Exploring Contextual Cues for Enhancing Literacy Development in Grade 9 Students: A Literature Review

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Abstract— This literature review underscores the profound positive impact of context clues on reading comprehension, elucidating their vital role in aiding readers in grasping unfamiliar words or concepts within a text. Educators wield the power to empower students by harnessing context clues to bolster vocabulary acquisition, decoding skills, and overall comprehension of textual materials. Crucially, addressing educational challenges through comprehensive teacher training and curriculum development is imperative to cultivate effective utilization of context clues and enhance literacy outcomes among learners. Moreover, integrating schema theory suggests that activating prior knowledge markedly enhances comprehension, offering educators a potent strategy to further empower students in text comprehension. Recognizing the interactive dynamics of bottom-up and top-down processing is pivotal in nurturing literacy development across diverse skill domains. Embracing these theoretical frameworks has the potential to revolutionize literacy instruction, fostering a profound understanding of textual materials among students. In conclusion, the convergence of context clues, teacher training, curriculum development, schema theory, and adept processing strategies holds immense promise in significantly elevating reading comprehension and literacy outcomes for students.

Keywords— Context clues, Comprehension, Empowerment, Schema, Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

The positive impact of using context clues to improve learners' reading comprehension is undeniable. Several researches (Utama, 2019; Kurniawati, Sudarsono, & Rezeki, n.d.; Firdus, 2016; Ong, Marmara, Vacalares, & Zambas, 2019; Zamani, Nematzadeh, & Alikhademi, 2022) pointed out that students' ability to unlock vocabulary terms and to infer meanings to unknown words are improved with the use of context clues. Apriliyanti (2019) and Utama (2019) also stated that context clues strategy enhances students' mastery of understanding vocabulary meaning in reading descriptive texts. Moreover, Mahmoud (2016) also stated that context clues, when used, provide clearer understanding of nonsense words. In fact, EFL students' vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension were positively influenced by the use of context clues (Mahmoud, 2016; Khanfar & Bouaziz, 2018; Valizadeh, 2021; Zamani, Nematzadeh, & Alikhademi, 2022).

Furthermore, using context clues provide opportunities for independent learning. The decoding skills of 48 first year students from Qassim Private Colleges were developed and their way of comprehending a text comes in a more knowledgeable way despite the role of the teacher being a facilitator (Nelson, Devardhi, & Zaed, 2016). Taking this into consideration, it has been recommended that teachers undergo seminar, training, and/or workshops to develop more knowledge on techniques on how to teach and strengthen students' vocabulary

development using context clues and other strategies (Ong, Marmara, Vacalares, & Zambas, 2019; Valizadeh, 2021; Al-Ghasab, 2022).

A study (Jomocan & Lesgaspi, 2021) within the Philippines proved the significant connection of context clues and reading comprehension skills such that the use of the different forms of context clues such as synonym, antonym, definition, and logical inference prepares students to improve their reading skills. To support this, Dela Torre (2021) and Oclarit & Casinillo (2021) were able to reveal that there is a significant difference when context clues are integrated in a lesson from the result of the pre and post test conducted to fourth grade students. Also, the use of context clues is much more effective compared to traditional strategies such as word-part strategy, word-card strategy, and using the dictionary (Ebrahimain & Nabifar; Dela Torre, 2021; Utama, 2019; Ilter, 2019).

In the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment, the Philippines ranked last in terms of reading comprehension and a step behind the last rank in Mathematics and Science discipline (DepEd, 2019). Some researches (Cabreza, 2023; See, 2023) noted that out of 10 students aged 8 to 12 years old, four can read and write while half of the pupils in ages 8 to 9 years old are truly literate in Filipino. Despite being denied by DepEd (Castillo, 2023) due to the lack of evidence provided, the current head of the local government of Baguio - Mayor Magalong stated that the whole community's assistance would be required to help the children in much need of assistance (Cabreza, 2023).

A good amount of research (Utama, 2019; Oclarit & Casinilio, 2021; Ilahude, Fatsah, Luwiti, Sri, & Otluwa, 2021; Suma, Sudarsono, & Rezeki, 2019; Firdus, 2016; Ong & Padilla, 2020; Wilkinson, Wong, & Torres, 2016; and De la Torre, 2021) provided answers on the effectiveness of using context clues. These researches highlighted how context clues made students understand the context of a read material and how they improved their understanding of terms that are difficult to understand and unknown or unfamiliar to them. However, with the rising concern in the Philippines' low reading comprehension as it ranked last among 79 countries that participated in the PISA (2018) and the underlying difficulty of distinguishing the different context clues used in a certain text, partnered with the challenging results from Phil-Iri results in the locality of Baguio City, it was recommended by many researchers that further training should be provided to teachers to accommodate the need of learners' in improving their reading comprehension with the use of context clues strategies. Moreover, an in-depth understanding of context clues should be given since it stands as a barrier that causes students not to fully unlock vocabulary words by merely relying on guessing the inferred meanings. (DepEd, 2019; Cabreza, 2023, Castillo, 2023; See, 2023; Ahmed, 2013; and Ong, Marmara, Vacalares, & Zambas, 2019; Innaci & Sam, 2017; Kurniawati, Sudarsono, & Rezeki, n.d; Ligudon & Ildefonso, 2022; Hernandez, 2015).

This literature review is significant to the teachers as it will help them to construct a good activity to further lessen the challenges encountered in terms of reading comprehension. Since This literature review will be giving appropriate activities focusing on diminishing the difficulties encountered by students in terms of understanding the use of context clues, it will make the teachers provide good activities that would promote better understanding of the context of texts. Also, this literature review will help students to improve their knowledge on context clues.

This can enlighten them of the different types and uses of context clues. In addition, this literature review is also significant to parents as it will help them to improve their children' reading skills. Lastly, this literature review is also significant to the curriculum developers as they will be able to further their understanding on context clues and its effect as a strategy to build the literacy of learners.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

Reading is one of the important skills that every student should develop and enhance using appropriate strategies. This literature review discussed how context clues help students develop their literacy. Context clues refer to the words or phrases that surround unfamiliar words to help the reader understand their meaning. In addition, the use of context clues does not always unlock meaning, particularly when the readers' experience is not matched to that of the writer, when a piece of writing is poorly organized, and/or when the writing lacks much redundancy (Robinson,1976: 59). There are different types of context clues that can be used to determine the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Definition clues offer a direct explanation of the unfamiliar term, while synonym clues present words with similar meanings. Antonym clues contrast the unfamiliar word with one that has an opposite meaning. Example clues employ instances to elucidate the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Inference clues demand the reader to deduce the meaning of the unfamiliar word from the surrounding context. These types of context clues will guide the reader to easily understand the text they are reading.

This literature review is also guided by schema theory which says that schema theory is an explanation of how readers use prior knowledge to comprehend and learn from text (Rumhelhart, 1980). Context clues can help activate and build on readers' prior knowledge. The term "schema" was first used in psychology by Barlett as "an active organization of past reactions or experiences" (1932, p.201); later, the schema was introduced in reading by Rumelhalt (1980), Carrell (1981) and Hudson (1982) when discussing the important role of background knowledge in reading comprehension (all cited in An, 2013).

The fundamental principle of the schema theory assumes that written text does not carry meaning by itself. Rather, a text-only provides directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge (An, 2013). Furthermore, schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. As Anderson (1977, p.369) points out, "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well."

Reading comprehension operates in two directions, from bottom up to the top and from the top down to the bottom of the hierarchy. Bottom-up processing is activated by specific data from the text, while top-down processing starts with general to confirm these predictions. These two kinds of processing are occurring simultaneously and interactively, which adds to the concept of interaction or comprehension between bottom-up and top-down processes (Carrel and Eiserhold, 1983. Cited in An, 2013).

The above concepts and theories guided the researchers to come up with This literature review considering that a lot of students nowadays have difficulty in understanding what they are reading. These theories can help the students develop not just their comprehension but also enhances the vocabulary, writing, and communication skills of the students.

DISCUSSIONS

The role of context clues in enhancing reading comprehension has been widely acknowledged in educational research. This literature review delves into various studies that illuminate the positive impact of utilizing context clues on learners' reading comprehension abilities. It synthesizes findings from multiple research articles to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of context clues in improving students' vocabulary acquisition, decoding skills, and overall comprehension of textual materials.

Enhanced Vocabulary Acquisition and Understanding

Numerous studies (Utama, 2019; Kurniawati et al., n.d.; Firdus, 2016; Ong et al., 2019; Zamani et al., 2022) have highlighted the efficacy of context clues in improving students' ability to unlock vocabulary terms and infer meanings of unfamiliar words. Apriliyanti (2019) and Utama (2019) emphasize how employing context clues strategies enhances students' mastery of vocabulary meanings, particularly in descriptive texts. Additionally, Mahmoud (2016) notes that context clues aid in providing clearer understanding, even with nonsense words. These findings underscore the significance of context clues in facilitating EFL students' vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.

Development of Decoding Skills and Independent Learning

Research by Nelson, Devardhi, and Zaed (2016) demonstrates that using context clues fosters the development of decoding skills among students, empowering them to comprehend texts independently. The study suggests a shift towards a more student-centered approach to learning, wherein teachers act as facilitators rather than primary sources of knowledge. Furthermore, recommendations for teacher training and workshops (Ong et al., 2019; Valizadeh, 2021; Al-Ghasab, 2022) underscore the importance of equipping educators with strategies to enhance students' vocabulary development using context clues. Schema theory posits that readers utilize prior knowledge to comprehend and learn from text. Introduced by Rumelhart (1980), Carrell (1981), and Hudson (1982), this theory emphasizes the role of background knowledge in comprehension. Texts serve as prompts for readers to retrieve or construct meaning from their existing knowledge base. Anderson (1977) notes that comprehension involves integrating textual material with one's own knowledge of the world.

Impact on Reading Comprehension Skills

Studies conducted in the Philippines (Jomocan & Lesgaspi, 2021; Dela Torre, 2021; Oclarit & Casinillo, 2021) highlight a significant correlation between the use of context clues and improved reading comprehension skills. Various forms of context clues, such as synonyms, antonyms, definitions, and logical inferences, have been shown to prepare students to better comprehend texts. Additionally, context clue integration in lessons proves more

effective compared to traditional strategies like word-part analysis and dictionary usage (Ebrahimain & Nabifar; Dela Torre, 2021; Utama, 2019; Ilter, 2019).

In contrast, context clues are words or phrases surrounding unfamiliar terms that assist readers in deciphering their meaning. However, their effectiveness may be hindered by factors such as mismatched reader-writer experiences, poor organization, or lack of redundancy (Robinson, 1976). Various types of context clues include definition, synonym, antonym, example, and inference clues, each providing different strategies for uncovering word meanings. Reading comprehension operates through both bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing involves extracting meaning from specific text data, while top-down processing begins with general knowledge to confirm predictions. These processes interact simultaneously, facilitating comprehension (Carrel & Eiserhold, 1983). This interactive approach underscores the importance of integrating bottom-up and top-down processes in reading comprehension.

Addressing Educational Challenges

Given concerns over low reading comprehension levels in the Philippines (DepEd, 2019; Cabreza, 2023; See, 2023), it is imperative to prioritize the implementation of context clue strategies in education. Research underscores the need for teacher training to effectively incorporate context clue techniques into instruction (Ahmed, 2013; Ong et al., 2019; Innaci & Sam, 2017). Moreover, understanding the nuances of context clues is crucial to overcoming barriers to vocabulary acquisition and comprehension (Kurniawati et al., n.d.; Ligudon & Ildefonso, 2022; Hernandez, 2015).

Significance and Implications

This literature review serves as a valuable resource for educators, parents, and curriculum developers alike. It provides insights into designing activities that mitigate challenges in reading comprehension by focusing on context clue utilization. Additionally, it enhances students' understanding of context clues, thereby improving their reading skills. Moreover, it informs curriculum development by emphasizing the importance of integrating context clue strategies to bolster learners' literacy. Given the challenges students face in understanding text, the integration of context clues and schema theory can significantly enhance comprehension. These theories not only improve comprehension but also contribute to vocabulary, writing, and communication skills development. Educators can utilize these approaches to design effective instructional strategies that cater to diverse learner needs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the literature overwhelmingly supports the positive impact of context clues on reading comprehension. By leveraging context clues, educators can empower students to enhance vocabulary acquisition, decoding skills, and overall comprehension of textual materials. Addressing educational challenges through teacher training and curriculum development is essential to fostering a culture of effective context clue utilization and improving literacy outcomes among learners. Similarly, context clues and schema theory offer valuable insights into improving reading comprehension. By leveraging context clues and activating prior knowledge

through schema theory, educators can empower students to comprehend texts effectively. Understanding the interactive nature of bottom-up and top-down processing enhances literacy development across various skill domains. Embracing these theories can revolutionize literacy instruction and foster a deeper understanding of textual materials among students.

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