

Assessing EFL Papuan students' ability in memorizing English vocabulary using context clues strategy

Monika Gultom*

Cenderawasih University, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author; Email: monikagultom73@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Research on how to utilize students' ability to master the foreign language especially in memorizing some words in a target language is believed very important. The purpose of the study is to assess the ability of native Papuans in memorizing some English vocabulary using the keyword system strategy of a selected translated Sentani folktale, entitled The Legend of Sentani Lake. Data was obtained from around 32 students who were asked to memorize several target words. The result showed that students' keyword system strategy was useful in connecting the spelling, pronunciation, and new words to their prior knowledge by looking at the similarity between the target word and keyword in sound using the key-word system strategy. It is also showed that Papuan EFL students have a high ability to utilize existing knowledge and memorable relationship to memorize new or currently studied English vocabulary. The findings provide important insight for foreign language teaching and learning regarding the importance of encouraging students to develop their ability to master the language being learned by connecting it with something close to the context of Papuan native students' live in order to make it more effective and meaningful.

Keywords: assessing, memorizing vocabulary, context clues strategy, EFL, Papua

Article history

Submitted:
14 September 2023

Accepted:
23 November 2023

Published:
23 November 2023

Citation (APA Style): Gultom, M. (2023). Assessing EFL Papuan students' ability in memorizing English vocabulary using context clues strategy. *LITERA*, 22(3), 307-314. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v22i3.66016>.

INTRODUCTION

Many experts believe that teachers should provide alternative ways or strategies for the learners to develop meaningful language learning and develop their vocabulary knowledge by fostering word consciousness, and interest in words (Nation 1990; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 2008, Nemati, 2009). Increasing learners vocabulary knowledge can be through the use of some strategy system, which Schmidt (1990) called by vocabulary learning strategies used by individuals or groups through consciously encouraged learners to process information in learning vocabulary. This included both the discovery strategies that are about receiving new words and understanding the lexical meaning and consolidation strategies that are about the strategy in composing the memory cognitively (Song et al., 2017; Arti Prihatini et al., 2023; Kilic, 2019; Andi Fitri Rahmasari et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to introduce learners to be aware of using strategy in learning new words in target language and actively trying to connect learners with the words that are familiar with them in the context using the so-called keyword system strategy as parts of learners' context clues (mnemonic devices) strategies.

The keyword system strategy or some people may called it keyword method instruction has been proved are superior in terms of improving learners vocabulary learning Majeed, A et al., 2000; Ana Piribabadi et al., 2014; Tavakoli et al., 2013; Taheri et al., 2016). The study then explores on how some Junior High School students in Papua use their context clues strategies in recalling the new vocabulary words using Keyword System as a strategy in making them easily and most likely interesting memorizing some given target words into by associating them with something familiar both in sounds, spelling, or something closed to their world knowledge.

Keyword System is a system that used words in a text as the keywords to help young EFL students easily memorize the meaning of target words and therefore will enable them to produce the target language, as part of the other five devices in Mnemonic Devices used as vocabulary learning strategies

considered as the most strategy that effectively help students memorizing new words (Henson & Eller, 1999; Higbee & Kuniyama, 1984, Davoudi & Yousefi, 2016). Some comparison studies and quasi-experiment also show that the implementation of key word system or some might called keyword method helped learners to recall the new words easily (Wyra, Lawson, & Hungi, 2007; Abdel-Majeed, 2000;) and significantly improved students' ability in recalling new words when combining with meaningful context. This strategy then might also considered effective since it is coming from learners' meaningful context since they could associate with something from their native language or something around their own word knowledge and world concept.

In that, students are able to acquire new words or vocabulary by associating the new words with their native language. Some other important studies about showed that keyword system are believed has powerful effects for second/foreign language learners to develop their vocabulary acquisition (Abdel-Majeed, 2000; Ana Piribabadi et al., 2014; Tavakoli et al., 2013, Taheri et al., 2016), since alphabetical phonemes spelling still considered became one of the challenging problem in learning foreign language. Therefore, it is important to considering the keyword system method or strategy by comparing or associating target words with the learners own keywords in context, which sound similar to the learners' first language and establish a link with the chosen keyword, provide learners opportunity to familiarize the learning through creatively and interactively building the connection between the TL and their own context. It is also believed that doing such connection with learners own context and word knowledge with its target word might facilitate and increasing learners' interest in learning target word in the learning process (Ramli, Boeriswati and Emzir, 2019:6), even these learners' experiences in making or choosing their own learning target words using learners own strategy were recommended included in developing the classroom activities in such a curriculum practice accordingly to the school's culture and context (Barabas, 2018:9). Therefore, in this study, Sentani folktales will be used as hints for English young learners from a favorite junior high school in Jayapura, Papua, as they mostly originally from the Sentani tribe and familiar with the story. Inspiring by Lawson & Hogben (1996), who stated that teaching English using literature is motivating and encouraging since it has different style of writing and authentic use of language (esp. in local language), and it can be used as an access to cultural background and vocabulary expansion; aspects in Mnemonic devices (context clues) will be used in exploring English vocabulary from a Sentani folktales that familiar with the students.

Sentani folktales as one of *Sentani* cultural and social product transmitted from generation to generation in *Sentani* society and Jayapura in general. As many experts explained that culture and language correlated and interrelated to each other (Hughes, 2014;Tengku Sepora Mahadi et al., 2012; Munir et al. 2018), it is then believed that exploring the students' context clues using *Sentani* folktales will be helpful to increase English young learners' in Jayapura vocabulary along with their ability to acquire the target words by utilizing strategies on making a connection between their previously background knowledge and context and the target words that made them easily to recognize and memorize, since context clues related to the way students associated some target words with something familiar or close to their lives and way of thinking.

The way students' thought divided by Anderson and Krathwohl (Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, 2001) into several sub skills on thinking, which are understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These sub skills on thinking can be perceived as the order of thinking and the way students' associated or correlated the given texts like Sentani folktales that familiar to them are believed might help students in maximizing the process of acquiring the target words, while at the same time the process of acquiring the target language (TL) will help learners to increase their critical thinking skill (Piaget, 1971; Vygotsky, 1962), by learning new words independently and creatively. This study aims to provide ideas for foreign language teacher that holds an essential position in developing students' thinking skills as well as the students' language skills in maximizing the acquiring process, whereas teacher is suggested to provide a contextual reading text and facilitate the learning class with a condition where learners can enthusiastically understand the task in finding the words that connect to the given target words, analyzing and evaluating the connection between each words, and finally creating their own key words in memorizing the target words. This study also suggested that it is also important for teachers to activate learners' ability to use key words strategies to create words that might help them memorizing learned target words as one of the process of acquiring foreign language.

METHOD

A total number of thirty-two (N=32) eight-grade junior high school students of a favorite junior high school in *Jayapura, Papua, Indonesia*, took part as the participants in the study, ranged from 13 to 15 years of ages, selected from total 128 students from three classes in eight-grade by an adapted vocabulary test from Nation (2011). There were two classes was chosen as the sample using homogeneity test in SPSS 16.0, and asked to find the key word in memorizing some words from the *Sentani* folktales entitles *The Legend of Sentani Lake*.

This qualitative study discussed only on how students explore the folktales with the key word system strategy and creatively tries to find the appropriate keyword for some vocabulary by connecting them with their mother tongue in order to help them easily memorize the target words. After participants read the chosen *Sentani* folktales, they were asked to choose some words that familiar for them in terms of the sound and try to identify the appropriate keyword for such words. Firstly, they were grouped in a group of three or four, and then they identified the key word system for the list of the words in the class discussion before decided the appropriate keyword system for all of them.

Data of students' keywords were then collected by asking students to read the *Sentani* folktales first, find the target words ("source," "hut," "mountain", "valley," "lived," "saw", "went") from the folktales that appear repeatedly and adequately represent the entire content of the folklore, whereas students have to fulfill in a table, as well as their chosen keywords. Data about students' chosen keyword then analyzed by firstly making sure that they all had similarity in terms of the reason why they all agreed to choose certain keywords in memorizing the target words from the folktales in a class discussion after finishing the task. Students' explanation about the connection between the target words and chosen words in how they were similar in pronounced then analyzed one by one considering their phonetic symbols accordingly to the way the students pronouncing that are easily connect with the students' previously knowledge, and experience that might help in memorizing the target words taken from the folktales. The folktales is the story about the occurrence of Lake *Sentani*, a beautiful lake in *Jayapura* District, Papua Province, Indonesia, where in ancient times, there was a tribe in the *Sentani* area did not find water even though they heard the sound of flowing water. The two sons of the chief then went to a mountain called *Cyclop* to look for the source of the sound of water, but they only found a hut where an old husband and wife lived in a hut. In short, the old man then took them around and let them get water from the third pool which he showed them with one condition, namely that on the way home they were not allowed to shoot any animals they encountered on the road. They came down from the mountain but on their way they could not restrain their desire to shoot the baby, so at that moment the water they were carrying spilled and flowed continuously until it filled the entire valley, thus forming a large lake, namely Lake *Sentani*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Sentani folktale entitled "*The Legend of Sentani Lake*" is a tale about the historical background of a big lake in Sentani called Sentani lake, where long time ago there were two brothers from *Sentani* who broke a promise from an old man for not shooting animals on their way back home from the *Cyclop* mountain or there will be flooded in all the valleys. The folktales are read and comprehended by the students first, and then they were asked to identified seven (7) target words from the folktales to explore the way they will create keyword of their own that connect or similar in terms of the pronunciation with their mother language as a toll for remembering the meaning of the target word. The table below shown the implementation of keyword to be applied in teaching vocabulary presented in *Sentani* folktale entitled "*The Legend of Sentani Lake*." The students' ability in analyzing, evaluating, and creating keywords toward the 7 target words showed that they have the ability in understanding, analyzing, evaluating, and creating the keyword by finding out the similarity in the way the keywords and the target words are similar in sound of pronunciation. Analysis of sound similarities between the target words that have been studied from the folklore text *The Legend of Sentani Lake* and the keywords chosen by students to remember the target words are described and analyzed in two tables, where the first table is intended to help students understand the task well.

The selection of keywords made by students is one of the outcomes of the learning process which can be used then to assess students' ability to master or to remember new vocabulary in the target language being studied. Griffin and Nix (1991) explain that facts and information about learning outcomes and the achievement of a student can explain a person's characteristic and ability to learn or

master something, in that facts and evidence about how junior high school students in *Jayapura, Papua, Indonesia*, determine keywords that appropriate for them in remembering the target language words can be seen as a fact or proof of their ability to master a target language. As a non-test-based assessment, the portfolio of the facts or evidence on how junior high school students in *Jayapura, Papua, Indonesia*, produce seven (7) keywords to memorize words in an FL they are studying is used to explain the students' ability in memorizing new English targeted vocabulary, as explained below.

Results

The target word “source, hut, mountain, valley, trip, live, poured out, saw, covered, went,” in “*The Legend of Sentani Lake*” folktale were identified as “*sos, hati, mantan, fale*, in terms of the similarity on the sound when the students produced the target word and they could easily memorized them by finding the word in Papuan Malay language that have similar sound system. Papuan Malay are language that are used two provinces, Papua and West Papua Provinces, where this language is naturally emerged due to contact and interaction with non-native Papuans who live in this provinces, which has a sound system that is somewhat different from the bahasa Indonesia used in other provinces in Indonesia (Karubaba, 2017). The similar sound system between the target word and the Papuan Malay are showed from this table.

Table 1. Students' Keyword System 1

Target Word	Phonetic Symbol	Chosen Keyword	Phonetic Symbol
Source	/sôrs/	Sos	/sos/
Hut	/hət/	Hati	/ha. ti/
Mountain	/'mount'(ə)n/	Mantan	/man.tan/
Valley	/'valē/	Vale	/fa. lē/
Trip	/trip/	Se-trip	/sē. trip/

Table 1 shows that target word “Source” being identified had the same sound with keyword “*sos*” (in Papuan Malay language) that preceded with sound “/s/” and ended with sound “/s/” as well. In which the both sounds “/s/” were identified as “Voiceless Lingua-alveolar Stop” which the place of articulation was articulated by the tongue and the gum ridge, produced by letting the air leak from narrow passage, and produced without vibrations. For most of the participant students the chosen keyword “*sos*” has some meanings for them and the students easily chose this “*sos*” since it is easily recognized as the abbreviation “*SOS*” which stands for “save our soul,” or it could also be related to “social something.” The students' chosen words show that they are able to make a connection my making simplicity of the way the word “source” pronounced.

To be different with the target word “source,” the target word “Hut” being identified had the same sound with keyword “*Hati*” as in English means “heart,” proceeded with sound “/h/” that identified as “Voiceless Glottal Fricative” which sound “/h/” was articulated by lungs and diaphragm and produced by letting the air leak from narrow passage, and without vibrations. Those were also presented “/t/” that identified as “Voiceless Lingua-alveolar Stop which sound was articulated by the tongue and gum ridge and produced by stop the air completely and without vibration. The chosen keyword “hat” easily connected, by the entire participant, with the Indonesian word “*hati*” in the sense of the sound similarity and no clear explanation about the fact of adding vowel “i” after the chosen key word “hat.” This thing occurs eventually for the target word “mountain” which required some vowel substitution.

Target word “Mountain” being identified had the same sound with keyword “*Mantan*” (in Papuan Malay language), consisted of “/mount’/ and “/man/” that preceded with sound “/m/” that identified as “Voiced Bilabial Nasal” which sound was articulated by the lower lip and upper lip and produced by pushing out air from nose and with vibration. Presented sound “/t/” in the middle that identified as “Voiceless Lingua-alveolar Stop” which sound was articulated by the tongue and gum ridge and produced by stopping the air completely and without vibration. Those also ended with “/(ə)/ “/n/” and “/a/” /n/” actually different in sound “/(ə)/ and “/a/” pronounced vowels in which both of the sounds were voiced. Sound “/n/” that identified “Voiced Lingua-alveolar Nasal” that articulated by the tongue and gum ridge and produced by pushing out air with vibration. “*Mantan*” in *bahasa Indonesia* means “ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, or ex-something” is very common in terms of the participant word knowledge and their age level interested, which makes them easily related the target word into this chosen keyword.

The target word are “lived, saw, went,” founded in “*The Legend of Sentani Lake*” folktale and were identified as “*lif, sobat, wenda,*” most of them are chosen because of the similarity in the sound when the participants produced the target word and they could easily memorized the word, as it is showed from this table.

Table 2. Students’ Keyword System 2

Target Word	Phonetic System	Chosen Keyword	Phonetic Symbol
Lived	/liv. id /	lift	/lif/
Saw	/sô/	Sobat/Sawo	/so.bat/
Went	/went/	Wenda	/wen. da/

As it is found in the target word “valley,” the target word “Lived” being identified had the same sound with keyword “Lift” (in Papuan Malay language), by reducing the consonant “t.” It is preceded by sound “/l/” that is identified as “Voiced Lingua-alveolar Liquid” which sound was articulated by the tongue and gum ridge and produced by obstructing the airflow but without causing a friction resulting in a consonant with vowel-like quality and so with vibration. The chosen target word “*lif*” proved that the participant had not considered the word “live” and “life” should not be pronounced differently and had different meaning as well when it is pronouncing.

The target word “saw” being identified had the same sound with keyword “*sobat*” and “*sawo*” (in Papuan Malay language) that preceded with sound “/s/” which the both sounds “/s/” were identified as “Voiceless Lingua-alveolar Stop” which the place of articulation was articulated by the tongue and the gum ridge, produced by letting the air leak from narrow passage, and produced without vibrations. The chosen keyword “*sobat*” and “*sawo*” for target word “saw” seemed much more unrelated to each other compared to other chosen keywords mentioned before, since both these two chosen keywords had no connection at all in sound and meaning, except that these two keywords are initially pronounced /sô/.

Target word “Went” being identified had the same sound with keyword “*Wenda*” (in Papuan Malay language). These words were similar preceded by sound “/w/” that is identified as “Voiced Lingua-velar Glide” which sound was articulated by tongue and soft palate (velum) and produced by beginning the sound from a vowel position and end it in a consonant and with vibration. The chosen keyword “*wenda*” was actually a family name from one of the great tribe in Papuan society, and was considered as one of the mountain tribe stayed in Jayapura a lot. The way the participant associated the target word “went” with the chosen keyword “*wenda*” that seemed quite far in terms of meaning and word knowledge proved that the participant tended to chosen their keyword considering something that familiar for them.

Discussion

The next discussion focuses on the use of the keyword method or strategy in learning English as a foreign language where students are encouraged to use their previous knowledge as well as their ability to relate it to things close to their lives, making it easier to them to acquire and retain the vocabularies they learn better. Some studies showed that the keyword method is beneficial in helping students in making a link between a learned target words and a familiar L1 word that has similarity in sounds (Abdel-Majeed, 2000). The finding found the simplification of a target word in terms of the similarity sound as well from the target word “Valley” identified into the chosen keyword “Vale” (in Papuan Malay). This chosen word preceded with “/v/” and “/f/” that were classified in “Labio-dental” that both articulated by the lip and teeth and they both were classified as “fricative” sounds because of letting the air leak from narrow passage but they both were different in vibration produced. The chosen keyword “vale” had no specific meaning either no connection to any lexical unit of Indonesian vocabulary, but the participants use the consonant “v” and “f” both respectively by considering both fricative sound as equal and with an ignorance to their sound and potential meaning differences. This finding showed that most EFL students from a favorite school where dominantly are native Papuans in *Jayapura, Papua*, tend to rely on similarities in terms of sounds and/or spelling methods to help them memorize new English words that are learned, which is acknowledged to be very helpful for them in acquiring the new vocabulary.

In terms of the meaning, this chosen key word had nothing to do with any concept in the participants’ word knowledge or something, but it is admitted sounds more “Papuan Malay” for them.

This phenomenon were chosen based on the closeness to the Papuan Malay words and sounds were also found in the next chosen keyword below whereas the target word and the chosen keyword were reducing, adding, and modified creatively by the participants. This finding is in line with what was explained by Rashidi and Sajjadi (2010) who claim that the keyword method is able to facilitate FL learners in learning some words that are not easy to describe or store in memory for a long time, and that vocabulary might be much better to learn by learners in their own way applying their learning strategies (Sabet, Zafarghandi, Naseh, 2015). These findings confirmed that keyword system was useful for EFL students to able to be linked associate meaning of target word with the students' native language, then called by chosen keyword, into something that made the participant easily to recall their memory toward such target words, whether by adding, reducing, replace, modified, or associated with something familiar for them and ended up with recalling the meaning of the target words using the chosen keyword as a strategy in the process of learning or mastering the target word easily. The way participants associate meaning is related to what Margana & Humaera Silvia Maristy (2020) claimed the importance of contextualization learning in facilitating students to memorize thing that they have studied meaningful, whereas learning should be brought in terms of learners' strategy in recalling the meaning of the target words by associating it with their own chosen keyword that had been created and can be used by asking learner to memorize the target word in their long term memory.

CONCLUSION

Based on that analysis and description, it is concluded that papuan EFL students at junior high school level in *Jayapura, Papua*, have a high ability to memorize English vocabulary by connecting the spelling, pronunciation, and their prior knowledge and looking at the similarity between the target word and keyword in sound like using the Keyword-system strategy, and therefore this strategy has been proven to provide great benefits in increasing students' vocabulary mastery in foreign language teaching and learning.

Asking students to find keywords as a strategy in an effort to memorize words in the target language being studied has been proven to be effective in increasing students' ability to master the target words by exploring the similarities in sound between the target words and words that are close to the context of the students' life. Further research regarding how students improve their ability to master a language with strategies that involve previous experiences and things that are close to students is very necessary, especially in making sentences, not just memorizing words without meaningful context.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Gratitude is given to all parties who have contributed and facilitated the successful completion of this research, especially in obtaining authentic data from participants of this research.

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