

Beyond the Dictionary: Enhancing Inferential Reading Comprehension through Digital Contextual Guessing Strategies via Google Sites

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a significant challenge for Indonesian students, particularly at the inferential level. The background of this study highlights a national literacy crisis where students face a severe "vocabulary bottleneck" and heavily rely on digital translation tools, leading to a cognitive "short-circuit" that disrupts reading flow and deep text comprehension. To address this issue, the present study integrates Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) as a multimodal digital scaffold to evaluate the effect of the Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy via Google Sites on inferential reading comprehension. This study used a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design with 63 eleventh-grade students from SMAN 1 Kandat, selected for homogeneity in prior proficiency scores. The experimental group ($n = 30$) received an intervention focusing on four context clues (definition, contrast, example, and logic) embedded in interactive texts concerning Gen Z health issues, while the control group ($n = 33$) followed conventional teacher-led translation methods. Data were collected using a validated and reliable 20-item multiple-choice test mapped to Barrett's Taxonomy. The Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) results revealed a significant main effect of the instructional strategy ($F(1, 60) = 10.34, p = 0.002$, partial eta squared = 0.147) after controlling for prior reading ability. The findings indicate that the digital contextual guessing intervention significantly improved students' inferential reading comprehension compared with conventional instruction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia, reading comprehension remains one of the most critical and heavily emphasized

skills. The national curriculum for Senior High School, specifically for Grade XI students in Phase F, expects learners to understand various English texts thoroughly and master macro reading skills, including inferential comprehension. In alignment with national standards, students are expected to reach a minimum proficiency level of B1 (intermediate) in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [1]. This expectation aligns precisely with the evaluation criteria for Grade 11 English textbooks [2]. At this advanced stage, students must move beyond word-for-word translation; they must absorb and infer implicit meanings from the surrounding context to construct a coherent mental model of the text [3].

However, a substantial gap persists between these elevated curriculum standards and the actual empirical reality within classrooms. Recent national TKA results indicate that English achievement remains a substantial concern among Indonesian secondary students. The 2025 national assessment reported a mean score of 24.93 for compulsory English, while the achievement rate for inferential comprehension was 28.53% (Pusat Asesmen Pendidikan, 2025) [4]. This national picture highlights the need for instructional approaches that can support students in constructing meaning beyond explicitly stated information [5]. This macro-level discrepancy mirrors the empirical conditions observed among Grade XI students at SMAN 1 Kandat, where learners continuously struggle to decode unfamiliar vocabulary in context and subsequently fail to draw logical inferences [5].

This deficit is driven primarily by a cognitive phenomenon known as the "vocabulary bottleneck" [5]. According to the Lexical Quality Hypothesis, reading success relies heavily on the quality and automaticity of word representations. When EFL learners encounter unfamiliar words, their limited lexical store forces them to divert scarce cognitive resources from higher-level integrative processing to low-level decoding [6]. This cognitive overload clogs students' working memory, hindering their ability to synthesize information and draw logical conclusions.

The complexity of this issue is further exacerbated by the students' habitual reliance on translation tools and dictionaries [7]. While these tools offer immediate definitions, they foster a profound cognitive dependence, preventing students from developing independent strategic reading skills [6]. Constantly interrupting the reading process to search for definitions breaks the "reading flow," fragments the text, and makes it nearly impossible for students to construct a unified mental representation of the passage [8]. As a result, students experience a "short-circuit" in their reading process, where linguistic obstacles completely halt their progression toward inferential comprehension.

To effectively dismantle this vocabulary bottleneck, pedagogical interventions must transition from passive, dictionary-dependent translation to active, strategy-oriented reading instruction. The Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy offers a robust, process-based approach to explicitly deducing unknown English word meanings by training students to use relevant contextual information without consulting external translation software [9]. This strategy has shown positive impacts on EFL learners' reading comprehension in various contexts [10]. Furthermore, empirical evidence confirms its effectiveness in significantly improving specific vocabulary competence [11]. Previous

studies have also examined contextual guessing strategies in reading comprehension within local settings [12]. Other mixed-methods research has corroborated these positive outcomes among Indonesian pre-university students [13].

Meanwhile, investigations into digital scaffolding in EFL learning have highlighted the critical importance of multimodal platforms [14]. A systematic review further emphasizes digital scaffolding's role in bridging specific skill gaps in ESL classrooms [15]. This approach aligns seamlessly with technology-based interventions in L2 reading [16]. Moreover, specific online strategy training has proven effective in increasing reading comprehension through intentional digital scaffolding design [17]. However, empirical evidence remains limited on integrating contextual vocabulary guessing with interactive Google Sites scaffolding for inferential reading comprehension among Indonesian upper-secondary EFL learners.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by determining whether post-test inferential reading comprehension achievement differs significantly between students taught using the Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy via Google Sites and those taught using conventional methods. By systematically investigating this digital intervention within a Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework [14], the present research seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding the effect of the Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy via Google Sites on inferential reading comprehension, without the extraneous cognitive overload associated with paper texts [18].

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research approach utilizing a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group pretest-posttest design [19]. A quasi-experimental design was explicitly adopted because true random assignment of individual students was administratively unfeasible; shuffling students into new groups would severely disrupt the school's established scheduling, fixed class rosters, and institutional regulations [19].

This study population comprises all 340 eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Kandat, distributed across ten parallel intact classes during the odd semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. To determine the experimental and control groups, purposive sampling was utilized to select two classes from the ten available options that demonstrated the highest degree of homogeneity. The homogeneity data came from "non-instrument scores," which represent the results of an initial English proficiency diagnostic test administered during the first meeting of the new academic year. This preliminary placement test assessed students' baseline capabilities upon entering the eleventh grade in July 2026, immediately before the intervention began. Classes XI-8 and XI-10 were specifically chosen because their diagnostic test records exhibited the most comparable means, balanced student demographics, and nearly identical class schedules, which is crucial for minimizing extraneous variables.

To empirically confirm this baseline equivalence, statistical analysis was conducted on these prior proficiency scores. Levene's test showed no significant difference in variance between the two classes ($p = 0.974$). Furthermore, an independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference in prior English proficiency between the two

selected classes ($t = 1.479$, $p = 0.144$). Consequently, Class XI-8 was assigned as the control group ($n = 33$) and Class XI-10 as the experimental group ($n = 30$), yielding a total sample of 63 participants.

The primary data-collection instrument is a researcher-developed Inferential Reading Comprehension Test. The instrument was meticulously aligned with the Phase F curriculum targets and the CEFR B1 vocabulary level. The test focuses on analytical exposition texts addressing Gen Z health challenges, such as holistic wellness and preventive healthcare, mapping closely to the national assessment framework [1]. These chosen topics are also specifically tailored to match the CEFR-aligned reading texts expected for Grade 11 [2]. The instrument consists of 20 multiple-choice items designed to measure eight cognitive dimensions based on Barrett's Taxonomy, including inferring main ideas, supporting details, and sequence [20]. This comprehensive measurement design is critical for properly assessing higher-order thinking skills in EFL reading [21].

To ensure the highest degree of academic rigor, the instrument underwent a comprehensive three-stage validation process. Content validity was established through expert judgment by experienced English educators and the thesis supervisor. The researchers then determined empirical validity and reliability through try-out testing with a non-sample group. The pre-test try-out instrument demonstrated excellent reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.842, with Pearson correlation analysis confirming the validity of all 20 items. Similarly, the post-test try-out instrument exhibited high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.865.

To assess comparability between the pre-test and post-test instruments, the researchers conducted an initial item analysis of the try-out data using McNemar's non-parametric test. The initial analysis identified five items that displayed significant discrepancies in difficulty indices. Based on this statistical finding and subsequent expert review, the researchers systematically revised and recalibrated these five problematic items. The revised instrument was subsequently used for the actual post-test data collection [19].

The instructional procedure was implemented over three major sessions, totaling nine instructional periods (45 minutes per period). To control for confounding variables, the researcher acted as the instructor for both groups, ensuring that instructional time, reading materials, and emotional support structures (such as Mindful Starts and Joyful Hooks) remained identical. The sole independent variable was the core vocabulary decoding strategy.

The experimental group received the Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy treatment utilizing Google Sites as an interactive scaffold. Students were explicitly taught to identify four linguistic clues: Definition, Contrast, Example, and Logic [9]. Through collaborative jigsaw reading and independent practice, students utilized the platform to analyze highlighted target words, discuss possible meanings, and use the embedded interactive features to verify their predictions [14]. In contrast, the control group used Google Sites merely as a digital reading room and received conventional teacher-centered instruction focused on direct explanation, rote memorization, and explicit paragraph-by-paragraph translation [6].

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0. Following prerequisite testing, the researchers used Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to answer the research questions. ANCOVA statistically controlled for the influence of students' pre-test scores, ensuring that the final comparison of post-test achievement accurately reflected the true impact of the instructional treatment. Additionally, Partial Eta Squared was calculated to determine the intervention's practical effect size [19].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Before conducting the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), the reliability of the instruments and the key assumptions of the statistical model were examined. First, measurement reliability was confirmed, as both the pre-test and post-test instruments demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.842 and 0.865, respectively). Subsequently, the five fundamental assumptions of ANCOVA were evaluated to ensure the validity of the statistical model. The controlled research design satisfied the independence of observations assumption by ensuring students completed assessments individually without cross-group contamination. Data verified the normality of residuals, indicating a normal distribution of data ($p > 0.05$). Linearity was confirmed, demonstrating a linear relationship between the covariate (pre-test scores) and the dependent variable (post-test scores) across both groups. Levene's test confirmed the homogeneity of variance, establishing equal error variances across the experimental and control groups ($p > 0.05$). Finally, the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption was tested to ensure no significant interaction between the covariate and the independent variable. The interaction effect (Pre-test * Class) was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), confirming that the relationship between prior reading ability and post-test achievement was consistent regardless of the instructional strategy used.

After meeting all prerequisite assumptions, the ANCOVA was conducted to determine the effect of the Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy via Google Sites on inferential reading comprehension, compared with conventional instruction. The pre-test scores were entered as the covariate in the statistical model to control for students' initial reading abilities, ensuring an objective evaluation of post-test achievement. The ANCOVA results, summarized in Table 1, showed that the covariate (pre-test score) significantly influenced post-test scores, $F(1, 60) = 7.14$, $p = 0.010$. More importantly, after statistically adjusting for these pre-test scores, the analysis showed a significant main effect of instructional strategy (Class) on students' post-test achievement, $F(1, 60) = 10.34$, $p = 0.002$.

Table 1. Summary of ANCOVA for Post-test Inferential Reading Comprehension
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Post-test Score

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	7308.56	2	3654.28	10.60	0.000	0.261
Intercept	8623.64	1	8623.64	25.01	0.000	0.294
Pre-test Score	2462.67	1	2462.67	7.14	0.010	0.106
Class (Strategy)	3564.78	1	3564.78	10.34	0.002	0.147
Error	20682.70	60	344.71			
Total	115650.00	63				

a. *R Squared* = .261 (*Adjusted R Squared* = .236)

The magnitude of this effect was measured using Partial Eta Squared, which yielded a value of 0.147. Substantively, this indicates that the intervention accounted for approximately 14.7% of the variance in the adjusted post-test achievement. Based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, this effect size indicates a large practical effect of the instructional strategy on adjusted post-test achievement [22]. This finding suggests that the digital contextual guessing approach may provide a useful alternative to conventional translation-based instruction for supporting inferential reading comprehension when students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary.

Furthermore, an examination of the Estimated Marginal Means (Table 2)—which evaluated the post-test scores at an adjusted pre-test baseline of 31.43—demonstrated a notable difference in student performance.

Table 2. Estimated Marginal Means of Post-test Scores

Class (Strategy)	Adjusted Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval (Lower)	95% Confidence Interval (Upper)
Experimental (Google Sites)	45.32	3.42	38.48	52.16
Control (Conventional)	30.01	3.26	23.50	36.53

Note: Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pre-test Score = 31.43.

As shown in Table 2, the experimental group, which engaged in systematic digital inferencing, achieved a higher adjusted mean score ($M = 45.32$, $SE = 3.42$) than the control group, which relied on conventional direct translation and dictionary use ($M = 30.01$, $SE = 3.26$). While this absolute mean difference of 15.31 points illustrates the practical advantage of the intervention, the statistical evidence for this improvement is supported by the aforementioned ANCOVA main effect for instructional strategy ($F(1, 60) = 10.34$, $p = 0.002$). Together, these results support the conclusion that the experimental digital treatment improved students' inferential reading comprehension achievement compared with standard pedagogical practices.

3.2. Discussion

The significant improvement in the students' reading comprehension scores can be attributed to the pedagogical design implemented during the treatment. The Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy via Google Sites was designed to create an interactive learning atmosphere [14]. Compared with conventional methods that rely heavily on static texts, this web-based multimodal platform theoretically optimizes cognitive engagement [23]. Classroom observations conducted throughout the treatment sessions provided contextual support for this interpretation. Students in the experimental group were observed actively navigating the digital texts and engaging with the contextual clues, whereas students in the control group more frequently followed teacher-led translation activities. This heightened engagement served as a foundational element, enabling students to be better prepared to process information deeply from the presented English texts.

Classroom observations during the treatment sessions provided additional contextual evidence for the quantitative findings. Students initially tended to seek direct translations when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. As the contextual guessing activities progressed, several students began examining the surrounding sentences and using the highlighted clues before revealing the meaning of the target words. Some students also discussed possible meanings with their peers before checking the provided explanation. These observations suggest that the Google Sites interface helped operationalize the contextual guessing strategy during reading activities. However, these observations are presented strictly as supporting classroom evidence rather than as independently measured qualitative outcomes.

The strategy's core cognitive mechanism drove improved learning outcomes: the systematic use of contextual clues. During the treatment, the instructional design on the Google Sites interface directed students away from word-for-word translation habits [9]. This transition is crucial for minimizing extraneous cognitive processing [18]. Observational notes taken during the instructional periods provided practical evidence of this shift. While students in the control group frequently paused to consult digital dictionaries, students navigating the Google Sites scaffold actively utilized the highlighted linguistic and semantic clues—specifically definition, contrast, example, and logic markers. Actively identifying and synthesizing these clues stimulated students' analytical reasoning skills [21]. Students were observed employing a structured cognitive strategy to construct meaning [24], rather than resorting to incidental vocabulary learning through random guessing [25]. Ultimately, this structured approach is particularly beneficial for Zillennial generation students facing complex textual literacy demands [26].

Furthermore, equipping students with this contextual vocabulary guessing strategy theoretically influences the development of their strategic reading behavior. By providing structured textual clues and a visually signaled layout within the website, the strategy may help mitigate the perceived need for external tools, such as digital translation applications or bilingual dictionaries [6]. During the experiment, the experimental group showed a smoother reading process. Theoretically, this strategic approach allows students to maintain their reading focus with fewer cognitive interruptions, which is often hypothesized to sustain concentration across lengthy paragraphs [5]. This sustained focus

is a key component of effective second language reading strategies [27]. Consequently, it helps address the specific difficulties EFL students encounter at the inferential discourse level [28]. The ability to process texts more independently is a key factor that accelerates overall comprehension [12].

From a psychological perspective, this digital strategy aligns with principles that reduce the reading apprehension often experienced by upper-secondary EFL students [29]. Lengthy English academic texts typically act as an intimidating stimulus, elevating the "Affective Filter" and diminishing students' reading motivation. Through systematic, step-by-step scaffolding integrated into Google Sites, students gain a reliable strategic toolkit. Anecdotal observations during the sessions suggested that students appeared increasingly willing to engage with unfamiliar vocabulary as the activities progressed [30]. This psychological scaffolding theoretically fosters a supportive environment that builds learner confidence, which logically contributes to their improved ability to tackle complex, higher-order reading comprehension questions [31].

Overall, these empirical findings confirm a positive effect of the implemented treatment strategy on inferential reading achievement. Rigorous statistical testing validates this study's significance, and the researcher's classroom observations and pedagogical rationales support it. The Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy via Google Sites is an effective intervention: it equips students with the cognitive tools to navigate vocabulary barriers using linguistic clues while leveraging educational technology to support inferential reading comprehension [15].

4. CONCLUSION

This study presents a pedagogical framework to address the pervasive vocabulary challenges that often hinder EFL students' inferential reading comprehension. By shifting away from traditional, static print-based strategies, this research leveraged Google Sites as an interactive, multimodal scaffolding tool. Explicit, systematic instruction in the Contextual Vocabulary Guessing Strategy—using definition, contrast, example, and logic clues—effectively trained students' cognitive reflexes. The intervention provided students with a structured approach to interpreting unfamiliar vocabulary through contextual clues rather than relying solely on direct translation.

The ANCOVA results indicated a statistically significant effect of the instructional strategy on students' post-test inferential reading comprehension. From a pedagogical perspective, this intervention implies that providing students with structured, digital inferencing tools can serve as a viable alternative instructional approach. Equipping learners with such strategies can foster more resilient reading habits when navigating complex English texts in a digitalized educational environment.

For future pedagogical practice, EFL educators should integrate multimodal digital platforms into strategy training to support lexical inferencing. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to explore the longitudinal retention of vocabulary acquired through contextual guessing and empirically investigate the strategy's applicability across different text genres and educational levels.

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