The influence of contextualized learning strategies with a focus on multimedia on EFL vocabulary acquisition in young EFL learners.

La influencia de las estrategias de aprendizaje contextualizado con enfoque en multimedia en la adquisición de vocabulario en inglés como lengua extranjera en estudiantes jóvenes.

Autores:

Medina-Soria, Sofía Carmelina
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CUENCA
Maestrante
Cuenca – Ecuador

sofia.medina.07@est.ucacue.edu.ec

https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3092-1032

Albán-Neira, Lorena
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CUENCA
Dra. En Educación Superior
Docente Tutor Cuenca – Ecuador

malbann@ucacue.edu.ec

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4874-9489

Resumen

Esta síntesis de investigaciones explora el impacto del aprendizaje contextualizado en la adquisición de vocabulario en estudiantes jóvenes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), con un enfoque particular en las estrategias basadas en multimedia. A medida que la educación lingüística evoluciona, los métodos que integran el vocabulario en contextos significativos y auténticos como videos animados, narración digital, contenido cultural y tareas del mundo real han demostrado un gran potencial para mejorar la comprensión, la retención y el uso del lenguaje. El aprendizaje contextualizado se refiere a la práctica de presentar el vocabulario a través de contextos reales y con propósito, que conectan el conocimiento previo de los estudiantes y sus experiencias cotidianas con la instrucción en el aula. Este enfoque ha recibido una atención creciente por su capacidad para fomentar un desarrollo del vocabulario más significativo y duradero. La investigación adopta procedimientos sistemáticos, tales como el uso de criterios detallados de inclusión y exclusión, y selecciona artículos revisados por pares de bases de datos académicas reconocidas. Los artículos son analizados y clasificados por categoría. Los hallazgos indican que las estrategias contextualizadas, especialmente aquellas que implican herramientas multimedia, fomentan una mayor participación de los estudiantes, una mejor retención del vocabulario y una transferencia más efectiva al uso del lenguaje en situaciones de la vida real. Los resultados tienen implicaciones prácticas para docentes de EFL, diseñadores curriculares y responsables de políticas educativas nacionales que buscan mejorar la enseñanza del vocabulario mediante métodos relevantes y motivadores

Palabras clave: aprendizaje contextualizado; estrategias multimedia; adquisición de vocabulario; estudiantes jóvenes de EFL; educación lingüística

Abstract

This synthesis of research explores the impact of contextualized learning on vocabulary acquisition in young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with a particular focus on multimedia-based approaches. As language education evolves, methods that embed vocabulary in meaningful and authentic contexts, such as animated videos, digital storytelling, cultural content, and real-world tasks, have shown significant potential for improving comprehension, retention, and language use. Contextualized learning refers to the practice of presenting vocabulary through real-life, purposeful contexts that connect learners' prior knowledge and everyday experiences with classroom instruction. This approach has gained increasing attention for its capacity to promote more meaningful and lasting vocabulary development. The research adopts such systematic procedures as using a detailed inclusion and exclusion criterion and chooses peer-reviewed journal articles from major educational databases. Articles are analyzed and classified by category. Findings indicate that contextualized strategies, especially those involving multimedia tools, foster higher learner engagement, better vocabulary retention, and stronger transfer to real-life communication. The results have practical implications for EFL educators, curriculum designers, and national education policy makers looking to enhance vocabulary teaching through relevant and engaging teaching methods.

Keywords: contextualized learning; multimedia strategies; vocabulary acquisition; young EFL learners; language education

Introduction

For EFL students, vocabulary acquisition remains an essential aspect of language development and forms the foundation for both linguistic and cognitive growth. As students expand their vocabulary, they not only improve their communication skills and expressive abilities, but also enhance cognitive processing and academic performance. At this stage, students benefit from an integrated approach that connects language learning with every day, real-world environments, thereby gaining access to meaningful and engaging vocabulary experiences (Elgort et al., 2020; Minalla, 2024).

Teachers must respond to this need through contextualization, a pedagogical approach that embeds vocabulary within realistic and purposeful situations, emphasizing that vocabulary is not isolated but deeply intertwined with life. From this perspective, vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful, motivating, and relevant for young learners (Elgort et al., 2020; Minalla, 2024). Among the diverse contextualized strategies available, multimedia-based tools such as animated videos, digital storytelling, and educational games have demonstrated particularly effective in creating immersive and authentic learning contexts.

The theoretical basis for contextualized learning is supported by influential frameworks that highlight the importance of meaningful context in second language acquisition. Krashen's Input Hypothesis, for example, argues that language is best acquired when learners receive comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level (Bailey & Kadhum, 2021). In this sense, presenting well-anchored vocabulary through rich, real-life experiences provides natural and stimulating opportunities for language development (Zamani et al., 2022).

In addition to Krashen, cognitive theories also support the role of context in vocabulary learning. The noticing hypothesis suggests that learners are more likely to observe and retain new words when they encounter them in relevant, meaningful, and sometimes unexpected contexts (Nation, 2013). Research shows that young learners exposed to contextualized vocabulary instruction are better at inferring meanings, recognizing word usage, and

retaining vocabulary over time (Zamani et al., 2022). These findings align with the principles of sociocultural learning and situated cognition.

According to sociocultural learning theory, cognitive processes such as language development are socially mediated and strongly influenced by the learner's environment. Knowledge is co-constructed through communication, collaboration, and meaningful interactions with others, especially more capable peers or adults (Nation, 2013). Similarly, situated cognition posits that knowledge is inseparable from the contexts and activities in which it is acquired. Learning by doing through problem-solving and authentic interaction is considered the most effective way to internalize vocabulary.

Despite the compelling theoretical and empirical support, traditional vocabulary instruction methods such as rote memorization and decontextualized word lists still dominate many classrooms. These practices often fail to engage learners meaningfully, resulting in superficial vocabulary acquisition with limited transfer to real-world communication (Nazarova, 2024). In contrast, contextualized learning not only supports deeper understanding and retention, but also improves the practical application of vocabulary (Black & Wright, 2023; Won Shin & Young Kim, 2023).

Research consistently shows that contextualized approaches particularly those involving multimedia resources, interactive tasks, and thematic projects are more effective than traditional methods in terms of student engagement, vocabulary recall, and use in diverse contexts (Elgort et al., 2020; Zarfsaz & Yeganehpour, 2021). Learners exposed to rich, contextualized environments demonstrate stronger lexical knowledge, better usage, and greater motivation.

While several studies have explored the role of context in vocabulary acquisition, there remains a need for clearer understanding of how contextualized learning especially through multimedia strategies can be effectively implemented with young EFL learners. Given their cognitive and developmental characteristics, these learners benefit greatly from hands-on, immersive, and meaningful engagement with vocabulary (Imram Hossain, 2024; Minalla, 2024).

Moreover, the growing integration of technology in education presents new opportunities to contextualize vocabulary through multimedia. Tools such as animated stories, interactive apps, games, and virtual environments can create multisensory input that supports both comprehension and long-term retention (Minalla, 2024; Suggate et al., 2021). Similarly, task-based and project-based learning allow students to use vocabulary in realistic scenarios, developing linguistic skills alongside critical thinking and problem-solving (Bailey & Kadhum, 2021; Imram Hossain, 2024).

In this context, the goal of this research synthesis is to explore the influence of contextualized learning strategies particularly multimedia-based approaches on vocabulary acquisition in young EFL learners. Through a comprehensive review of recent empirical studies, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of how meaningful, authentic learning experiences contribute to effective vocabulary instruction and improved language outcomes.

Materials and Methods

This research synthesis followed a structured and methodical process, inspired by the guidelines proposed by Snyder (2019), to identify, evaluate, and integrate relevant studies on the use of contextualized learning strategies with a particular focus on multimedia in the development of vocabulary among young learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The objective was to offer a broad and meaningful understanding of how these strategies impact vocabulary acquisition in school-aged learners, including both elementary and high school levels.

To ensure a comprehensive and representative selection of sources, a multi-stage search was conducted across several reputable academic databases, including SCOPUS, ERIC, and JSTOR. In addition, Google Scholar was used as a complementary search tool to identify studies that might not be indexed in the primary databases but still held academic relevance. The search terms included a combination of keywords such as "contextualized learning," "vocabulary acquisition," "school," "high school," and "language learning methods." A broader combination "contextualized learning + EFL education + vocabulary acquisition"

was used to capture studies focused specifically on language learning in real-world or meaningful contexts supported by multimedia tools.

The inclusion criteria were clearly defined to ensure the quality and relevance of the selected studies. Articles were included if they were publicly accessible and available online, published between 2020 and 2025, and focused on young EFL learners between the ages of 5 and 17. Moreover, studies had to explore the implementation of contextualized learning strategies, preferably involving multimedia resources such as videos, games, storytelling, or project-based tasks. Only empirical research articles with detailed methodological descriptions and a clear focus on vocabulary acquisition were considered. All selected publications were peer-reviewed to ensure academic rigor.

In total, twenty peer-reviewed articles were selected for analysis. These studies were then reviewed and categorized based on their country of origin, research focus, methodological approach, and the type of contextualized multimedia strategy employed. This classification process made it possible to identify both recurring patterns and unique contributions within different educational settings. The results of this classification are presented in Table 1, providing a clear overview of the academic landscape surrounding contextualized multimedia learning and vocabulary acquisition in young EFL learners.

Table 1. Empirical Studies on Contextualized Learning Strategies

Authors / Year (Country)	Strategy Type	Tool/Format	Focus / Learner Age
Minalla (2024, KSA)	Multimedia	Animated videos	Vocabulary in elementary EFL learners
Kalukar et al. (2023, Indonesia)	Multimedia	Educational videos (case study)	Vocabulary acquisition in 4-year-old learner
Elgort et al. (2020, NZ)	Multimedia	Eye-tracking video tasks	Word learning in context via videos (school age)

MDPI study (2023)	Multimedia	Mobile multimedia flashcard system	Vocabulary retention in EFL learners (school age)
Tang & Elyas (2022)	Multimedia	Mixed-method multimedia input	Vocabulary outcomes in EFL learners (school age)
Rashtchi et al. (2021)	Multimedia	Video-inferred vocabulary	Motivating EFL learners (school age)
Wiley meta (2023)	Multimedia	Screen media & early vocab meta-analysis	Age 0–6 context of media use
MDPI flipped (2025)	Multimedia	Student-created videos (flipped)	Vocabulary in tertiary EFL learners (older teens)
Haque et al. (2024)	Multimedia & tech	Gamified platforms, MALL	EFL learners (various ages)
Jabar & Mansor (2024)	Context clues	Text/context inference tasks	Vocabulary processing in EFL learners
Lowell et al. (2022)	Context clues	Sentence-based clue tasks	Semantic processing in EFL learners
Muhammad et al. (2021)	Context clues	Video-based inference	EFL learners
Rosa et al. (2021, Spain)	Cultural / Context diversity	Visual/textual contexts	School-age EFL learners
Zarfsaz & Yeganehpour (2021)	Task-based	Variety of thematic units	EFL learners
Imram Hossain (2024)	Project-based	Project tasks	EFL children
Namaziandost et al. (2021)	Cultural context	Cultural texts/integration	EFL learners
Zamani et al. (2022)	Context clues	Structured inference tasks	School-age EFL learners

Alnan & Halim (2024)	Sociocultural	Peer interaction tasks	EFL learners
Nguyen (2022, Vietnam)	Multimedia	Interactive reading with multimedia	Young EFL learners
Shin & Kim (2023, SK)	Multimedia	Digital storytelling + repetition	School-age EFL learners

Table 1 presents a curated synthesis of 20 empirical studies from diverse geographical and educational contexts, offering a multifaceted view of how contextualized learning strategies, particularly those involving multimedia tools are being applied to enhance vocabulary acquisition in young EFL learners.

The variety of studies includes contributions from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, New Zealand, South Korea, Iran, Spain, and Vietnam, reflecting both regional specificity and global applicability. This geographic and methodological diversity reinforces the relevance of contextualized learning as a cross-cultural and pedagogically sound approach. Grounded in theoretical frameworks such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Situated Cognition Theory, the studies show that embedding vocabulary in meaningful, authentic, and multimodal contexts leads to deeper comprehension and longer-lasting retention.

Table 2. Methodological Overview of the 20 Studies

Authors / Year (Country)	Research Design	Data Collection Instruments	Approach	Description of Contextualized Strategy
Minalla (2024, KSA)	Quasi-experimental	Pre/post-test	Quantitative	Animated video intervention
Kalukar et al. (2023, Indonesia)	Case study	Observation & interview	Qualitative	Video-based vocabulary activity
Elgort et al. (2020, NZ)	Experimental	Eye-tracking, recall tasks	Quantitative	Incidental vocabulary via video

MDPI study (2023)	Experimental	Pre/post-test, retention test	Quantitative	Mobile multimedia flashcards
Tang & Elyas (2022)	Mixed-method	Survey + vocabulary test	Mixed	Multimedia teaching units
Rashtchi et al. (2021)	Experimental	Pre/post-test	Quantitative	Video vocabulary instruction
Wiley meta (2023)	Meta-analysis	Systematic coding	Quantitative	Media impact on early vocabulary
MDPI flipped (2025)	Experimental	Pre/post-test + student video creation	Mixed	Flipped classroom with videos
Haque et al. (2024)	Survey study	Questionnaires	Quantitative	Gamified MALL apps
Jabar & Mansor (2024)	Experimental	Vocabulary inference task	Quantitative	Contextual clues in reading
Lowell et al. (2022)	Quasi-experimental	Inference tasks	Quantitative	Context-based vocabulary guessing
Muhammad et al. (2021)	Experimental	Listening tasks + cloze	Quantitative	Video-inferred vocabulary
Rosa et al. (2021, Spain)	Experimental	Pre/post-test	Quantitative	Visual/text contextual learning
Zarfsaz & Yeganehpour (2021)	Experimental	Thematic unit assessments	Quantitative	Task-based thematic vocab
Imram Hossain (2024)	Project-based	Project outcomes, teacher report	Mixed	Collaborative project tasks

Namaziandost et al. (2021)	Experimental	Reading + culture-based test	Quantitative	Cultural contextual learning
Zamani et al. (2022)	Experimental	Reading with clues + test	Quantitative	Inference-based vocabulary
Alnan & Halim (2024)	Quasi-experimental	Group interaction tasks	Mixed	Sociocultural learning approach
Nguyen (2022, Vietnam)	Experimental	Pre/post-test	Quantitative	Multimedia enhanced reading
Shin & Kim (2023, SK)	Experimental	Storytelling + retention test	Quantitative	Digital storytelling strategy

Table 2 complements this synthesis by classifying the studies according to their methodological designs, instruments, and underlying approaches. A clear predominance of quantitative research emerges, with most studies utilizing experimental or quasi-experimental designs, supported by instruments such as pre- and post-tests, vocabulary recall tasks, multimedia-based assessments, and structured inference activities.

These tools are strategically chosen to capture both immediate gains and long-term vocabulary retention. Countries like Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Iran are particularly well-represented in controlled interventions, indicating a strong research focus on measurable vocabulary outcomes within formal educational settings. Mixed-method studies contribute qualitative depth, while innovative techniques such as eye-tracking further validate findings. Overall, these approaches reflect a balance between empirical rigor and pedagogical relevance in studying contextualized vocabulary learning.

Results

The results of this synthesis are organized into three key thematic categories: (1) the role of context in vocabulary acquisition, (2) the implementation of contextualized learning

strategies in EFL settings, and (3) the effectiveness of contextualized multimedia methods compared to traditional approaches. These categories reflect consistent findings across the twenty empirical studies reviewed and are supported by evidence drawn from various geographic, cultural, and instructional contexts.

The Role of Context in Vocabulary Acquisition

The majority of studies converge on the idea that vocabulary acquisition is significantly enhanced when learners encounter words in rich, meaningful contexts. For example, Elgort et al. (2020) and Zamani et al. (2022) emphasized that young learners internalize vocabulary more effectively when it is presented within realistic scenarios or narratives. These findings are further corroborated by Nguyen (2022), who found that contextualized exposure through multimedia-enhanced reading led to better vocabulary recall and usage. The consistent role of repeated exposure and multimodal presentation, as shown in Shin and Kim (2023) and Minalla (2024), suggests that young learners benefit not only from contextual clarity but also from varied sensory input. The evidence supports the view that context serves as a cognitive and affective anchor for vocabulary retention.

Table 3. Key findings related to the role of context in vocabulary acquisition

Strategies	Authors	Findings
Vocabulary learning in context	Elgort et al. (2020); Zamani et al. (2022)	Vocabulary learning is enhanced in context-rich environments.
Repeated exposure to vocabulary	Won Shin & Young Kim (2023)	Strengthens understanding and retention.
Use of multimedia tools	Minalla (2024)	Improves vocabulary retention vs. traditional methods.
Contextual Vocabulary Retention	Nguyen (2022)	Favorable for vocabulary retention.
Vocabulary and Idiomatic Expressions in Culture-Based Instructional Environment	Namaziandost et al. (2021)	Culture-based instruction improves vocabulary learning.
Spacing and Contextual Learning	Nakata & Elgort (2020)	Spacing enhances explicit learning in context.

Table 3 presents a summary of the key findings related to the role of context in vocabulary acquisition. Multiple studies confirm that vocabulary learning is significantly enhanced when learners are exposed to words within meaningful, real-life contexts. These environments promote deeper comprehension, encourage semantic processing, and facilitate long-term

retention. Young EFL learners particularly benefit from these approaches, as contextualized input supports inference skills, engagement, and noticing of vocabulary. Multimedia tools, repeated exposure, and culturally relevant materials all contribute positively to the acquisition process.

Implementation of Contextualized Learning in EFL Settings

Studies employing multimedia tools such as animated videos, interactive storytelling, and gamified applications demonstrate particularly effective results in EFL classrooms. For instance, Haque et al. (2024) and Kalukar et al. (2023) reported improvements in vocabulary retention and learner motivation when using digital and visual aids. Moreover, sociocultural approaches, such as those highlighted by Alnan and Halim (2024), revealed that peer collaboration and contextually embedded communication tasks also facilitate deeper vocabulary learning. Several studies, including Chien (2020) and Rosa et al. (2021), underscore the importance of designing authentic tasks that reflect the learners' environment and cultural context. These applications show that contextualized learning is not a monolithic model but a flexible framework adaptable to diverse classroom realities.

Table 4. Strategies for contextualized vocabulary instruction

Strategies	Authors	Findings
Contextualized vocabulary learning	Bagias (2023)	Real-world connections enhance recall and use.
Context Clues	Fudhla et al. (2020)	Effective for advanced learners with reading frequency.
Instructional Design	Chien (2020)	Need for better scenario design in contextual tasks.
Contextual Diversity	Rosa et al. (2021)	Diverse input leads to stronger vocabulary learning.
Socio-Cultural Strategies	Alan & Halim (2024)	Social strategies positively impact vocabulary size.

Table 4 highlights various strategies for contextualized vocabulary instruction, focusing on real-world applications. Findings indicate that grounding vocabulary in authentic experiences enhances learners' ability to recall and use language effectively. Context clues, diverse input, and socio-cultural methods show particular promise, especially when adapted to learners' developmental levels. However, challenges persist in instructional design and implementation, emphasizing the need for professional development and strategic planning.

Effectiveness of Contextualized Multimedia vs. Traditional Approaches

Empirical evidence strongly favors contextualized multimedia strategies over traditional rote-based vocabulary teaching methods. Research by Zarfsaz and Yeganehpour (2021), Black and Wright (2023), and Suggate et al. (2021) demonstrated that learners exposed to vocabulary through thematic units, storytelling, and project-based learning not only retained more words but also used them more confidently in real-life situations. In contrast, studies addressing traditional instruction—characterized by word lists, memorization, and isolated drills—reported lower engagement levels and weaker retention outcomes (Rahmat & Mohandas, 2020). This contrast underscores the pedagogical value of situating vocabulary within contexts that are cognitively and socially engaging for young EFL learners.

Table 5. Contextualized learning against traditional vocabulary instruction methods

Strategies	Authors	Findings
Comparison of learning methods	Zarfsaz & Yeganehpour (2021)	Contextualized methods outperform traditional in vocabulary gains.
Overcoming vocabulary learning barriers	Rahmat & Mohandas (2020)	Contextualized learning addresses diverse learner needs.
Engagement through context	Black & Wright (2023)	Improves motivation and long-term retention.
Meaningful learning contexts	Suggate et al. (2021)	Young learners benefit from contextual vocabulary teaching.

Table 5 synthesizes comparative studies that evaluate contextualized learning against traditional vocabulary instruction methods. The evidence overwhelmingly supports contextualized approaches, particularly in enhancing learner engagement, motivation, and retention. Traditional methods, often reliant on rote memorization, fall short in delivering meaningful vocabulary knowledge. These findings underscore the need for reform in vocabulary pedagogy to embrace context-driven, student-centered methodologies

Discussion

The synthesis of research reviewed in this study reveals compelling evidence that

contextualized learning particularly when supported by multimedia strategies has a meaningful and positive impact on the vocabulary acquisition of young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Unlike traditional vocabulary instruction methods that rely heavily on memorization or word lists, contextualized learning emphasizes the integration of vocabulary into authentic, real-life situations, allowing learners to experience language in ways that are meaningful, dynamic, and memorable.

Several studies highlighted in this review confirmed that young learners benefit from multisensory exposure to vocabulary through visual, auditory, and interactive media. For example, animated videos, cultural storytelling, and task-based learning activities created immersive contexts that not only facilitated word retention but also improved learners' motivation and ability to transfer knowledge to real-life communication scenarios. This aligns with theoretical frameworks such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the Noticing Hypothesis, which emphasize the importance of exposure and meaningful input in second language development.

Moreover, contextualized strategies that utilize multimedia were shown to support deeper engagement and long-term retention, especially for beginners who require repetitive yet varied exposure to new vocabulary. The reviewed studies also suggest that when learners are actively involved, either through project-based tasks or interactive digital tools, their vocabulary learning becomes more autonomous and personally relevant, thus increasing their intrinsic motivation.

Despite these benefits, some challenges remain. Teachers often report difficulties in designing authentic contextual tasks due to time constraints, lack of resources, or insufficient training. Additionally, while multimedia enhances engagement, its pedagogical effectiveness depends on thoughtful integration and alignment with language goals. Nonetheless, the overall findings favor a pedagogical shift toward contextualized, student-centered instruction, particularly in primary and secondary EFL settings.

Conclusions

It is clear from the results of this synthesis of 20 empirical research that contextualized learning strategies, particularly those backed by multimedia resources,are important for

improving young EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition. These techniques increase student motivation and engagement while also improving retention and comprehension by integrating words into meaningful, real-world scenarios. According to the research, learning settings that are more dynamic and context-rich are preferable to classic rote memorizing techniques. When it comes to helping young learners assimilate language more naturally and meaningfully, using multimedia tools (like interactive films, storytelling, games, and project-based activities) proves to be both entertaining and pedagogically effective.

These findings underscore the importance of equipping EFL educators with training and resources to implement contextualized learning effectively. They also highlight the need for curriculum designers and policymakers to consider how real-world contexts and technology can enrich early language learning. Future research may continue to explore the long-term effects of contextualized vocabulary instruction and its scalability across diverse educational settings.

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