vocabulary. When researcher asked the respondent "what factor makes you difficult in using context clues?" 6 out of 10 students stated that vocabulary is the main factor. Most of the students realized that they were still lack in vocabulary mastery. So, it made them difficult to interpret the meaning of the word they did not familiar with. For example, when they want to interpret the unfamiliar word using antonym context clues, they know the meaning of the clues, but they cannot find the word appropriate to interpret the unfamiliar word.

Using Antonym and Example Context Clues

From the interview, some students stated the hardest type of context clues was Antonym/Contrast clues. One of the students stated that it was because in Antonym/Contrast clue they must find the opposite meaning of the unfamiliar words. In contrast, the data of the test showed that the lowest score of first-year students and third-year students were in Example Context Clues. One of the respondents said they have difficulty in using Example context clues because they have to find the meaning of unfamiliar word by using the example provided on the sentence.

Discussion

In reading activity, the students must practice regularly to improve their reading skill. Therefore, they will be able to understand the whole sentence, even though they found the unfamiliar word in a sentence. One of the techniques that can be used to improve students reading skill is Context Clues Technique. Besides that, Context Clues will also help students to improve their vocabulary; students can guess the meaning of the unfamiliar word using Context Clues technique. Baydhowi (2020) stated that Context Clues are proven can foster students' vocabulary, because it gives a new knowledge to the students

The result of the test showed that students' ability in using context clues, both first-year and third-year students are classified as moderate. It can be concluded that the ability of first-year and second-year students have not really good ability in using Context Clues. It is assumed that most students did not apply Context Clues technique when they interpret the meaning of the unfamiliar word. The students probably interpreted the unfamiliar word based on their knowledge or using the dictionary. This statement in line with the findings of the study conducted by Wongwiwattana & Watanapokakul (2021) where the students stated that they are not sure whether they interpret the correct meaning using Context Clues, hence, they tend to utilize online dictionary or online translation tools rather than using Context Clues technique.

Referring to the interview result, there are three main difficulties faced by the students when using Context Clues. The first is the students cannot understand the context of the sentence. Most of the students stated their ability in understanding the unfamiliar words is according to the context of the sentence. If students understand the context of a sentence, they will be able to interpret the meaning of unfamiliar words even without looking at the dictionary (Innaci and Sam, 2020).

Furthermore, the main factor that made students difficult to use Context Clues is lack of vocabulary. In line with the finding of the research that conducted by Baydhowi (2020), he said lack of vocabulary is one factor that makes students cannot find the correct words to explain the unfamiliar word. Vocabulary is the main key to reading a text. When students do not have a lot of vocabulary, then they will have difficulty in understanding the sentence. Low vocabulary mastery will make it difficult for students to use context clues.

Lastly, the result of the test showed that the students have difficulty in guessing the meaning using Antonym/Contrast and Example clues. It can be proven by the result of students' test where both year of students' got the lowest scores in Example clue. Meanwhile, based on the students' interview, most of them stated they had difficulty in using antonym context clues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion that presented above, the researcher found that the first-year students' ability in using context clues based on the average score was 51.3 and the third-year students was 54.7; both in fair level. It can be concluded the ability of third-year students is higher than first-year students. Among five types of context clues, the highest percentage of the first-year students' correct answer was in Definition/Explanation clues and the highest percentage of the third-year students correct answer was in General/Inference clues. Meanwhile, the lowest percentage of the first-year and third-year students' correct answer was in Example clues.

The students' low scores were caused by the difficulties faced by the students when using context clues. The result of interview found that students have difficulty in understanding the context of the sentence, lacking vocabulary, and in interpreting the meaning using example and antonym clues.

In order to improve students' ability in using context clues, it is suggested to the students to improve their vocabulary and always practice using Context Clues technique; because this technique is very useful to help students to be good at reading. Moreover, it is suggested for the lecturers to guide the students to improve their ability in using context clues; it could done by always giving the students the chance to practice using Context Clues in reading activity in the class. The researcher fully aware this research is imperfect. There are many aspects were overlooked during writing this research. It is suggested for further researcher to explore more about students' difficulties in using context clues and how to overcome the problems.

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