

**THE ANALYSIS OF TWO PRE-READING STRATEGIES:  
CONTEXTUAL REDEFINITION AND WORD LIST  
IN EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION**

Nika Asri\*

nikaasri5@gmail.com

\*Graduated in 19 April 2013 from English Education Study Program of Indonesia University of Education

**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine which of the two pre-reading strategies, contextual redefinition or word list, is more effective for EFL learners' reading comprehension. In addition, it was aimed at investigating students' responses to the use of both strategies. The research design used in this study was counterbalanced. Two intact classes at eight-graders in a junior high school in Bandung were chosen based on the similarity of pre-test mean score. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the process of collecting the data. The quantitative data were obtained from the post-tests. Moreover, qualitative data were gained from questionnaires and interview. The results of the study revealed that contextual redefinition was more effective to be used than word list as pre-reading strategy in reading comprehension. It can be seen from the mean score of the first and the second post-test. The mean score of the students who received contextual redefinition strategy outperformed the mean score of the students who experienced word list strategy ( $72.13 > 61.47$  and  $76.53 > 71.23$ ). Moreover, the analysis showed that more than half students in group A (56%) and group B (55%) liked to use contextual redefinition better. This was due to the consideration that contextual redefinition could enhance new vocabularies, stimulate language schema, stimulate students' interest to the words that will be studied, and help the students to decode the difficult terms. Although the findings revealed that students preferred to use contextual redefinition, it is interesting to note that significant number of students also acknowledge the importance of the use of word list as pre-reading strategy. In fact, the students in group A (44%) and group B (45%) argued that the use of word list as pre-reading strategy was easier than contextual redefinition. On the basis of the findings, it is recommended that teachers should benefit from a variety of pre-reading strategies, and one of the alternative pre-reading strategies in helping EFL learners' reading comprehension is contextual redefinition.

**Keywords:** *Contextual Redefinition, Word List, EFL Learners, and Reading Comprehension*

## **Introduction**

In comprehending a passage, students should have vocabulary knowledge as background knowledge (Biemiller, 2003; Sedita, 2005). Therefore, vocabulary knowledge is important because it encompasses all the words we must know to access our background knowledge and it is one of the prominent indicators of how well students are able to comprehend the text in the junior and high school levels (Sedita, 2005). Thus, students who do not have strong vocabulary knowledge will struggle to comprehend a text while they are reading and to understand new concepts presented in oral discussion (Hackman, 2008). This theory is in line with the findings in the preliminary observation questionnaires and interview results. It is shown that about 55% students do not like reading English texts and 69% students experienced difficulty in reading English texts. The reason obtained from the interviews was because they do not have sufficient vocabulary.

In ELT reading classroom, one of the most common vocabulary learning strategies used in EFL countries is word list (Baleghizadeh and Ashoori, 2010). However, this strategy should be studied more because it is regarded as a boring and stressful way of enhancing vocabulary (Wahyunengsih, 2010 as cited by Roselina, 2011). Moreover, there is another strategy in learning vocabulary, namely contextual redefinition. Literature on vocabulary and learning strategies has revealed that this strategy is selected as an alternative vocabulary strategy in promoting students' vocabulary development in reading comprehension (Tierney et al., 1985; Baleghizadeh and Ashoori, 2010; Soureshjani, 2011). It is believed that this strategy has some advantages such as it is easy to be employed, it needs relatively simple preparation and easy to use, and it has potential transfer to be used by students in other reading situations (Tierney et al., 1985). Also, by using this strategy, the students would be easier to learn and remember the word and phrases (Broughton *et al.*, 1987 as cited in Chou, 2011).

On the basis of those issues, this study was aimed at investigating which pre-reading strategy: contextual redefinition or word list is more effective in helping students' reading comprehension especially in EFL context and how students'

responses toward the use of those strategies. This study was aimed to find out (1) Which pre-reading strategy is more effective for EFL learners' reading comprehension: contextual redefinition or word list?, (2) What are the students' responses toward the use of contextual redefinition as pre-reading strategy in reading activity?, and (3) What are the students' responses toward the use of word list as pre-reading strategy in reading activity?

## **Literature Review**

### **• Contextual Redefinition**

Contextual redefinition is a strategy that emphasizes the importance of context in predicting and verifying word meaning (Tierney et al., 1985). It also provides activities that can help students connect word with their prior knowledge which emphasizes comprehension monitoring. The strategy also actively engages students in learning which are more likely to result in significant vocabulary growth (Gambrell and Hadley, 2006). To sum up, contextual redefinition is the strategy that involves context clue which aims to activate the prior knowledge especially word knowledge and to enhance more vocabulary.

In addition, some studies about the use of contextual redefinition in deriving meaning were conducted (Soureshjani, 2011). The results showed that contextual redefinition is effective in enhancing students' vocabulary development (Jenkin, Matlock, and Slocum, 1989; Soureshjani, 2011).

Several advantages of using this strategy are found. First, it enables students become actively involved in a more profitable process of discovering new words rather than in the rote memorization of them (Bean, Baldwin, and Readence, 2012). Hence, using contextual redefinition also makes the students interested in the term that will be studied (Martin, 1985 as cited in Chou, 2011). Second, contextual redefinition makes the students become an independent reader because by using this strategy, some unfamiliar words considered being essential have been introduced in the pre-reading activity (Wiese, 2012). Another advantage mentioned by Sharzad and

Derakhshan (2011) is that contextualized words appeared with more clues is better to be learned and consequently kept longer.

On the other hand, the main disadvantage of this strategy is that students feel frustrated when trying to identify an unfamiliar word by simply focusing on the word as an isolated element. Moreover, they may probably make a haphazard and inaccurate guessing. It should be 98% the words surrounded in the sentence are familiar with the students (Hirsh and Nation, 1992 as cited in Hunt and Beglar, 2005), so that the teacher should notice the words' selection which is appropriate for the students' level (Hunt and Beglar, 2005).

- **Word list**

Word List strategy is considered as one of the old-fashioned vocabulary learning strategies (Balegizadeh and Ashoori, 2010). This strategy focuses on repetition and memorization in which the learner writes both of the L2 word and its meaning out of context (Balegizadeh and Ashoori, 2010). Some previous studies related to word list indicate that the students gained higher score and enriched more vocabulary after using word list. In addition, word list strategy is proposed to give a quick help for students to memorize words and can be learned in a short time (Roselina, 2011; Gu, 2003 as cited in Balegizadeh and Ashoori, 2010).

There are three important general processes that might make word kept longer when using word list. They are noticing, retrieval, as well as creative and generative use (Nation, 2001). However, there are some considerable things in the using of word list. The learner should not retain too much words per day because it makes them feel stressful and boring (Wahyuningsih, 2011 as cited by Roselina, 2011).

- **EFL Learners**

EFL is an abbreviation for "English as Foreign Language". EFL learners are mainly used to talk to about students whose first language is not English who is learning English while living in their own country. EFL learners in this study refer to

eight grade students in one of junior high schools in Bandung and they are in Intermediate level.

- **Reading Comprehension**

Reading for general comprehension involves the ability to understand information in a text and interpret it appropriately (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). Successful comprehension enables readers to acquire information, to experience, to be aware of other worlds, to communicate successfully, and to achieve academic successfully (Snowling, et al. 2009). Hence, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is an active and intentional thinking which involves cognitive process which entails deeper thought to comprehend information in a text.

### **Methodology**

This research design of this was experimental research in the form of counterbalanced design. Counterbalance design or has come to be called repeated measured design is a kind of experimental research design where the subjects in the study are exposed to all the treatments. The reason why counterbalanced design was used in this study because it is designed to get more accurate data and often used to reduce the chances of the order of treatments or other factors negatively influencing the result of the study.

Research methods used in this study were mix methods which involve both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was used to examine which strategy that is considered to be more effective. Meanwhile, qualitative method was used to find out how students' responses toward the use of contextual redefinition and word list in their reading activity.

In this study, the null hypothesis is set as follow:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference of post-test scores between reading text by using contextual redefinition and using word list as strategy in helping EFL learners' reading comprehension. In addition, the population in this study consists of seventy seven second grade students of junior high school in Bandung which is divided into

two groups, group A and B. Then for analyzing the scores of pilot test, normal distribution test, homogeneity test, and independent *t*-test were then used with the help SPSS 19.0 for Windows.

### **Data Presentation and Discussion**

The computation results of both post-tests demonstrated that contextual redefinition was more effective to be used as pre-reading strategy than word list in reading comprehension. It was proven by the mean of the first post-test where the students in group A received word list first and group B had contextual redefinition as the treatment. The statistical computation result showed that group B who received contextual redefinition gained higher mean score than group A who had word list as the pre-reading strategy (mean score of group A was 61.47 and mean score of group B 72.133). It is in line with the first post-test, in the second post-test group A (contextual redefinition) and group B (word list), mean score of the group A was outperformed mean score of group B (76.53 > 71.23). The findings were strengthened by students' responses in the data of questionnaires and interviews.

More than half of students in both group liked more contextual redefinition than word lists (group A = 56%; Group B= 55%). Meanwhile, there are 44% in group A and 45% in group B liked word list better. From the interview conducted, students found that contextual redefinition can enhance new vocabularies especially vocabulary that will be encountered in the text. Hence, using contextual redefinition makes them more confident with their reading ability because they did not have to look up the dictionary to search unfamiliar word when reading text. It is in line with Wiese (2012) who states that contextual redefinition strategy is pre-reading strategy which is useful to introduce words that are essential in comprehending the reading and it is also a strategy to assist students to become independent readers.

Furthermore, the use contextual redefinition can stimulate EFL's language schema. Language schema is gathered from the words that have been learned by the students. In addition, deriving unfamiliar words by using contextual redefinition is more fun and challenging. It is in line with Bean *et al.* (2012) that state by using

contextual redefinition, the students become actively involved in a more profitable process of discovering new words rather than in the rote memorization of them. Hence, students are enthusiastic to find out whose predictions are correct.

Therefore, the use of contextual redefinition can retain more in long term memory. This finding is in line with by Sharzad and Derakhshan (2011) who stated that contextualized words that appear with more clues are learned better and consequently kept longer. Then, the words that are memorized by the students will be kept in working memory and it will be a background knowledge which helps students to comprehend the text. Another advantage of using this strategy is the students can derive unfamiliar word and they can easily comprehend the text because the students have learned the unfamiliar word in reading activity.

Nevertheless, the main disadvantage of using contextual redefinition is the students felt difficult to guess the unfamiliar word when they think the sentence provided were difficult. Hence, the ability of guessing unfamiliar word is influenced by the sentence that is provided by the teacher too. In line with that, Nation (2001) proposes that in teaching procedure using contextual redefinition, teacher should be noticed text and word selection. Hence, teacher should pay attention to the text and word selection.

Meanwhile, from the interview conducted, some students who preferred more word list as pre-reading strategy stated that they liked word list better because it was easier than guessing unfamiliar word with contextual redefinition. Hence, by using word list they also thought that they can understand more what the text is about because they had the vocabulary needs that will be encountered in the text. This finding is supported by Soureshjani (2011) who states that in using contextual redefinition students need sufficient grammar knowledge and can use grammatical contextual clues to guess meaning from context. Therefore, it is different from word list that can be used by all level of students. Another advantage found in using word list; the students found that the use of word list makes them easier to retain new word. It is in line with Gu (2003 as cited in Balezizadeh and Ashoori, 2010) and Rosalina (2011) who state that paired list of words which contains translation from L2 to L1

were easier to be retained and it was effective because it can be learned in a short time. Hence, the words retained will be kept in working memory as background knowledge.

Despite the advantages, some students argued that it was difficult to use word list because it is not effective to search unfamiliar word in dictionary and make them confused. Sometimes students do not understand the definition in the dictionary because they may not know how to choose appropriate meanings from a word that has multiple meaning. Hence, it can be conducted by asking the students to have minimum number rather than exact number, 5 words per day (Roselina, 2011).

### **Conclusions**

After conducting the research, it can be concluded that there are some advantages found in using contextual redefinition in helping EFL learners' reading comprehension. First, contextual redefinition strategy is pre-reading strategy to enhance new words that are essential in understanding the reading and it is also strategy to assist students to become independent reader. Second, the strategy helps the readers to stimulate their language schema to help them to comprehend what the text is about. Third, most important of the use contextual redefinition is in creating interest in vocabulary learning and it is regarded to be more fun and challenging strategy by the students. Hence, it makes the students retain the vocabulary longer. The words are retained will be kept in working memory as background knowledge. Moreover, the strategy helps them to derive unfamiliar word use that underlying on the use of context which enables students to make informed guesses about the meaning of words in print. It means that contextual redefinition guided the students to find out the unfamiliar words encountered in the text.

Moreover, using contextual redefinition as pre-reading strategy makes them comprehend better in reading a text. However, the disadvantage is also found when using contextual redefinition as pre-reading strategy; the students feel difficult when guessing unfamiliar word from difficult sentence provided. Hence, it makes haphazard guessing which is not very accurate from the context clue.

In terms of word list, there are advantages and a disadvantage of using it as pre-reading strategy. The first advantage of using word list is the students feel easier to follow word list as pre-reading activity than contextual redefinition. Therefore, they are easier to decode the vocabularies that will be encountered in the text. Second, the word is easier to be retained. It is the same as contextual redefinition; the word will be kept in the working memory to help the students connect to the background knowledge. Meanwhile, the disadvantage is also found in the use of word list as pre-reading strategy; this strategy is believed that learners can become frustrated when they look up (too) many words or do not understand the given definitions. Therefore, the findings suggest that teachers should benefit students by using a variety of pre-reading strategies, and one of the alternative pre-reading strategies in helping EFL learners' reading comprehension is contextual redefinition.

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