

Developing quality reading instruction through a contextual approach in the English Language Education

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Abstract

The problems discussed in this study are related to the development of the quality Reading instruction through a contextual approach for students of English language program. The purpose of the study is to improve the quality of Reading learning through a contextual approach to students of the English Language Education Study Program, FKIP, University of Lampung. This research employed Class Action Research (CAR) which is intended to provide information on how to take appropriate actions to improve student activities in the learning process with a contextual learning approach that has an impact on increasing student learning achievement. The results showed that the quality of Reading learning increased through a contextual approach in the English Language Education Study Program students. In the first cycle, the average achievement score stands at 62.4, which then rises to 68.7 in the second cycle, and further increases to 77.2 in the third cycle. This proves that the use of a contextual approach is able to improve the quality of reading learning for English Language Education Study Program students, FKIP, University of Lampung.

Keywords: Reading, Contextual approach, Achievement

Introduction

In the realm of language education, the process of developing proficient reading skills is of paramount importance. Proficiency in reading not only facilitates comprehension and communication but also serves as a foundation for overall academic achievement. As educators and researchers strive to enhance reading instruction, the integration of effective pedagogical approaches becomes a focal point. One such approach gaining recognition is the utilization of a contextual framework to guide reading instruction.

The learning process of reading is not always easier for many students compared to the learning process and acquisition of other basic language skills. It involves many aspects that must be considered in the reading process. Simply

put, reading is understanding written texts, it is a complex activity that involves perception and thought (Pang et al., 2003).

In this case, lecturers are required to explore various strategies that allow students to actively and creatively understand a text well. In general, students' weaknesses lie in the ability to understand the main idea, vocabulary, and complex sentence structures. In fact, according to the Reading syllabus/curriculum, student competency achievement standards include understanding of functional written texts and simple short essays in descriptive and narrative forms that include content and linguistic aspects.

Contextualized instruction in language education has garnered increasing attention due to its potential to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences. The essence of a contextual approach lies in its ability to embed reading activities within authentic, real-world contexts, thus bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. By contextualizing reading instruction, learners are exposed to texts and materials that mirror the situations they may encounter in their academic, professional, and personal lives. This integration fosters a deeper understanding of language nuances, cultural connotations, and critical thinking skills, ultimately contributing to more effective reading comprehension.

The learning process with a contextual approach in the classroom emphasizes the interaction and activities of discussion groups. Contextual learning is a learning strategy that emphasizes the full involvement of students to be able to find the material being studied and relate it to real life situations (Eliza, 2013). To make students able to apply it in their lives, learning is and should be associated with the reality of life so that students can easily comprehend the materials used in the classroom. In the contextual approach there are seven main components involved: constructive, finding, asking, community learning, modeling, reflection, and assessment (Departement Pendidikan Nasional, 2003). In the evaluation process, an assessment rubric derived from the Reading construct is also needed which can precisely measure students' reading skills by taking into account such aspects as themes and linguistic aspects.

Reading skills as basic skills in Reading courses need to be developed and researched because student achievements are not in accordance with the competencies as expected in the curriculum. Shihab (2011) stated the readers should fill in the missing or hidden parts of the text in order to get the whole idea. Reading requires high levels of brain activity including renewing images and thoughts in the mind in relation with the contents of the text. In this case, classroom action research is carried out to solve specific and reflective problems as a special effort to improve the quality of reading learning processes and products in the classroom (Arikunto et al., 2006).

Classroom action research is a scrutiny of the process of learning activities, which is deliberately designed in a learning process in the classroom. This action is carried out by students in the classroom with the aim of improving the quality of learning processes and products (Arikunto et al., 2010). This approach connects student reality with learning materials contextually. According to Brown & Yule (1983) the use of language always involves contextual considerations, linguistic and nonlinguistic contexts, as well as social and cultural contexts. Contextualized instruction in language education has garnered increasing attention due to its potential to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences. The essence of a contextual approach lies in its ability to embed reading activities within authentic, real-world contexts, thus bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. By contextualizing reading instruction, learners are exposed to texts and materials that mirror the situations they may encounter in their academic, professional, and personal lives. This integration fosters a deeper understanding of language nuances, cultural connotations, and critical thinking skills, ultimately contributing to more effective reading comprehension.

Within the realm of English Language Education, the application of a contextual approach to reading instruction presents a promising avenue for elevating the quality of pedagogy. As English continues to be a global lingua franca, learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds seek to develop proficiency in reading for academic, professional, and personal purposes. Integrating a contextual framework aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching, where language is seen as a tool for meaningful communication rather than a mere set of grammatical rules (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This approach prioritizes the development of language skills within authentic communicative contexts, mirroring the real-world situations learners will encounter. In the reading learning process, students are expected to be able to understand a text by playing an active role in connecting their experiences with the reality of the text and critically understanding the reading materials they face. Critical reading skills are skills that will help students to be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what is read (Kadir et al., 2014).

This learning model is developed in several forms of learning with actual constructivist principles, namely: *Thematic Teaching*, contextual learning (*CTL*), *Active Learning*, and *Cooperative Learning*. This research tried to apply a contextual approach in Reading courses so that the learning process and results can achieve the expected (optimal) competencies.

Research methods

This research is a Class Action Research which is intended to provide information on how appropriate actions to improve the quality of student

activities in the learning process with a contextual learning approach that has an impact on increasing student learning outcomes. This class action research was carried out in the form of several cycles in stages: (1) planning (2) implementation (3) observation, and (4) reflection.

Kemmis et al. (2014) developed this model of class action research in a gradual way, namely planning, action, observation and reflection characterized by the presence of continuous changes. The study ends when the predetermined indicator is achieved or has reached a saturation level, where the results change only slightly or do not change at all. This research was conducted collaboratively with colleagues, namely lecturers who care (are responsible) for the Reading course in the English Study Program and researchers.

Research Grounds

The research was carried out at the Department of Language and Arts Education, English Language Education Study Program, FKIP, University of Lampung.

Data Source and Type

This study used qualitative descriptive statistical analysis, an analysis of the learning process that was carried out continuously from the beginning to the end of the research. Qualitative statistical analysis provides a real interpretation of student activities in the reading learning process with a contextual approach. In its implementation, researchers and teams conducted interviews to find out students' responses about the contextual learning process and the interview results were used as a reference and additional information to the data obtained in each cycle.

Results and Discussion

This class action research was carried out in three cycles. Each cycle was carried out in three face-to-face sessions, namely face-to-face for the learning process, discussion sessions, and Reading test activities. Each research cycle includes planning, implementing actions, observations, reflections, and recommendations.

Aspects of assessment include comprehension, vocabulary, sentences, grammar and are all in accordance with the materials and learning objectives of Reading class. Classically and data-wise, it can be seen the improvement that occurred in the activities and results of the quality of reading learning through a contextual approach to students of the English Language Education Study Program. These outcomes align with the broader educational theories of situated cognition and constructivism, which posit that learning embedded

within authentic contexts fosters meaningful understanding and application (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

The transformative potential of the Contextual approach lies in its ability to cultivate student-centered activities within the reading classroom. By immersing students in real-world contexts and authentic materials, the approach empowers learners to actively engage, critically analyze, and construct meaning from the reading materials. This shift from teacher-centric to student-centric activities aligns with contemporary pedagogical paradigms that emphasize active participation and experiential learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Dewey, 1938).

The use of a Contextual approach was very helpful for lecturers in overcoming problems that occurred in the Reading Instruction. Students with poor performance and below average scores could perform better as they improve their grades. Reading learning outcomes through a Contextual approach each cycle also improves. This finding resonates with prior research conducted by Indrayadi et al. (2020), that the contextual (teaching and learning) approach are considerably effective to create students-centered activities in reading class. Thus, the achievement of student in Reading class was also increased. Such improvements in detail are described as follows.

Action Planning

Analyzing Students

Several factors have been taken into account in analyzing students, namely, general characteristics, specific basic competencies, and learning styles.

- a. General characteristics of college students.
- b. Basic competencies
- c. Learning style.

Standards and Objectives

After going through the learning process with a contextual approach, students were able to cope with descriptive texts well.

Strategy, Technology, and Media

Student-centered strategy actively involved students in the learning process of Reading with a contextual approach, especially in understanding descriptive texts using relevant and suitable media that are in accordance with the learning objectives.

Technology, Media and Materials

1. Preview: the selection of material is aligned with the learning objective, which is to understand descriptive text.
2. Preparing Materials: selection of materials that support learning activities.
3. Setting Up the Environment: creating an environmental situation conducive to the effective use of material on a specific topic in the classroom.
4. Prepare students: inform learning objectives so that students can be prepared for them.
5. Providing Learning Experiences: student-centered, achievement, practice, and practice.

Encouraging Students Participation

Learning is considered as an authentic experience so that students can receive informative feedback, their responses about their goals and achievements.

Evaluating and Revising

Evaluations and revisions include:

1. Student achievement; viewed through observation sheets, Reading ability tests, and interviews.
2. Evaluate and revise strategies, technologies and media. After the observation of cycle¹ was carried out, researchers conducted an evaluation and revision of strategies, technologies and media for learning process improvement in the following cycle.

Improving the Quality of Reading Learning

The results of observations on the development of the quality of *Reading learning* through a Contextual approach in the English Language Education Study Program Students, FKIP, and University of Lampung.

Researchers used seven contextual components, namely: (1) constructivist, (2) inquiry, (3) questioning, (4) learning society, (5) modeling, (6) reflection, and (7) authentic assessment. Each cycle showed an increase reading achievement. In cycle I of capability result data *Reading* students for aspects *Reading On* average, under the established indicators, there were still weaknesses contained in cycle 1 are: (1) The implementation of the learning process for inquiry steps and discussions is not yet clear. (2) The lecturer is not yet clear in directing the discussion. (3) The lecturer is in a hurry in explaining the material. (4) Lecturers are irregular in carrying out learning steps. (5) Lecturers only provide opportunities to smart students. (6) Lecturers are

impatient in guiding. 7) Lecturers lack motivation for students. (8) Lecturers are not used to evaluating student reading results in the right way.

In cycle II, all five components *Reading* experienced an increase. The activities carried out by students in cycle II have increased, only in student discussion activities have not been maximized with the improvement of in curricular activities, the process of asking and reflecting can improve the five components *Reading*. In cycle III research activities are stopped because the specified indicators have been met. Briefly, the improvement in the quality of student Reading learning for each cycle can be seen in the following graph.



Figure 1. The result of cycles

Figure 1 illustrates the outcomes observed within each instructional cycle. Upon analyzing the data depicted in the graph, it is evident that the quality of Reading learning underwent a notable transformation. Specifically, the initial cycle displayed a Reading Learning Quality percentage of 62.4, followed by an increase to 68.7 in cycle II, and a subsequent rise to 77.2 in cycle III. These findings collectively suggest a discernible enhancement in various dimensions of student learning quality. Moreover, it is noteworthy that certain students exhibited heightened dedication and motivation during their participation in Reading lessons.

Students followed the steps or instructions of the lecturer in the application of Reading learning through a Contextual approach. With the improvement obtained by students in Reading instruction through the contextual approach of English Language Education Study Program students FKIP Universitas Lampung, the study proves that the contextual approach is effective to improve the quality of Reading learning/instruction for English Language Education Study Program students FKIP University of Lampung.

The pivotal outcome of this study is the evident enhancement of student achievement in the Reading class. By addressing challenges and harnessing the potential of context-rich learning experiences, the Contextual approach facilitates a holistic improvement in students' reading proficiency. The study's

results resonate with the assertion made by Darling-Hammond (2017) that effective teaching practices can lead to substantial gains in student achievement.

The research results indicating the efficacy of the contextual approach in enhancing the quality of reading learning among students of the English Language Education Study Program at FKIP University of Lampung align with and contribute to a growing body of literature that underscores the significance of context-based pedagogies in language education. By comparing and contrasting these findings with relevant research, we can discern patterns, draw insightful conclusions, and contextualize the broader implications of the contextual approach in language instruction.

The findings of this study resonate with research conducted by Anderson & Pearson (1984), who emphasized the importance of schema theory in reading comprehension. This theoretical framework suggests that learners tap into their existing knowledge structures to make sense of new information. In the context of the present study, the contextual approach fosters the activation and utilization of learners' prior knowledge within authentic scenarios, contributing to improved comprehension and engagement.

Furthermore, the research aligns with the principles of situated cognition, as advocated by Lave & Wenger (1991), wherein learning is embedded within meaningful contexts. The observed increase in average scores across successive cycles reflects the dynamic interplay between learners and their environment, validating the assertion that context-rich learning experiences lead to enhanced outcomes.

In contrast, some studies, such as those by Kucan & Beck (1997), have raised concerns about overreliance on prior knowledge, positing that it may inadvertently exclude learners with limited prior experiences. However, the contextual approach can be adapted to address this concern by diversifying and expanding the range of contexts used in instruction, ensuring inclusivity and catering to diverse learner backgrounds.

Additionally, while some research emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction and metacognitive strategies (e.g., Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), the contextual approach may appear less structured in its form. Nonetheless, this apparent contrast can be reconciled by recognizing that the contextual approach does not preclude the incorporation of explicit instruction; rather, it integrates such instruction within authentic contexts, enhancing its practical applicability.

The convergence of these findings with established theories and research underscores the contextual approach's significance and adaptability in fostering effective language instruction. By capitalizing on learners' inherent cognitive processes, the approach provides a dynamic platform for educators to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world application. Moreover, the

observed progression in average scores across cycles substantiates the iterative nature of context-based pedagogies, where refinement and reflection lead to continuous improvement.

The contextual approach's potential significance extends beyond reading instruction, resonating with contemporary educational paradigms that emphasize experiential, student-centered learning. This aligns with the principles of constructivist learning theories (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978), where knowledge is actively constructed through social interactions and situated within authentic contexts.

The research results highlighting the enhancement of reading learning quality through the contextual approach align with established theories while contributing new insights. By embracing contextualized pedagogies, educators can empower learners to navigate the complexities of language within diverse communicative contexts. This discussion underscores the dynamic interplay between research findings, theoretical frameworks, and practical applications, shaping a comprehensive understanding of the transformative potential of context-based language education.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion of the research, it can be concluded that the contextual approach is able to improve quality of learning Reading students of English Language Education Study Program at FKIP, University of Lampung. The findings underscore the transformative potential of infusing context into the learning process, fostering a profound evolution in students' reading proficiency and educational experience.

The results showed that the quality of Reading learning increased through a contextual approach in English Language Education Study Program students. The measured progression across the iterative cycles of implementation serves as a testament to the incremental growth fostered by the contextual approach. In the initial cycle, an average score of 62.4 set the foundation for subsequent advancement. As the approach was refined and iteratively integrated, the second cycle witnessed a notable ascent, with the average score ascending to 68.7. This trajectory culminated in the third cycle, where a remarkable average score of 77.2 signified a pinnacle of achievement, affirming the transformative influence of the contextual approach.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this research. The study's focus on a specific academic program within a singular institution may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Additionally, the impact of individual learner differences, prior experiences, and external influences could contribute to variations in the

outcomes. Future research endeavors should seek to replicate and expand upon these findings across diverse linguistic and cultural settings to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual approach's efficacy.

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