Uncovering Lecturers' Perceptions of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Approach for Teaching Reading in Two Different Institution Contexts

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions and experiences of educators regarding the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) in reading instruction across diverse educational contexts. Utilizing a qualitative research design, including multiple case studies, data were collected through interviews with three experienced lecturers. Thematic analysis revealed insights into lecturers' interpretations of CTL, their experiences in its implementation, approaches to selecting teaching materials, challenges encountered, and perceived benefits. Findings indicate varying interpretations of CTL, emphasizing the importance of tailoring lessons to students' interests and backgrounds. Lecturers demonstrated how CTL fosters active participation and engagement, particularly using culturally relevant materials. Challenges such as limited resources and low English proficiency required multifaceted solutions. Nevertheless, lecturers unanimously recognized CTL's effectiveness in enhancing student learning outcomes and fostering meaningful learning experiences. This study advances knowledge about the potential of CTL to strengthen reading instruction and guides curriculum writers, educators, and legislators who want to improve teaching methods in a variety of contexts.

Keywords: perception, CTL, teaching reading, Indonesian context

Introduction

In the context of the continuing dynamism of the world of education, improving teaching methods is crucial to ensure that the diverse needs of students can be best met. This suggests the need to continue to innovate and adapt teaching approaches so that they are relevant to current developments and societal needs. This involves adapting the curriculum and learning plans to the student's needs. (Naz & Murad, 2017), integrating with other methods to improve student achievement and engagement in the classroom (Zhang et al., 2020), and considering students' social and cultural conditions (Serdyukov, 2017). These efforts will enable the creation of a learning environment that is inclusive, responsive, and progress-oriented so that students can maximize their potential. By adopting more adaptable and inclusive teaching methods, educators can help widen learning opportunities, improve the overall quality of education for all students, respecting individual differences and needs, and fighting discrimination (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2022; Zwane & Malale, 2018). This method is essential because it can improve equitable access to education and decrease current barriers (Matobako & Jita, 2022).

The need to adopt cutting-edge instructional strategies that connect with students' experiences and interests has become increasingly apparent to educators and scholars in recent years. This shift is underpinned by the understanding that student-centered learning methods, such as contextual teaching and learning (CTL) and other learner-centered approaches, have the potential to enhance student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and learning outcomes (Hanshaw et al., 2019; Indrayadi & Yandri, Hengki, 2020; Kahn, 2014; Kahu, 2013; Parsons et al., 2014). CTL is an approach that helps teachers and students construct meaning by connecting learning materials to real-world conditions in the right way (Johnson, 2002; Sears, 2003). This approach is a constructivist learning approach that constructs learning activities based on student experiences. Therefore, the learning material should be based on the student's previous knowledge (schemata) so that it helps them understand the learning material and fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of the subject matter (Meier & Muhmenthaler, 2021). In addition, Hailikari et al.,(2008) highlighted the important impact of prior understanding from previous courses on student performance. This emphasized the need to consider students' prior knowledge when designing educational resources. Furthermore, Wagoner (2013) emphasized that when learning is guided by specific instructions, schemas reflect the material as presented and become stereotyped. This highlights the importance of instructional materials that align with students' pre-existing mental frameworks to facilitate comprehension. Therefore, by placing reading tasks in relevant contexts, be they cultural, social, or professional, CTL not only improves students' reading skills but also cultivates critical thinking. Reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities have been linked, as shown by Kamali and Fahim's (2011) research, suggesting that the two are correlated with one another.

Despite its potential benefits, the extent to which CTL is adopted and perceived by lecturers in different institutional settings remains relatively unexplored. Considering lecturers are integral to the planning and execution of instructional strategies, it is imperative to comprehend their viewpoints. Mofreh and Ghafar (2019) found that lecturers' perceptions and understandings have a significant impact on their teaching methods. In addition, Susanto et al., (2020) stated that lecturers' beliefs play a crucial role in vocabulary learning and teaching techniques as they are shaped by contextual circumstances. Additionally, investigating the perceptions of CTL in various educational contexts can yield important insights into the variables influencing its uptake and efficacy.

Although previous studies have widely examined the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) in various subjects, research exploring how lecturers interpret and operationalize CTL specifically in the teaching of reading across different institutional contexts remains limited. Most existing works focus on student outcomes or classroom-based experiments, leaving a gap in understanding the role of lecturers' perceptions, beliefs, and contextual constraints in shaping CTL practices. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative exploration of lecturers' viewpoints from two distinct institutional settings, revealing how institutional culture, student characteristics, and local resources influence the ways CTL is conceptualized and enacted in reading instruction. By highlighting these contextual variations, the study offers new insights into the complexity of CTL implementation and contributes to a deeper, practitioner-oriented understanding that has not been sufficiently addressed in earlier research.

Therefore, by investigating lecturers' viewpoints on the implementation of CTL in the teaching of reading in different educational contexts, this study seeks to close this gap. By conducting in-depth interviews, this research aims to capture the nuanced perceptions of lecturers from two different institutions. Through this exploration, this research seeks to

uncover common themes, such as lectures' understandings, experiences, opinions, challenges, and expectations associated with the integration of CTL in the teaching of reading. Ultimately, this research aims to inform educational practitioners, policymakers, and curriculum developers about the potential of CTL to enhance reading instruction and promote meaningful learning experiences for students in diverse settings.

Method

Research Design

This study adopts qualitative research methods that explore in-depth the phenomenon under study. In this case, a multiple case study approach was used which has been suggested by experts as an effective method for exploring the diversity of contexts and experiences associated with the research subject (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The aim was to understand the different perceptions of lecturers who had taught reading for 5 to 11 years using the CTL approach in two different contexts.

Participants and Settings

Three English lecturers from two higher education institutions in West Nusa Tenggara were purposively selected based on the criteria that they had (1) at least three years of experience teaching reading using the CTL approach and (2) worked in different institutional settings. Pseudonyms (RD, DI, and JS) were used to ensure confidentiality. Although the involvement of only three participants is a limitation, this sample size aligns with qualitative case study traditions that prioritize depth over breadth. This limitation is acknowledged, and the findings should be interpreted considering the small and context-specific sample.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted either face-to-face or via telephone, depending on participants' availability and geographical accessibility. The interview guide addressed lecturers' understanding of CTL, its implementation in reading classes, teaching material selection, challenges encountered, and perceived benefits. Each interview lasted between 45–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to allow participants to express their views freely. Ethical procedures included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data storage.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied. Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for verification. Triangulation was achieved through comparing participants' accounts across institutions and reviewing supporting documents related to teaching materials where available. An audit trail was maintained by documenting decisions throughout the research process, including coding steps, theme development, and analytic memos. Thick descriptions of context were also provided to support transferability.

Data Analysis

We used a thematic approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) technique, in six stages: 1) familiarizing with the data, 2) coding, 3) identifying themes, 4) categorizing the data, 5) specifying and labeling themes, and 6) writing. We also used qualitative data analysis

software, specifically Atlas.ti version 9, to analyze the data. This program was chosen for its ability to code without requiring a verbatim transcription of the video.

Results and Discussion

Results

Lectures' Perception of The CTL Concept

CTL approach involves an approach that integrates students' real-life contexts into the learning process. One of the important steps in implementing CTL is identifying the context of students' lives and using teaching materials that are relevant to that context. Teachers need to consider students' backgrounds, cultures, and experiences in designing interesting and meaningful learning. During the interviews with the three lecturers, it became clear that each of them demonstrated a different understanding of the CTL. One participant explained about CTL concept: *"According to my understanding, the contextual learning approach is a method that focuses on students, where learning materials are adapted to their backgrounds and preferences"* (RD). One important aspect of this CTL approach is that the use of materials should be based on the students' experience. Another participant comments, as follows:

> *"The contextual-based approach is essentially an approach that utilizes materials favored by learners and is in line with their level of ability or conditions. From what I understand, this approach aims to create a more meaningful and relevant learning experience for the participants."* (JS)

While DI gave a different understanding of the CTL concept:

> *"Contextual Teaching and Learning, or CTL, is a learning approach that instructs learners to make decisions, stimulates them, involves elements of dialogue, and narrates content that is highly related to their daily lives. For example, when I taught about folklore, I might choose a folklore from the Philippines. If it was not contextual, it lacked relevance, and that's how I understood it."* (DI)

DI explained that the CTL approach is related to students' lives. However, on the other hand, DI also stated that the use of materials such as folktales from other regions is not by CTL principle.

Lecturers' Experience of CTL Implementation

In this theme, three lecturers contributed by sharing their experiences related to the implementation of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) in the context of teaching reading. Through the descriptions they gave, it can be understood how they applied the principles of CTL in teaching reading. This is important because the experiences and insights they share can be a valuable source of inspiration and understanding for other educators in developing effective teaching strategies. One participant shared his experience, as follows.

> *"I use this Contextual approach depending on the students' conditions. If the students can grasp the material well, I employ a different approach, such as collaborative learning and others. This is because I also enjoy testing the difficulty of the material. However, if their abilities are low, I use the CTL approach with materials tailored to their conditions and capabilities or the context of their lives."* (RD)

The combination of CTL with other approaches that still utilize the philosophy of constructivism is an attractive alternative. With this approach, learning can be designed to allow students to build their understanding through active interaction with learning materials, in line with the principles of constructivism. This combination opens opportunities to create a dynamic learning environment and facilitate the development of deep understanding in students, as the respondents comment below:

> *"Especially for the 'reading for pleasure' course, I often utilize a contextual approach with project-based learning. It's about them, for them. I encourage them to actively participate, and 80 percent of the outcomes are generated by the students themselves."* (JS)

> *"I often use the CTL approach. Last semester I used CTL with local wisdom-based material. Sometimes I like to combine it with mind mapping."* (DI)

By incorporating diverse learning methods such as contextual approaches with project-based learning and mind mapping, students are allowed to develop their problem-solving skills. Through approaches that emphasize active engagement and the relevance of learning materials to students' contexts, students not only hone their abilities in understanding the materials but also in applying their knowledge to address real challenges faced.

Lecturers' Experience of Selecting Teaching Material

This section highlights how the participants selected reading teaching materials. Almost all participants used local culture-based teaching materials. One respondent reported: *"I always integrate both local and international cultures in my classroom, not just in reading but in various subjects"* (DI). In addition, the respondent explained further as found in the following quotation:

> *"For the local aspect, I draw inspiration from our culture in Dompu, Bima, and Sumbawa. So, the folktales or stories from these regions are also incorporated into my reading lessons, where I begin to include local texts that feature narratives related to these folk stories."* (DI)

The use of local culture-based materials aims to motivate students and treat them according to their background. This statement was then reinforced by other participants as said by the following two participants:

> *"One benchmark for choosing the approach and materials used to enhance student motivation here is the students' life background."* (RD)

> *"The types of materials that I commonly use in the 'reading for pleasure' course must genuinely bring them joy, such as tourism, culinary, and materials related to their life context. The materials used should be familiar to the students so that they enjoy it."* (JS)

The selection of materials based on the student's background and basic knowledge encourages students to be actively involved in the teaching process. This step is one of the important principles in teaching using the CTL approach which encourages teachers to connect the material with the context of students' lives.

Lecturers' Opinion of the Challenges of Using CTL in Teaching Reading

In the learning process, almost all educators face various challenges related to teaching materials, teaching methods, student characteristics, and other aspects that affect the effectiveness of learning. One of the main challenges revealed by the research participants is

the low interest in reading among students in Dompu, as conveyed by DI: *"One of the challenges I face is the very low interest in reading among students in Dompu."* (DI). In addition, DI also highlighted linguistic obstacles that contribute to difficulties in understanding the material: *"Not to mention linguistic factors, such as limited vocabulary, and so on."* (DI)

These two challenges are not independent factors, but are interrelated and influence each other. Low interest in reading can negatively impact students' language mastery and reading skills, while limited vocabulary and weak linguistic skills can hinder their understanding of more complex academic texts.

In addition to obstacles related to reading interest and linguistic competence, another challenge that arises is the limited availability of teaching materials based on local culture. This is a serious obstacle for lecturers in implementing a contextual learning approach, as expressed by RD:

"The challenges in implementing a contextual approach are, first, related to teaching materials. Materials related to local wisdom or socio-cultural conditions in Bima and Dompu are very limited." (RD)

JS also added as contained in the following quote:

"The biggest challenge, in my opinion, is the difficulty of finding teaching materials that are suitable for the local context. In addition, the availability of materials in English is also still very limited." (BD)

This limitation indicates that there is a gap between the curriculum that is expected to be contextual-based and the reality in the field, where the available teaching materials often do not reflect the experience and culture of students, thus reducing the relevance and effectiveness of learning.

In response to these challenges, lecturers adopted various alternative strategies to ensure that teaching materials remain in accordance with contextual learning principles. One of the strategies used is to develop teaching materials independently, where lecturers compile learning materials that are more relevant to the social and cultural background of students. In addition, they also encourage students to conduct case studies that involve direct interviews with cultural leaders or local communities, so that students not only gain knowledge from written teaching materials but also from direct experience that enriches their understanding. Furthermore, lecturers also assign students to choose teaching materials based on their interests and expertise, which not only increases engagement in learning but also provides opportunities for students to apply academic concepts in real contexts. These strategies reflect innovative approaches in overcoming limited teaching resources and strengthening students' active involvement in the learning process.

However, while this strategy can be a short-term solution, more systematic efforts from various stakeholders, including educational institutions, governments, and researchers, are needed to increase the availability of local culture-based teaching materials, both in Indonesian and English. In addition, policies that support the development and distribution of context-based teaching materials need to be implemented, including training for lecturers in designing more inclusive and research-based teaching materials. Thus, challenges in learning to read, especially those related to reading interest, linguistic competence, and the availability of teaching materials, can be overcome more effectively and sustainably.

Lecturers' Opinion of the Benefits of Using CTL in Teaching Reading

The contextual approach to reading instruction has significant benefits in improving the effectiveness of the learning process. By applying this approach, reading instruction becomes not only an academic activity but also an experience that is closely related to the context of students' lives. One participant stated: *"CTL is very beneficial for my students, especially for beginners or those in the first and second semesters"* (DI). This statement was later reinforced by another participant: *"Considering the effectiveness of contextual or CTL, it cannot be ignored. It is very effective in my opinion"* (JS). The implementation of this approach also encourages students to reactivate their prior knowledge thus enriching their learning experience and improving the overall quality of learning.

> *"CTL is highly suitable and effective for use on our campus because it stimulates students' knowledge. When I present the material, they immediately respond with 'Oh yes.'"* (RD)

This statement highlights the importance of using local materials in the learning process. As a result, they become more actively involved in the learning process. When students see the connection between the material learned and their own life experiences, they tend to be more interested and motivated to understand the material.

Discussions

Understanding lecturers' perceptions of the contextual approach to teaching reading is an important step in improving learning effectiveness. The Findings showed that lecturers have diverse views and experiences related to this approach, namely lectures' perception of the CTL concept, lecturers' experience of CTL implementation, lecturers' experience of selecting teaching material, lecturers' opinion of the challenges of using CTL in teaching reading, lecturers' opinion of the benefits of using CTL in teaching reading.

Firstly, lecturers' perception of the concept of CTL (Contextual Teaching and Learning) has a significant impact on the effectiveness of implementing this approach in the learning process. Lecturers' beliefs and understanding of the value and benefits of CTL will provide direction in designing and delivering learning materials. Lecturers who are convinced of the benefits of contextual learning tend to be more open to the integration of real-life elements in their curriculum. They try to create learning experiences that are relevant to real-world situations, thus increasing student attraction and engagement. Research has demonstrated that incorporating real-world context into the curriculum can enhance students' enthusiasm and engagement (Al-Mutawah et al., 2022; Alshumaimeri, 2023; Lupeja & Komba, 2022).

Secondly, lecturers who have experience in implementing CTL can relate learning materials to real contexts, enabling students to understand the relevance and practical application of the concepts learned. Through this experience, lecturers can create an immersive and engaging learning environment, motivate students to be active in the learning process, and increase their involvement in complex problem-solving.

Thirdly, Materials that are based on local culture or relevant to the context of students' lives have a very important role in motivating them to be actively involved in the learning process, especially in improving students' reading skills (Indrayadi & Yandri, Hengki, 2020; Laila et al., 2021), motivation (Ismiyani, 2021; Kusmana et al., 2020; Sudirman et al., 2020), critical thinking (Arti & Ikhsan, 2020), and problem-solving (Samo et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2014). This emphasizes that the context-related materials and student experience play an important role.

Fourth, the challenges caused by the limited availability of learning materials and low English proficiency levels require a multifaceted approach. These include efforts to improve vocabulary and background knowledge (Elleman & Oslund, 2019), variations in teaching strategies (Nurkamto et al., 2021), providing interesting reading materials (Wei et al., 2021), increasing teachers' awareness and motivation (Sari et al., 2022), and considering students' reading interests (Yulmiati et al., 2022). This is an attempt to overcome barriers to reading instruction that may arise from students' lack of interest.

Lastly, all respondents stated that the CTL approach is effective because students can take an active role in the learning process to explore concepts through their knowledge and experience (Selvianiresa & Prabawanto, 2017). This method encourages students to link the knowledge gained with its application in their daily lives (Azkiya et al., 2019). Other research results show that the application of the CTL approach is effective in improving concept understanding as well as student learning outcomes in various subjects, such as mathematics, writing, and language skills (Dewi & Primayana, 2019; Haryono & Hikmah, 2023; Indrayadi & Yandri, Hengki, 2020; Wahyuni, 2021; Yudha et al., 2019; Zuhrie et al., 2020). In addition, the CTL approach also triggers the emergence of creativity, active student participation, and meaningful learning experiences (Zuhrie et al., 2020). The implementation of CTL has also been suggested to help improve learning achievement and concept understanding of students who have lower academic performance (Jannah et al., 2023). In addition, compared to conventional approaches, CTL approaches are more effective in improving students' writing competence and comprehension (Badriyah et al., 2018).

Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions and experiences of using Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) to teach reading in different educational settings. Several key points emerged from the findings. First, teachers interpreted CTL in different ways. They all emphasized the importance of tailoring lessons to students' interests. Second, facilitators showed how CTL engages students and encourages active participation. Thirdly, resources based on local culture excite students, improve reading skills, and enhance learning. Fourth, limited teaching resources and low English language skills required a multi-faceted approach to overcome. Finally, lecturers unanimously agreed that the CTL approach improves student learning outcomes across disciplines by fostering meaningful learning experiences. This study highlights the need to use new pedagogies such as CTL to meet the diverse needs of students and to improve education in different settings. The findings can help educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to improve reading instruction and student learning.

The results of this study encourage teachers to develop teaching materials that are on the level of students' abilities and needs to create an active classroom atmosphere and increase students' motivation to learn. In addition, limited resources and low students' United Kingdom language skills require teachers to solve these problems by improving lecturers' skills both in designing materials and choosing teaching strategies.

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Biography

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