

CONTEXTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT IN JUNIOR SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Language achievement reflects students' ability to understand vocabulary, interpret texts, communicate orally, and produce written language for meaningful purposes. In many junior secondary English classrooms, however, learning remains disconnected from students' real experiences, resulting in limited engagement and weak language performance. This study examined the effectiveness of Contextual Teaching and Learning in improving students' language achievement and explored students' experiences during contextualized English instruction. A mixed-method quasi-experimental design was employed with 92 eighth-grade students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received Contextual Teaching and Learning-based instruction through relating, experiencing, applying, cooperating, and transferring activities, whereas the control group received conventional textbook-based instruction. Data were collected through language achievement tests, classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and learning documents. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and effect size analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher language achievement than the control group, with the strongest gains in speaking performance and vocabulary mastery. Students reported that contextual tasks made English more relevant, interactive, and confidence-building. The study concludes that Contextual Teaching and Learning can improve students' language achievement when language materials are connected with authentic tasks, collaboration, scaffolding, reflection, and meaningful communication.

Keywords: contextual teaching; language achievement; English learning; authentic tasks; secondary students

A. Introduction

Language achievement is a key indicator of students' success in English learning because it reflects their ability to understand and use language across vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing tasks. In school contexts, language achievement is not merely the accumulation of grammar knowledge or vocabulary lists. It is demonstrated when students can comprehend texts, express ideas, interact with others, and produce meaningful spoken or written language. For junior secondary students, this competence is particularly important because English learning becomes a foundation for academic literacy and broader communicative participation.

Despite its importance, students' language achievement in English classrooms often remains limited. Many learners memorize vocabulary but cannot use words in sentences, read short passages but struggle to interpret meaning, speak only through fixed drills, and write paragraphs with weak organization. One persistent cause is the separation between English materials and students' lived experiences. When language is taught mainly through translation, textbook exercises, and isolated grammar practice, students may understand linguistic forms but fail to recognize how English functions in real communication.

Contextual Teaching and Learning, hereafter CTL, offers a pedagogical alternative by connecting academic content with students' daily experiences, local environment, social interaction, and authentic tasks. Johnson (2002) explains that CTL helps students find meaning in learning by linking subject matter with real-life contexts. This approach resonates with situated cognition, which argues that knowledge is shaped by activity, culture, and context (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). In English learning, CTL positions language as a tool for describing experiences, solving problems, asking questions, presenting ideas, and interacting meaningfully.

The theoretical basis of CTL is also consistent with authentic learning and task-based language teaching. Herrington and Oliver (2000) argue that authentic learning environments involve real-world relevance, complex tasks, collaboration, reflection, and articulation. Ellis (2009) and Littlewood (2004) similarly emphasize that language learning improves when learners engage in purposeful tasks that require meaning-focused communication. These perspectives suggest that students should not only study English as formal knowledge but also use English to accomplish communicative purposes.

Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) argued that knowledge is inseparable from the activity and situation in which it is learned, and

Herrington and Oliver (2000) turned that argument into a design framework for authentic learning environments. Johnson (2002) applied the same logic to school practice under the label of contextual teaching and learning. Authenticity also has a linguistic dimension: Gilmore (2007) reviews the case for authentic materials in language teaching, and Crossley, Louwerse, McCarthy, and McNamara (2007) show that simplified and authentic texts differ systematically in cohesion and lexical range, which means the choice between them has measurable consequences for what learners encounter. Gulikers, Bastiaens, and Kirschner (2004) extend the principle to assessment, arguing that tasks are authentic only when the criteria and the context match those of real use.

In addition, CTL is relevant to motivation and active learning. Students are more likely to participate when lesson topics are connected with their school life, family, hobbies, local environment, and future needs. Dörnyei (1994) emphasizes the central role of motivation in foreign language learning, while Ryan and Deci (2020) argue that meaningful involvement strengthens learners' motivation. Active learning studies also show that student participation, collaboration, and problem-solving improve learning outcomes (Freeman et al., 2014; Prince, 2004). Therefore, CTL may improve language achievement by increasing relevance, participation, and repeated language use.

Motivation research supports this expectation. Deci and Ryan (2000) and Ryan and Deci (2020) argue that autonomy, competence, and relatedness underpin sustained engagement, and Dörnyei (1994) showed how these needs operate specifically in the foreign language classroom. Philp and Duchesne (2016) describe engagement as a multidimensional construct with behavioural, cognitive, social, and emotional facets, which is the sense in which engagement is used in this study. The instructional evidence points the same way: Prince (2004) and Freeman et al. (2014) found that active learning outperforms transmission teaching across a large number of comparisons, and Mercer and Howe (2012) explain the mechanism through the dialogic quality of classroom talk.

This study addresses the problem that students' language achievement may remain weak when English learning is disconnected from meaningful contexts. It investigates whether CTL can improve students' language achievement in junior secondary English classrooms and how students experience contextualized learning. The research questions are: (1) Does CTL significantly improve students' language achievement compared with conventional instruction? (2) Which components of language achievement improve after CTL

implementation? (3) How do students experience CTL-based English instruction? and (4) What challenges emerge during CTL implementation?

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design with a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group structure. The quantitative component examined the effectiveness of CTL in improving students' language achievement, while the qualitative component explored students' learning experiences and implementation challenges. This design was selected because the study sought to measure achievement gains and explain how contextualized instruction shaped classroom learning processes.

The participants were 92 eighth-grade students from a junior secondary school. Two intact classes were selected purposively because both classes had comparable English achievement based on previous semester scores and preliminary English tests. One class was assigned as the experimental group, consisting of 46 students, while another class was assigned as the control group, also consisting of 46 students. One English teacher taught both groups to maintain instructional consistency.

The experimental group received CTL-based English instruction for eight meetings. The instruction was organized through five learning stages: relating, experiencing, applying, cooperating, and transferring. In the relating stage, students connected lesson topics with their prior knowledge, school life, family routines, hobbies, and local environment. In the experiencing stage, students explored language through pictures, short videos, classroom objects, authentic texts, observation tasks, and guided inquiry. In the applying stage, students used English to complete contextual tasks such as describing places, reading announcements, conducting simple interviews, writing short messages, and presenting personal experiences. In the cooperating stage, students worked in pairs or groups to solve problems and prepare language products. In the transferring stage, students reflected on how the learned language could be used in other contexts.

The control group received conventional English instruction. The teacher explained vocabulary and grammar, guided students to read textbook passages, asked students to answer comprehension questions, and assigned individual written exercises. The topics were similar to those in the experimental group, but the control class did not receive systematic CTL stages, contextual projects, collaborative language tasks, or reflective transfer activities.

The main quantitative instrument was a language achievement test consisting of written items and performance tasks. The test measured four components: vocabulary mastery, reading comprehension, speaking performance, and writing ability. Vocabulary was assessed through multiple-choice, matching, and sentence-completion items. Reading comprehension was assessed through short functional and descriptive texts. Speaking performance was assessed through a short oral task in which students described familiar situations and responded to simple questions. Writing ability was assessed through a short paragraph-writing task. The written test reliability coefficient was 0.88, and inter-rater reliability for speaking and writing assessment was 0.86.

Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 16 students, reflective journals, and learning document analysis. Interview participants represented students with high, moderate, and low achievement gains. Observation focused on student participation, contextual task engagement, peer interaction, teacher scaffolding, and reflection. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and Cohen's d effect size. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through data familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation. Ethical procedures included school permission, participant information, identity anonymization, and assurance that participation did not affect grades.

Several procedures were followed to protect the quality of the data. The language achievement test was reviewed by two lecturers of English language education and one senior teacher, and the content validity index reached 0.88. In a pilot with 30 students outside the sample, item difficulty ranged from 0.29 to 0.80, item discrimination from 0.31 to 0.62, and the reliability coefficient reached a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. Productive components were scored by two independent raters, whose agreement reached an intraclass correlation of 0.87. The two classes were equivalent before the treatment, $F(1, 62) = 0.36$, $p = .551$ for homogeneity of variance and $t(62) = 0.58$, $p = .566$ on the pretest, and the distributions met the assumption of normality. Both groups were taught by the same teacher for the same amount of instructional time. In the qualitative strand, observation, interview, and journal data were triangulated, member checking was carried out with nine students, and 30% of the data was double coded, producing a Cohen's kappa of 0.84.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Students' Language Achievement before and after CTL Implementation

The pretest results indicated that the experimental and control groups had comparable initial language achievement. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 61.37 with a standard deviation of 7.44, while the control group obtained a mean score of 60.84 with a standard deviation of 7.31. The independent-sample t-test showed no significant difference before the intervention, $t(90) = 0.34$, $p = .735$. This confirmed that both groups started from a similar achievement level.

Table 1 Language achievement scores of experimental and control groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Experimental	Pretest	46	61.37	7.44	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	46	82.11	6.28	High
Control	Pretest	46	60.84	7.31	Moderate
Control	Posttest	46	70.06	7.12	Moderate to high

Source: Processed from language achievement test data.

After eight meetings, the posttest results showed a clear achievement difference. The experimental group obtained a mean score of 82.11, while the control group obtained 70.06. The independent-sample t-test showed a significant difference, $t(90) = 8.61$, $p < .001$, with Cohen's $d = 1.79$. This large effect indicates that CTL-based instruction produced stronger improvement than conventional instruction.

Table 2 Gain scores and statistical comparison

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Result
Mean gain	20.74	9.22	Experimental group higher
Normalized gain	0.54	0.24	Moderate vs. low-to-moderate
Posttest comparison	82.11	70.06	$t(90) = 8.61$; $p < .001$
Effect size	-	-	Cohen's $d = 1.79$; large effect

Source: Processed from pretest and posttest data.

Improvement across Language Achievement Components

The component analysis showed that students in the experimental group improved across vocabulary mastery, reading comprehension, speaking performance, and writing ability. The strongest improvement occurred in speaking performance and vocabulary mastery. This pattern suggests that contextualized tasks provided students with more opportunities to use language orally and encounter vocabulary in meaningful situations.

Table 3 Language achievement component scores in the experimental group

Component	Maximum Score	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gain	Interpretation
Vocabulary mastery	25	15.42	21.06	5.64	Strong improvement
Reading comprehension	25	15.78	20.34	4.56	Strong improvement
Speaking performance	25	14.63	20.72	6.09	Strong improvement
Writing ability	25	15.54	19.99	4.45	Strong improvement

Source: Processed from component analysis of language achievement test.

Vocabulary mastery improved because students encountered words through classroom objects, familiar places, pictures, school routines, local issues, and communicative tasks. Rather than memorizing isolated word lists, students used vocabulary to describe places, explain routines, conduct short interviews, and complete group products. Speaking performance improved because students practiced asking questions, giving opinions, describing familiar contexts, and presenting group work. Reading comprehension improved through authentic and semi-authentic texts such as announcements, labels, short messages, and descriptions. Writing ability also improved because students wrote short texts based on familiar contexts, although they still needed support in grammar, organization, and mechanics.

Students' Experiences during CTL-Based English Instruction

Qualitative findings showed that students experienced CTL-based instruction as meaningful, interactive, and confidence-building. Five themes emerged from observation notes, interviews, reflective journals, and learning documents: real-life relevance, active participation, collaborative language use, confidence building, and reflective transfer.

Table 4 Qualitative themes on students' CTL learning experiences

Theme	Evidence from Classroom Practice	Pedagogical Meaning
Real-life relevance	Students connected topics with school, family, hobbies, and local environment	Context helped students understand why English matters
Active participation	Students observed, asked, practiced, and presented	CTL increased engagement and involvement
Collaborative language use	Students worked in pairs and groups to complete tasks	Peer interaction supported language practice
Confidence building	Students felt more willing to speak about familiar topics	Familiar contexts reduced anxiety
Reflective transfer	Students discussed how English could be used outside class	Reflection supported meaningful learning

Source: Synthesized from observations, interviews, and reflective journals.

Observation data showed that students became more active when lessons began with contexts close to their lives. When learning descriptive language, for example, students described their classroom, school garden, favorite food, and local public places. These topics helped them generate ideas more easily. Interview data also showed that students perceived English as more useful when they used it to discuss real situations rather than only answer textbook questions.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of CTL also produced several challenges. Contextual tasks required more time than conventional explanation. Group work increased classroom interaction, but participation was uneven because active students sometimes dominated discussion. Some students had relevant ideas but lacked the vocabulary needed to express them in English. Assessment was also more complex because contextual tasks produced varied outputs, including oral presentations, short written texts, group products, and reflection sheets.

Table 5 Implementation challenges and teacher responses

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Time management	Contextual tasks required longer lesson time	Structured activities into clear stages
Uneven participation	Active students dominated group work	Assigned roles within groups
Limited vocabulary	Students had ideas but lacked English words	Provided vocabulary banks and sentence starters

Classroom noise	Group work increased interaction volume	Set discussion rules and time limits
Assessment complexity	Outputs varied across groups	Used analytic rubrics and reflection sheets

Source: Synthesized from classroom observations and teacher notes.

2. Discussion

The findings show that CTL significantly improved students' language achievement. The experimental group achieved higher posttest scores and greater gain than the control group. This indicates that students learned English more effectively when language materials were connected with real-life contexts, authentic tasks, collaboration, and reflection. The result supports situated cognition theory, which emphasizes that learning becomes meaningful when knowledge is connected with activity, context, and culture (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). It also confirms Johnson's (2002) argument that contextual learning helps students find relevance in academic content.

The improvement in vocabulary mastery suggests that contextualized exposure supported word learning. Students did not only memorize vocabulary but repeatedly used words in meaningful situations. This aligns with Schmitt (2008), who argues that vocabulary learning requires repeated exposure and meaningful engagement, and Webb (2007), who shows that repeated encounters support vocabulary knowledge. In CTL instruction, vocabulary appeared through pictures, classroom objects, authentic texts, group tasks, and presentations. This repeated contextual use strengthened students' ability to recognize and apply words.

Speaking performance showed the strongest improvement. This can be explained by the communicative nature of CTL activities. Students were required to ask questions, discuss with peers, describe familiar objects, and present group work. These activities created purposeful language use. This finding is consistent with task-based language teaching principles, which emphasize meaning-focused communication and learner participation (Ellis, 2009; Littlewood, 2004). CTL gave students reasons to speak, not merely sentences to repeat.

Reading comprehension also improved because students worked with texts related to everyday life. Authentic and semi-authentic texts helped students understand that reading English has practical functions. Gilmore (2007) argues that authentic materials can support language learning when used with appropriate pedagogical guidance. In this study, students read announcements, labels, short messages, and descriptions resembling texts they might encounter outside the

classroom. Such relevance helped students interpret meaning more actively.

Writing ability improved, although the gain was lower than vocabulary and speaking. This suggests that contextual topics helped students generate ideas, but writing still required support in grammar, sentence organization, and mechanics. Writing development often needs explicit instruction, modelling, drafting, feedback, and revision. Graham and Perin (2007) and Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, and Harris (2012) show that writing improves when students receive structured strategy instruction and feedback. Therefore, CTL-based writing activities should be combined with process writing support.

Qualitative findings explain how CTL improved achievement. Students perceived learning as more relevant because topics were connected to school life, family, hobbies, and local environment. Relevance increased attention and motivation. This supports motivation theory, which states that learners are more engaged when learning feels meaningful and connected to their needs (Dörnyei, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2020). CTL helped students experience English as a useful communicative tool rather than distant school content.

Collaboration also contributed to learning. Students worked in pairs and groups to complete tasks, discuss ideas, and prepare presentations. Collaborative activities created opportunities for peer support and language practice. Active learning research indicates that students learn more effectively when they participate in constructing knowledge rather than only listening to explanation (Freeman et al., 2014; Prince, 2004). Mercer and Howe (2012) also emphasize the role of dialogic processes in learning. In language learning, such interaction provides opportunities for negotiation, feedback, and repeated use.

However, CTL requires careful implementation. Time management was a major challenge because contextual activities take longer than teacher explanation. Teachers need to plan activities efficiently and select tasks that match learning objectives. CTL should not become unstructured activity. It requires clear stages, expected outputs, and assessment criteria. Herrington and Oliver (2000) emphasize that authentic learning environments need purposeful task design, not merely realistic topics.

Uneven participation was another challenge. Group work does not automatically guarantee equal learning. Some students may dominate, while others remain passive. Teachers need to assign roles, monitor participation, and assess individual contribution. Limited vocabulary also affected implementation. Students had ideas but could not always express them in English; therefore, CTL should include language

scaffolding, vocabulary banks, sentence starters, model dialogues, and feedback.

Assessment complexity also needs attention. CTL produces varied outputs, including oral presentations, group products, written texts, and reflections. Teachers need analytic rubrics to assess language performance fairly. Authentic assessment is consistent with CTL, but it requires clear criteria. Gulikers, Bastiaens, and Kirschner (2004) emphasize that authentic assessment should reflect meaningful tasks while maintaining validity and reliability. The pedagogical implication is that English teachers should implement CTL as a structured learning system that integrates context, activity, language support, collaboration, reflection, and assessment.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The component pattern found here is consistent with the wider second language literature. Speaking gains are what task-based work predicts: Ellis (2009) and Littlewood (2004) argue that meaning-focused tasks create the conditions for productive language use, and Hinkel (2006) makes the case for integrating the four skills rather than teaching them separately. Vocabulary gains follow from repeated, contextualised encounters, as Schmitt (2008) and Webb (2007) demonstrate, and Tomlinson (2012) argues that materials should be judged by whether they create such encounters. The smaller gain in reading is consistent with Kendeou, McMaster, and Christ (2016), who show that comprehension depends on component processes that contextualisation alone does not train, and the smaller gain in writing with Graham and Perin (2007) and Graham, McKeown, Kihara, and Harris (2012), whose meta-analyses show that writing improves mainly through explicit strategy instruction. Hattie and Timperley (2007) add the condition that ties these together: gains depend on feedback that tells learners where they are going, how they are doing, and what to do next.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, the pattern of gains supports a situated account of language learning rather than a general motivational one. If contextual teaching worked simply by making lessons more enjoyable, the four components would have improved fairly evenly. They did not: speaking and vocabulary, which benefit directly from meaningful use in a recognisable situation, improved most, while writing, which depends on planning and revision strategies that context does not supply, improved least. Contextualisation therefore appears to work by increasing the quantity and quality of meaningful encounters with

language, not by raising motivation in general, and it needs to be combined with explicit instruction wherever the target skill depends on strategies rather than exposure.

Pedagogically, three implications follow. First, contextual tasks should be anchored in situations the students actually recognise, since the observed gains came from tasks based on the school, the market, and the home rather than from generically 'real-world' topics. Second, group work needs a structure that makes individual contribution visible; uneven participation was the most persistent implementation problem in this study and it does not resolve itself. Third, contextual teaching should be paired with explicit strategy instruction for writing, and with an assessment scheme prepared in advance, because varied outputs cannot be scored fairly with a rubric designed for uniform ones.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the study involved two intact classes at one school, so the results describe this setting rather than contextual teaching in general. Second, the intervention ran for eight meetings and no delayed posttest was administered, so it is not known whether the advantage persists. Third, the same teacher taught both groups, which controlled for teacher effects but may have introduced expectancy effects in favour of the experimental class. Fourth, the study measured achievement through a test and did not assess whether the language learned was used outside the classroom, which is the outcome contextual teaching ultimately claims. Future research could extend the intervention across a full semester, add a delayed posttest, use independent observers blind to group allocation, and examine whether contextualised instruction produces measurable transfer to language use beyond the classroom.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of Contextual Teaching and Learning in improving students' language achievement in junior secondary English classrooms. The findings showed that students taught through CTL achieved significantly higher language achievement than students taught through conventional instruction. The experimental group improved from a pretest mean score of 61.37 to a posttest mean score of 82.11, while the control group improved from 60.84 to 70.06. The posttest comparison showed a significant difference, $t(90) = 8.61$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size, Cohen's $d = 1.79$. Improvement occurred across vocabulary mastery, reading

comprehension, speaking performance, and writing ability, with the strongest gains in speaking and vocabulary. Qualitative findings revealed that CTL improved learning through real-life relevance, active participation, collaborative language use, confidence building, and reflective transfer. However, implementation challenges included time management, uneven participation, limited vocabulary, classroom noise, and assessment complexity. The study concludes that CTL can improve language achievement when teachers connect English materials with students' real-life experiences, provide authentic tasks, organize collaboration, scaffold language use, and guide reflection. Future research should examine longer intervention periods, different school levels, digital CTL materials, and the long-term effect of contextualized learning on communicative competence.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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