

Development of English Reading Comprehension Using Context Clues for Grade Ten Students at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Myanmar

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of using context clues as a strategy to improve English reading comprehension among grade ten students at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Myanmar. English language instruction in Myanmar has undergone various transformations over time, especially due to shifts in language policy and access to quality education. Despite curriculum reforms emphasizing communication and comprehension, many students still face challenges in reading English texts, primarily due to limited vocabulary and exposure. To address this, the study implemented a context clues strategy to enhance vocabulary acquisition and overall reading comprehension. Using a quasi-experimental design, the researcher administered pre-tests and post-tests to evaluate students' progress across three phases: needs analysis, context clue strategy development, and implementation. The instructional approach incorporated five types of context clues—definition, restatement, example, comparison, and cause-effect—delivered through five structured lesson plans. Findings indicate significant improvement in students' reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence when interacting with English texts. Students demonstrated greater independence in inferring word meanings and understanding textual content. These results suggest that context clues can serve as an effective, low-cost instructional tool in improving reading comprehension, especially in low-resource educational settings. The study contributes to the literature on reading pedagogy and vocabulary development in EFL contexts and supports the integration of inferencing strategies into national curricula. Recommendations are made for wider application of context clue instruction across Myanmar's schools and for further research into long-term impacts of this approach.

Keywords: Context clues, reading comprehension, English education, vocabulary acquisition, Myanmar, inferencing strategies

Introduction

The teaching and learning of English in Myanmar has evolved significantly, marked by a long-standing tension between colonial legacies and nationalist language policies. Under British colonial rule, English was elevated as a language of administration and education, creating a class of elite English-speaking citizens who benefitted from educational and economic mobility (Lwin 45). After gaining independence in 1948, however, the government shifted its focus toward Burmese language instruction to unify the country's diverse ethnic groups and assert cultural sovereignty (Smith 89). This move, while politically motivated, had long-term effects on English language proficiency nationwide, particularly in rural areas like Hmawbi where access to resources and qualified English teachers has remained limited.

During the decades of military rule from 1962 to 1988, Myanmar's educational system adopted isolationist policies that further reduced exposure to English and inhibited pedagogical innovation (Tan 67). Consequently, a generation of students entered secondary school without the foundational skills necessary to engage with English-language texts effectively. The resulting low proficiency levels in reading comprehension have impacted not only students' performance in language subjects but also their ability to understand material across disciplines.

In recent years, with Myanmar's reintegration into the global community, there has been a renewed push to improve English education. This includes curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and an emphasis on communicative language teaching. Yet despite these efforts, students in under-resourced schools continue to struggle, particularly with reading comprehension. Reading is more than decoding words—it involves understanding, interpreting, and applying information from written texts. Unfortunately, traditional teaching methods that rely on rote memorization

and translation fail to equip students with the tools they need to navigate unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentence structures (Chen 33).

At Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Grade Ten students often express frustration when engaging with English texts. They find it difficult to understand passages with unfamiliar words, which hampers their ability to comprehend the overall meaning. This is where the strategy of using context clues becomes significant. Context clues are hints embedded within sentences or paragraphs that help readers infer the meaning of unfamiliar words. These may take the form of definitions, synonyms, examples, comparisons, or cause-effect relationships. Teaching students how to identify and use these clues can significantly enhance their reading comprehension and boost their confidence as readers (Norhayati 83).

The current research aims to examine the role of context clues in improving English reading comprehension among Grade Ten students at Minywa High School. Specifically, it investigates the existing state of students' reading ability, designs and implements a context clue strategy tailored to their needs, and evaluates the impact of this intervention through quantitative assessment. The study is rooted in the belief that effective reading strategies, when systematically taught, can empower students to become autonomous learners capable of interpreting complex texts.

In summary, the importance of this study lies in its response to a real and persistent problem faced by Myanmar's secondary school students: limited reading comprehension due to vocabulary gaps. By focusing on a concrete instructional strategy—context clues—this research seeks to provide both theoretical insight and practical guidance for English language teachers working in similar contexts.

Research Objectives

1. To study the condition of English reading comprehension for grade ten students at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Myanmar.
2. To develop the context clues strategy for grade ten students at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Myanmar.
3. To analyze and propose the result of using context clues towards English reading comprehension for grade ten students at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Myanmar.

Literature Review

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to process text, understand its meaning, and integrate it with what the reader already knows. According to Grellet, it involves extracting the required information from a text as efficiently as possible (7). Pang et al. expand on this, defining reading comprehension as "a process of deriving meaning from connected text" through the interpretation of written symbols in conjunction with prior knowledge (14). Thus, reading is not a passive activity but an interactive process requiring both decoding and interpretation.

Brown categorizes reading into two primary types: intensive and extensive. Intensive reading focuses on close analysis of short texts to grasp meaning, grammatical structure, and vocabulary, while extensive reading encourages reading large volumes of material for general understanding (20). Both are essential, but for second language learners, intensive reading is particularly important in developing detailed comprehension skills and vocabulary recognition.

In the context of English language education in Myanmar, reading comprehension remains a significant hurdle. The primary barriers include unfamiliar vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and inadequate reading strategies. As Nurhayati observes, many students struggle because of limited vocabulary and a reluctance to consult dictionaries, which hinders their understanding of texts (176). This highlights the need for instructional methods that promote independent word recognition and meaning inference.

The Role of Context Clues

Context clues are textual hints that help readers determine the meanings of unfamiliar words. Norhayati defines context clues as "information provided in a text that helps readers understand the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases" (83). These can be direct definitions, restatements, examples, contrasts, or cause-effect relationships. When effectively taught, context clues empower students to infer word meanings without external resources, promoting fluent and autonomous reading.

According to Abdul, successful reading comprehension relies not only on vocabulary but also on readers' ability to interpret textual structures and make inferences using prior knowledge (1). Using context clues integrates these elements, making it an effective strategy for language learners. By identifying surrounding words and structural patterns, students can make educated guesses about unknown vocabulary, enhancing both speed and accuracy in comprehension.

There are five main types of context clues used in instruction:

1. Definition Clues – the unknown word is defined directly in the sentence.

2. Restatement Clues – the meaning is restated in simpler terms.
3. Example Clues – examples illustrate the meaning of the word.
4. Comparison or Contrast Clues – comparisons or oppositions hint at meaning.
5. Cause-Effect Clues – relationships provide logical meanings.

By practicing with these clues, students can develop strategies for decoding meaning during reading, even when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary.

Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

Vocabulary knowledge is often cited as a strong predictor of reading success. As McKeown and Beck argue, “robust vocabulary instruction significantly improves students’ reading comprehension and their ability to articulate thoughts” (251). Similarly, Rupley, Blair, and Nichols contend that systematic vocabulary instruction enhances reading proficiency across disciplines (1).

Goh emphasizes that vocabulary development also supports effective communication, especially in diverse and multilingual settings (490). For Myanmar students, who often study English as a foreign language with limited exposure, building vocabulary through context is particularly effective. Context-based learning is not only more engaging but also more memorable than rote memorization.

Nation distinguishes between receptive vocabulary (words recognized during reading or listening) and productive vocabulary (words used in speaking or writing) (50). For reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary plays a crucial role. The more words students can recognize in context, the more fluently they can read and comprehend texts. Nation further suggests that exposure to repeated vocabulary in meaningful contexts is essential for long-term retention and fluency (89).

Reading Strategies in the Classroom

Teaching reading strategies is vital in bridging comprehension gaps. Brown outlines both microskills (such as recognizing grammatical forms) and macroskills (such as inferring meaning, understanding rhetorical structure, and recognizing discourse markers) as components of reading proficiency (187). Integrating context clues into reading instruction addresses both levels, allowing students to make connections and understand texts more deeply.

Sheila Agustina points out that learning strategies make reading “easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more effective” (12). Teaching students to use strategies like skimming, scanning, and inference helps them actively engage with texts rather than passively translate or decode them. In the Myanmar context, where traditional teaching still dominates, these modern strategies are crucial for transforming reading from a memorization task into a critical thinking process.

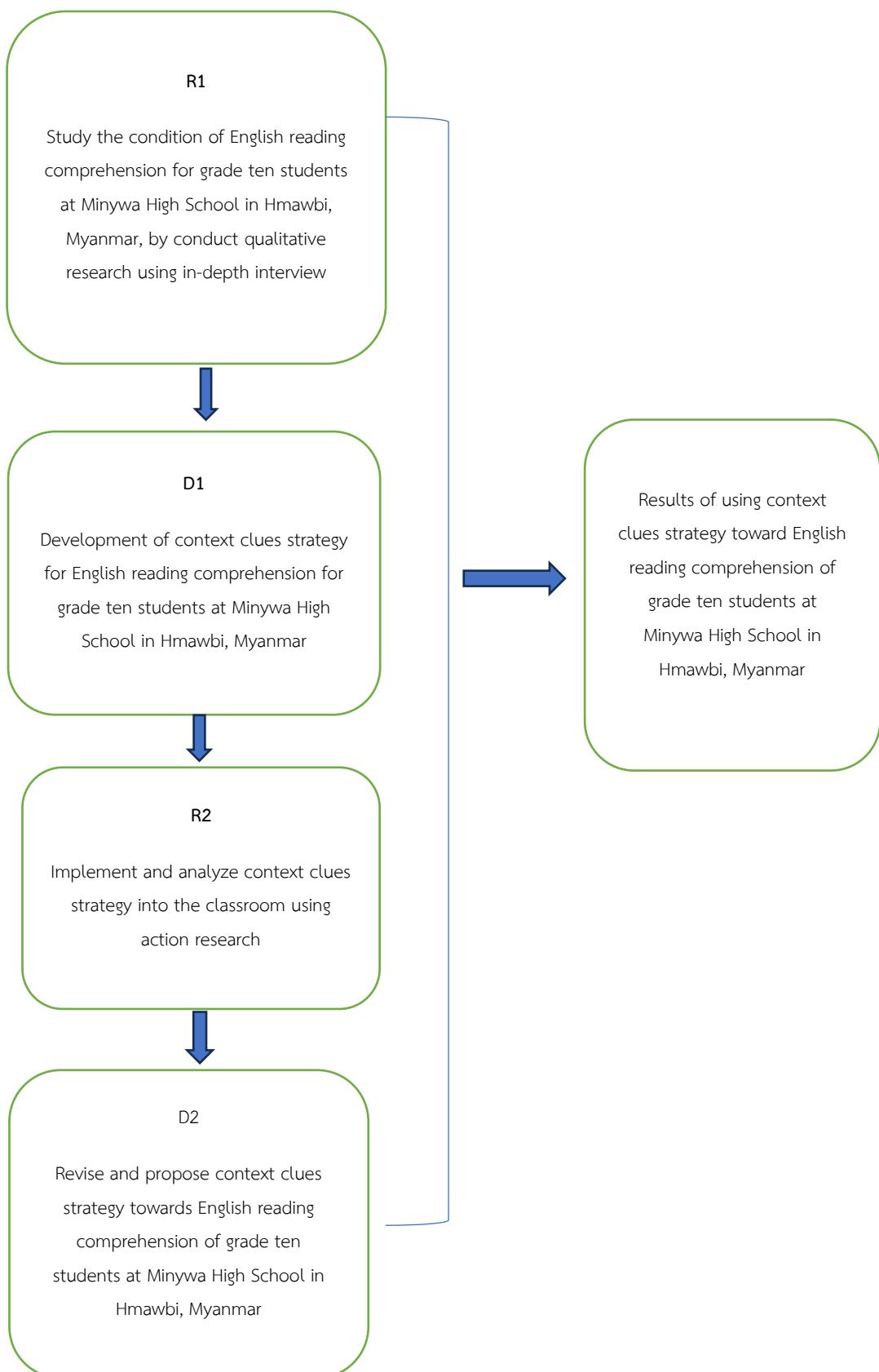
Related Research

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of context clue strategies in improving reading comprehension. Qonita conducted a pre-experimental study on vocabulary enhancement using context clues among primary school students, showing measurable improvement in word recognition and usage (45). Pribadi’s class action research focused on eighth-grade students and found that context clues significantly enhanced students’ ability to derive meaning from texts (112). Sasmita’s quantitative study at the senior high school level emphasized the role of context clues in understanding expository texts (78).

While these studies confirm the usefulness of context clues, they differ in focus, methodology, and educational level. The current research distinguishes itself by applying a quasi-experimental design specifically targeting Grade Ten students using both recount and narrative texts. It also introduces a structured lesson plan model incorporating five types of context clues, providing a comprehensive strategy for improving comprehension.

Conceptual Framework

The research studies of development of reading comprehension using context clues strategy for grade ten students at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, will be conducted and the researcher has written the relationship between variables as below figure.



Research Methodology

The research study focuses on the development of English reading comprehension for Grade Ten students through the use of context clues at Minywa High School in Hmawbi, Myanmar. The researcher designed and implemented a context clues-based instructional model to enhance students' reading skills. This strategy was applied in the English language classes to determine students' improvement in comprehension and vocabulary inference before and after the intervention. This research employed the Research and Development (R&D) method, using a one-group pre-test and post-test design. The framework followed four systematic steps of development and evaluation, as detailed below:

The research design is divided as follows:

Step 1: Research (R1) – To study the existing condition of students' English reading comprehension and to analyze their difficulties with vocabulary and understanding texts (Analysis: A).

Step 2: Development (D1) – To design and develop a set of context clues instructional materials, including five lesson plans covering five types of context clues: definition, restatement, example, comparison, and cause-effect (Design and Development: D&D).

Step 3: Research (R2) – To implement the context clues strategy in the classroom through structured instruction and guided reading activities using narrative and recount texts (Implementation: I).

Step 4: Development (D2) – To evaluate the effectiveness of the context clues strategy by comparing pre-test and post-test scores and to gather student feedback on their engagement and reading confidence (Evaluation: E).

The research process followed the four-step framework of needs analysis, lesson plan development, implementation, and evaluation. This model provided a structured and systematic approach to both instruction and assessment.

Participants

The study was conducted at Minywa High School in Hmawbi Township, Yangon Region. The school is representative of many semi-urban government schools in Myanmar where English is taught as a foreign language but often suffers from limited resources and outdated teaching practices.

The participants consisted of 45 Grade Ten students, all aged between 14 and 16. These students were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Most had been learning English for several years but reported significant difficulties in understanding reading passages, especially when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary.

Instruments and Materials

Three main instruments were developed and used:

1. Pre-test and Post-test: Both tests were constructed to assess reading comprehension. Each test included passages followed by multiple-choice and short-answer questions targeting vocabulary, inference, and understanding of main ideas. The tests were validated by three English teaching experts to ensure their appropriateness and alignment with curriculum standards.

2. Lesson Plans: A series of ten lesson plans were designed to teach five types of context clues—definition, restatement, example, comparison, and cause-effect—using narrative and recount texts. Each lesson focused on one type of context clue and included guided practice, discussion, and independent reading tasks.

3. Observation and Student Feedback: Informal classroom observations and short reflective surveys were used to monitor student engagement and perception of the new strategy. This qualitative data supplemented the quantitative test results.

Procedure

The study was implemented over a six-week period, with three sessions conducted each week.

1. Needs Analysis: An initial pre-test was administered to determine students' baseline reading comprehension. Common difficulties were identified, including poor vocabulary recall and lack of inference strategies.

2. Development Phase: Customized lesson plans and materials were developed to target the identified weaknesses. These were based on communicative language teaching principles and emphasized student-centered learning.

3. Implementation Phase: During instruction, the teacher introduced the concept of context clues and modeled how to use them. Students were guided through examples and gradually encouraged to apply the strategy independently. Each session included reading activities, vocabulary tasks, and comprehension exercises.

4. Evaluation Phase: After the instructional period, the post-test was administered to measure improvement. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and performance was compared to the pre-test scores.

Data Analysis

Test scores were tabulated and compared to assess the effectiveness of the context clue instruction. The mean, standard deviation, and percentage of correct responses were calculated for both pre- and post-tests. Additionally, student feedback was coded and analyzed to identify patterns in perception and engagement.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for a holistic understanding of the intervention's impact. While statistical results showed measurable gains, the observational data added depth to the interpretation, revealing that students became more confident and motivated as the lessons progressed.

Research Results

The results from the pre-test revealed that the Grade Ten students at Minywa High School had a low level of reading comprehension, particularly in dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary. The mean score on the pre-test was 48.5%, with most students struggling to interpret contextual meaning and identify key ideas in passages. These results confirmed the initial needs analysis, which showed that the students lacked strategies for understanding words without direct translation.

Following the implementation of the context clue instructional model, the post-test results showed a notable improvement, with the mean score rising to 75.3%. This indicates a 26.8% increase, demonstrating the positive impact of targeted context clue instruction. Students showed better ability to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words, determine main ideas, and comprehend complex sentences. The most effective types of context clues used were definition and example clues, as these were more direct and easier for students to apply. These clue types allowed learners to grasp the meaning of words based on immediately available textual cues.

Furthermore, students began to display increased reading confidence and autonomy. They relied less on dictionary use and were more willing to attempt reading longer texts independently. Observational data showed increased engagement during reading activities, and students asked fewer clarification questions compared to the early weeks of the program.

To determine the statistical significance of the difference between pre-test and post-test results, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The analysis confirmed that the difference in scores was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$), affirming the effectiveness of the context clues strategy in enhancing reading comprehension.

In addition to performance gains, student satisfaction surveys provided qualitative insights. The majority of students expressed that they found the lessons more engaging, enjoyable, and easier to follow. They appreciated the interactive activities and contextual reading tasks, which helped them understand English texts without translating every word into Burmese. These findings suggest that context clue instruction not only improves academic performance but also positively influences students' attitudes toward English reading.

Table 1 summarizes the comparison:

Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	48.5	10.2
Post-test	75.3	9.4

The improvement was consistent across all five types of context clues taught, though students showed the highest gains in understanding definition and example clues. These types were easiest to recognize, especially when introduced through familiar texts and repeated practice. Slightly lower gains were seen in comparison and cause-effect clues, which required more abstract thinking and contextual inference.

Discussion

The findings affirm the effectiveness of context clues in supporting vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Compared to traditional memorization methods, context clues encourage critical thinking and promote independent learning. In line with research by Abdul (1-12) and Norhayati (83-87), the strategy helps students become active readers who derive meaning through inference rather than rote translation.

Moreover, the approach is adaptable to low-resource settings, making it ideal for Myanmar's rural schools. The study supports integrating such strategies into national curriculum reforms to uplift English proficiency across the country.

Knowledge from Research

This research contributes the following insights:

Context clues enable deeper comprehension without reliance on dictionaries.

Instructional design tailored to learners' contexts yields better outcomes. Reading comprehension can be improved through inferencing strategies integrated into routine teaching.

Conclusion

The study concludes that using context clues significantly improves English reading comprehension for Grade Ten students at Minywa High School. The strategy is not only effective but also accessible and adaptable. It fosters vocabulary growth, boosts confidence, and develops inferencing skills—essential for long-term academic success.

Suggestions

English teachers should incorporate context clue strategies into reading lessons. Education policymakers should provide training on inferencing techniques. Future research should explore long-term retention and application of vocabulary learned through context clues.

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