



# The Role of Contextualized Testing Technique in Enhancing EFL Intermediate Students' Capacity in Acquiring English Vocabulary

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## Abstract

The present study aims to improve the learners' ability in acquiring vocabulary through using contextualized testing technique the problem of this study is that Iraqi EFL Intermediate School Students face difficulties when they acquire vocabulary. This is due to lack of suitable teaching techniques used by teachers to teach vocabulary. This study tries to find out the effect of using contextualized testing technique on the achievement of intermediate school students in learning vocabulary. The purpose of the present study is to use contextualized test technique to test vocabulary found in the 2nd intermediate students' book, hoping to improve their understanding of language vocabulary. Also, it aims to find out whether presenting the items in contextualized testing technique in an achievement vocabulary test affect the performances of students. To achieve the aims of the study, the following hypothesis is put: "There is a statistically significant difference between the students' mean scores of performance of the experimental group which is testing vocabulary performance by means of the proposed technique and that of the control group which is testing vocabulary according to traditional method of testing." The researcher followed the experimental design into which she has randomly chosen a sample being selected from the second intermediate school for girls. The researcher divided the sample into two groups, experimental and control, each of which includes 30 students. The results obtained from the post-test on both groups show that the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test are (39.24) and (32.85) successively, which means that the experimental group achievement in the CT is better than that of the control group.

**Keywords:** Contextualized testing techniques; EFL; Intermediate students; Capacity; English vocabulary.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Testing vocabulary and its elements have been a controversial issue in language testing for years. One of these elements is the sampling issue. Which vocabulary items the test writers should include in the tests, whether they should be chosen from active or passive vocabulary knowledge, and what the frequency of words should be are the main issues that must be considered in terms of sampling issue in vocabulary tests. On the other hand, testing the productive and the recognition vocabulary has been another issue that is open to discussion considering the criteria of knowing a word and the degree of production. Probably, the most ongoing issue among these elements is the contextualization issue. Presenting the vocabulary items in a test whether discrete or contextualized, what discrete and contextualized means, and the degree of contextualization are the main problems that have been discussed for many years.

The problem of this study is that Iraqi EFL Intermediate School Students face difficulties when they acquire vocabulary. This is due to lack of suitable teaching techniques used by teachers to teach vocabulary.

This study tries to find out the effect of using contextualized testing technique on the achievement of intermediate school students in learning vocabulary.

### 1.2. Aims of the Study

The aim of the present study is to use contextualized test technique to test vocabulary found in the 2nd intermediate students' book, hoping to improve their understanding of language vocabulary. Also, it aims to find out whether presenting the items in contextualized testing technique in an achievement vocabulary test affect the performances of students.

### 1.3. Hypotheses of the Study

This study hypothesizes that:

There is a statistically significant difference between the students' mean scores of performance of the experimental group which is testing vocabulary performance by means of the proposed technique and that of the control group which is testing vocabulary according to traditional method of testing.

### 1.4. Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited to:

1. Second class Iraqi EFL intermediate school students.

2. A sample of 60 students in two classes in AL-Zahraa secondary school for girls in Babylon. 30 students for each group ,experimental or control group.
3. The academic year 2016-2017.

### **1.5. Procedures**

To test the hypotheses, the researcher followed these procedures:

1. Review of the literature related to contextualized vocabulary test.
- 2, Designing a contextualized vocabulary test pre-post-test from the content analysis of the English textbooks taught in second grade preparatory schools.
3. Verifying the reliability of contextualized vocabulary test pre-post-test items using Pearson coefficient.
4. Administering the vocabulary post-test to the two groups to investigate the effectiveness of the contextualized vocabulary test in developing the learning vocabulary of the experimental group.
5. Analyzing the results statistically by using T-test.

### **1.4. Definitions of Basic Terms**

1. Contextualized Tests: are formats present students with words in isolation and require them to select meanings for the words without reference to any linguistic context (Read and Chapelle, 2001).
2. EFL: They are learners who study English as a foreign language.
4. Intermediate Students: Intermediate stage in Iraq consists of three levels: first, second, and third year-intermediate. It is preceded by a primary stage (6 levels) and followed by a preparatory stage (3 levels).
5. Vocabulary: The set of words within a language that are familiar are known as a person's vocabulary. Vocabulary develops with age and is a crucial tool for communicating and acquiring language. Acquiring an extensive vocabulary is one of the largest challenges in learning a second language (Al Zolaibani *et al.*, 2012).

## **2. Contextualization**

Contextualization is anything a teacher does to help in creating understanding of language and/or concepts by using materials such as actual objects, pictures, gestures or language etc. Contextualizing instruction for English learners involves active engagement whereby students experience content in a way that creates a higher level of comprehension. By contextualizing instruction, teachers ensure that students are more involved in their learning and are able to access the required content. There are three examples for supporting this strategy:

1. Verbal Amplification: contextualizes key vocabulary and concepts not by simplifying them but rather by elaborating on, or amplifying them. Additional language is used as a technique to increase comprehensibility.

2. Visual Support: The use of visual support is a strategy in which the language used in instruction is made more understandable by the display of photographs or drawings. This allows students to hear the language of English while visuals are shown that connect them to the content. To use this strategy, the teacher builds a collection of visuals related to the vocabulary or unit of instruction. Visuals may be collected from a variety of sources: internet, photos, pictures scanned from books and magazines.

3. Sentence Patterning Chart: The patterning chart is a colour-coded chart where students create a sentence by placing words in the appropriate column that corresponds to the correct part of speech. This works well for EL students because of the colour coding as well as helping them to classify the words into the appropriate part of speech column.

### **2.1. Contextualizing Vocabulary**

Knowing about a word involves knowing about its form (how it sounds, how it is spelt, the grammatical changes that can be made to it), its meaning (its conceptual content and how it relates to other concepts and words), and its use (its patters of occurrence with other words, and in particular types of language) (Cameron, 2001).

According to Ellis and Redman (1989), knowing vocabulary involves understanding the word when it is spoken or written, recalling it when needed, using it with the correct meaning and in a grammatically correct way and in the right situation, pronouncing and spelling it correctly, knowing which other words can and cannot be used with it, knowing if it has positive or negative connotations and when or when not to use it.

In accordance with the criteria of knowing a word, Hatch and Brown (1995) describe five essential steps in vocabulary learning based on research in learners' strategies: (1) having resources for encountering new words, (2) getting a clear image, whether visual or auditory or both, for the new form of the words, (3) learning the meaning of the words, (4) making a strong memory connection between the forms and meaning of the words, (5) using the words.

Contextualizing vocabulary means that sheltered instructors should choose several vocabulary words that are essential to understand the lessons' most important concepts and present the definition in context, not just using dictionaries that might offer multiple meanings.

Teachers peruse the material to be learned and select several key terms that are critical to understanding the lesson's most important concepts. The teacher introduces the terms at the onset of the lesson, systematically defining or demonstrating each and showing how that term is used within the context of the lesson. Experienced teachers know that having students understand the meaning of several key terms completely is more effective than having a cursory understanding of a dozen terms. One way of contextualizing words is to read with students is small

groups and, as they come across a term they do not understand, pause and explain it to them, using as many examples, synonyms, or cognates a necessary to convey the meaning.

### **2.1.1. The Role of Context in Testing Vocabulary**

An important dimension of vocabulary assessment is concerned with the role of context. This dimension considers the extent to which the test-taker is required to engage with and utilize the context in which the vocabulary items appear. The contextualized formats present students with words in isolation and require them to select meanings for the words without reference to any linguistic context (Read and Chapelle, 2001).

However, in context-dependent vocabulary tests students need to make use of contextual clues. Many scholars believe that vocabulary testing in context can offer a real situation for test takers and, the usage of words is tested in such real situations.

## **2.2. Testing Vocabulary**

Testing vocabulary has been a very hot debate in the world of testing for many years. Having too many dimensions such as what to test, how to test, criteria of knowing a word etc., the issue becomes much more challenging both for the instructors and test writers.

It is definite that the perspective on testing vocabulary will differ depending on the purpose of the test writers. The issues that must be taken into consideration in terms of the dimensions of testing vocabulary will change depending on the testing objective. In other words, for example, the issues considered in an achievement vocabulary test will be different from the issues considered in the vocabulary part of a proficiency or certification test. No matter what the objectives or purposes are, since the importance of testing vocabulary has been revealed in the literature, it is crucial that this important language development skill is assessed validly and reliably.

Since it is a well known fact that vocabulary has a big importance as much as the language skills in the whole language system, the importance of the assessment of vocabulary is the same as the assessment of other skills. As Schmitt (2000) states, vocabulary is an essential building block of language and, as such it makes sense to be able to measure learners' knowledge of it. With regard to second language acquisition, vocabulary is an indispensable and basic part. Both teachers and learners spend lots of time and energy on vocabulary acquisition. For this reason, due to the importance of vocabulary in the whole language system, it is quite necessary to test the vocabulary knowledge of learners.

One of the most common reasons for testing vocabulary is to find out if the students have covered the words they have been taught. As Read (2000) states, in the achievement test, the vocabulary section may be designed to assess how well the students have mastered a vocabulary skill that they have been taught. Moreover, vocabulary test can be utilized as a means of motivating students to study and showing them their progress in learning new words. Also, vocabulary tests which are part of commercial tests, such as TOEFL, attempt to provide a measure of learners' vocabulary size, which is believed to give an indication of overall language proficiency (Schmitt, 1994).

Teachers need to know how developed their students' vocabulary knowledge is. (Why?) Without a basic vocabulary, the potential for developing a reading problem is great. Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to overall reading comprehension. A limited vocabulary represents a limited understanding of concepts Well-developed vocabulary skills and wide background knowledge help individuals comprehend more difficult and complex material. Testing helps to recycle vocabulary as well as to consolidate it. Testing vocabulary also occurs in placement tests or diagnostic tests to find out students level of knowledge or in achievement tests at the end of the school year.

Types of questions in a vocabulary test, as in most other tests, there are two kinds or types of questions: recognition items and production items. Examples of methods for testing vocabulary recognition items multiple choice tests. This technique is simple to mark but challenging and difficult to design. It can be used for testing single words, words in sentences or in texts. Teachers should take into account that students may guess the right answer without actually knowing the word. There is a 25% chance if there are 4 options. Students may also choose the correct answer without really knowing the word through a process of elimination.

Production items: the testing of vocabulary productivity is so difficult that it is practically never attempted in proficiency tests. The main difficulty is the need to limit the candidate to the (usually one) lexical item that we have in mind. However, there are still several methods around this. Using pictures: The teacher can display pictures of various objects/people and ask the students to write down the names of them. This method is obviously restricted to concrete nouns that are simple to name.

### **2.2.1. Types of Vocabulary**

Read (2000) points out that the number of words we recognize and understand is rather larger than the number we use in our own speech and writing. Therefore, he distinguishes between receptive and productive vocabulary. (Some scholars use the terms active and passive vocabulary).

According to Lado (1964), producing a vocabulary means that a unit can be recalled almost instantaneously with its proper structural position in accordance with the context. A passive vocabulary requires only recognizing and grasping the meaning from the form in its partly redundant context. Receptive vocabulary is described by Harmer (1991) as words which students will recognize when they meet them but they will not be able to produce. It is generally assumed that words are known receptively first and only later they become available for productive use. Melka (1997); cited in Read (2000) regards this process as "receptive to productive continuum" representing the increasing degrees of knowledge or familiarity with a word. Thus, upon first encounter, learners have limited

knowledge of the word and may not even remember it until they come across it again. It is only after they gain more knowledge of pronunciation, spelling, grammar, meaning, range of use etc. that they are able to use it themselves.

### ***2.2.2. The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Learning***

Vocabulary and lexical units have great importance in learning a language and communicating it. Without enough vocabulary knowledge, it is not possible to employ grammatical or other types of linguistic knowledge in communication or discourse. According to [Folse and Bologna \(2003\)](#), without syntax, meaning is hindered; but without vocabulary meaning is impossible. It is also emphasized that vocabulary is needed for every language skill and grammar. It can be regarded as the core of the four skills; speaking, listening, reading and writing. As [Chastain \(1998\)](#) states, the lack of needed vocabulary is the most common cause of students' inability to say what they want to say during communication activities. To clarify the importance of vocabulary in the development of other skills in terms of testing, [Heaton \(1988\)](#) points out that tests of vocabulary often provide a good guide to reading ability.

As it is seen, unless the language learner has a sufficient amount of word knowledge, s/he can neither express her/himself as intended, nor understand the speaker. Without sufficient word knowledge, a learner cannot write or read in a desired way. In such a case, when the learners are confronted with situations where they feel they lack the knowledge of vocabulary, their motivation to learn language decreases.

### ***2.3. Previous Studies***

The issue of testing vocabulary has been one of the interests of the researchers in the field of language testing. Many different studies have been carried out to test vocabulary knowledge of learners. [Read \(1997a\)](#) ascertains that if vocabulary knowledge is accepted as a fundamental component of second language proficiency, it is natural to accept that one of the primary goals of language testing will be to assess whether learners know the meanings of the words they need to communicate in a successful way in L2. Here are some of the studies related to the assessment and testing of vocabulary knowledge;

[Qian \(2008\)](#) conducted a research on the predictive power of discrete and contextualized vocabulary items on assessing the reading performance. According to results of this research, in assessing reading performance, discrete-point vocabulary items and fully contextualized vocabulary items provide a similar amount of prediction. However, in the context of considering educational impact, the article argues in favour of the continued adoption of the fully contextualized vocabulary item format because it will more likely induce beneficial backwash effects than the discrete-point vocabulary item format. It is also stated that the contextualized format also has the advantage of bringing vocabulary testing closer to real-life communicative application of the English language and therefore has more positive implications for the language classroom.

A very recent study was carried out by [Fitzpatrick and Clenton \(2010\)](#) on the performance of vocabulary test, Lex30, designed to measure second language productive vocabulary knowledge. In this article, they presented evidence which makes a significant contribution to the inquiry into the validity of the Lex30 test of vocabulary knowledge. Their research encourages further investigation of its validity in an instructional context.

In their research study, [Laufer and Goldstein \(2004\)](#), they test the size and strength of vocabulary with the trial of bilingual computerized test. They consider the size as the number of words the learners know, and the strength as a combination of four aspects of knowledge of meaning that are assumed to constitute a hierarchy of difficulty: passive recognition, active recognition, passive recall and active recall. They investigated whether this hierarchy was valid and which modality correlated best with classroom language performance. The participants were 435 learners of English as a second language. Results showed that the hierarchy was present at all word frequency levels and passive recall was the best predictor of classroom language performance.

## ***3. Methodology and Procedures***

In order to achieve the aim of the present study and verify its null hypothesis, the following procedures are carried out:

### ***3.1. The Experimental Design***

Pretest-posttest control and experimental group design are used to achieve this part of the study ([Tavakoli, 2012](#)). It presents the selection of two groups randomly. The experimental group which is testing vocabulary performance by means of the proposed technique and that of the control group which is testing vocabulary according to traditional method of testing vocabulary.

Yet, the groups are submitted to a post-test in order to compare the scores of the pre-test, post-test on the dependent variable (contextualized test technique) and determine whether or not there is any statistically significance of difference between both groups.

### ***3.2. Population and Sample Selection***

#### ***3.2.1. Population***

The study population is the second-year students at AL-Zahraa secondary school for girls in Babylon, during the academic year (2017-2018).

### 3.2.2. The Sample of the Study

A sample of 60 students in two classes in AL-Zahraa secondary school for girls in Babylon. This sample is divided into two groups. The first group (A) is the control group, it consists of (32) students. The second group (B) is the experimental one, it consists of (35) students. After exclusion, the sample became (60) students, (30) students for each group. The following table shows the sample of the current study:

Table-1. The Study Sample

Groups	Section	Type of Treatment	N before excluding	N after excluding
Experimental	C	Contextualized test	32	30
Control	A	traditional method of testing	33	30
Total			65	60

### 3.3. Equivalence of the Groups

The two groups were equalized by controlling some variables which may affect the experiment results. These variables are: students' age (measured in months), parents' educational level, and students' scores in English in the first course examination of the same academic year. The two groups were equivalent in all variables at a time when all external and internal variables that may affect the experimental design had been controlled.

### 3.4. The Instruction of the Experiment

The experimental group was testing by using contextualized technique (hence forth CT) in testing vocabulary, whereas the control one was testing the same vocabulary by using the conventional method (hence forth CM).

### 3.5. The Achievement Test

The researcher has put the achievement tests which are used as pre-test and posttest for both groups. The pre-test's aim is to compare its scores with those of the post-test and see the effect of using Ct as a new technique on the students' achievement in testing vocabulary.

### 3.6. Description of the Pre-Test

The test content consisted of two questions. The first question was the discrimination by associating vocabulary with images. The second question was create sentences by filling in blanks using vocabulary and associating them with images. The test time was half an hour.

#### 3.6.1. The Scoring Scheme

The scoring scheme is a basis in which the researcher thoroughly depends on to interpret the outcomes. A precise scoring scheme must be adopted for reliability and objectivity purposes.

The scoring scheme that was adopted for the two questions is as follows: fifty marks are allotted for each question, taking into consideration the grammatical errors, spelling errors and punctuation marks. Each question has five items, each item is marked with two scores, so the total mark is one hundred.

#### 3.6.2. Validity

There are many forms of validity, but there are just two forms that are regarded valuable for achievement tests; content and face validity. Both forms have been addressed to evaluate the test and come out with a validated test that yields accurate and truthful outcomes. Face validity means how the test appears to measure what it purports to measure. The test was seen by a jury of ten specialists in linguistics and TEFL methodology in order to ensure its face validity. Those experts were asked to decide the face validity of the test and state their suggestions about the suitability of the test and its items to the students' level. The jury members agreed that the test is valid in its face and its items are suitable for the students' level except for some modifications which are taken into consideration.

#### 3.6.3. Pilot Study

The pilot study is defined as an initial step to examine the design and procedures before spending money and time on a particular study. The pilot study was carried out on 12th of March to 60 students randomly chosen from Al-Zahraa Intermediate School to represent the pilot study sample. The pilot study data have been statistically analyzed to determine the discrimination power and the difficulty level of each item. The results of the pilot study showed the practicality of the test and the time required for answering it which ranges between 35 to 40 minutes.

#### 3.6.4. Item Facility and Item Discrimination

Item facility refers to the degree to which an item seems to be complicated or facilitated for a particular number of testees. It simply reflects the percentage of learners who answer the item properly. The most appropriate test item will have item facility that ranges from 0.15 to 0.85. (Brown, 2001).

On the other hand, item discrimination refers to the degree to which an item distinguishes between good and poor testees. An item has good discrimination power if it collects correct answers from good students and incorrect answers from poor students. It is worth mentioning that high discrimination power will be near to 1.0, and no discrimination power at all will be zero (Brown, 2001).

After scoring the test items of the pilot study, the item facility equation was applied for each item. It has been found that all items are appropriate in their difficulty levels because they are between (0.35) and (0.80).

### 3.6.5. Reliability

Reliability pertains to the consistency of test marks, which means that a test would provide similar outcomes if it was given at a different time. Kuder-Richardson and Interrater methods were followed to estimate the reliability of the test in the current study. Kuder-Richardson (KR20) is a tool to measure the internal consistency of a test that its items scored dichotomously (Richards, 2010). Interrater method refers to the extent to which different testers agree in their evaluations of different subjective ratings of ability (ibid.: 297). By using these two methods yielded reliability coefficients of (0.801) and (0.899) successively. This means that the test is suitable for application since Tavakoli (2012) mentions that reliability coefficient of a test would be enough and acceptable if it is not less than (0.50).

### 3.7. The Pre-test

Both students of the experimental and control groups were pre-tested on the 20th of March 2017. This pre-test aims at comparing the scores of the students' achievement in the pre-test with those in the post-test. As a result, the researcher tested and scored the sample of the study.

### 3.8. The Post-test

Students of both groups (the experimental and control ones) were post-tested on the 10th of April 2017. The same pre-test procedures were followed in conducting the post-test, namely scoring scheme, validity, pilot study, item difficulty, item discrimination, and reliability.

### 3.9. Statistical Tools

The researcher used some statistical tools in this study. They are as follows: 1. T-test 2. Chi-square 3. Item facility and Item discrimination 4. Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

## 4. The Results

At the end of the experiment and in order to realize the aim of the study and test its null hypothesis, the data of the pre-test and post-test are statistically analyzed. It should be noted that this analysis is undertaken to decide whether there is any significant difference between the two groups in the pre-test and post-test.

### 4.1. Results of the Experimental and Control Groups in the Post-test Scores

The results obtained from the post-test on both groups show that the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-test are (39.24) and (32.85) successively, which means that the experimental group achievement in the CT is better than that of the control group. The result shows that the computed T-value of the post-test is (3.13), while the tabulated T-value is (1.88). This indicates that there is a significant difference between the two groups at (0.05) level of significance and under (63) degrees of freedom (see Table ). This also indicates that the null hypothesis of the study which sets in (1.3) and states that there is no statistically significant difference between the achievement mean score of the students who are testing vocabulary by using Ct technique and that of the students who are testing vocabulary by using the conventional method is refused.

Table-2. The t-test Statistics for the Subjects' Performance on the Posttest

Variable	Group	No.	M	SD	DF	t-value	
						Calculated	Table
Subject's Performance on the Posttest	EG	30	39.24	8.53	58	3.13	1.88
	CG	30	32.85	10.13			

The following table shows the Scores of the EG and CG on the Posttest

The Scores of the EG and CG on the Posttest

EG		CG	
No.	Score	No.	Score
1.	52	1.	37
2.	51	2.	36
3.	50	3.	36
4.	50	4.	35
5.	49	5.	35
6.	48	6.	35
7.	48	7.	34
8.	46	8.	34
9.	46	9.	33

10.	46	10.	33
11.	46	11.	32
12.	46	12.	32
13.	45	13.	30
14.	45	14.	30
1.	45	1.	30
2.	44	2.	28
3.	43	3.	28
4.	41	4.	27
5.	41	5.	27
6.	41	6.	27
7.	40	7.	26
8.	39	8.	22
9.	39	9.	22
10.	39	10.	21
11.	39	11.	20
12.	39	12.	20
13.	38	13.	14
14.	38	14.	13
15.	38	15.	13
16.	36	16.	11

## 5. Conclusions

In the light of the results shown in this work, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Teaching through the use of contextualized vocabulary test has a significant effect on developing the general ability of second-year intermediate students.
2. Using context in teaching vocabulary motivates students and creates an atmosphere of enjoyment and interest that makes them breaking the regular routine.
3. The use of contextualized vocabulary test provides students with the experience they need for developing their skills.
4. Through contextualized vocabulary, the students have proved to be more vital because they are given sufficient chances to use foreign language themselves without direct control of the teacher.
6. Contextualized vocabulary makes low level students involving in the class activities and gives them more chances to get more information.

## 6. Recommendations

On the basis of the study findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. English teachers at intermediate schools have to employ a variety of teaching techniques to help students getting better understanding of the English vocabulary.
2. English teachers have to participate in in-service training programs to keep them in touch with the recent innovations in the field of language teaching.
3. Students in English departments in faculties of education must be trained to use various teaching techniques for developing all language skills.
4. English curriculum designers are advised to employ contextualized vocabulary in designing materials at all levels of education with emphasis on intermediate schools.
5. Contextualized vocabulary should be allocated more time in teaching since through which new language can be easily and quickly taught.

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## Appendix I

### The Test

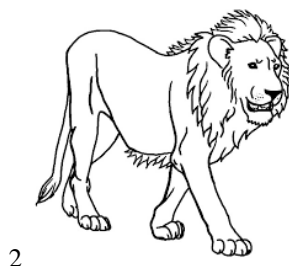
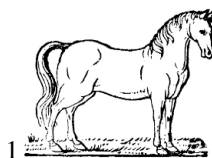
#### Q.1/ Look at the picture and then answer the questions! (10M)



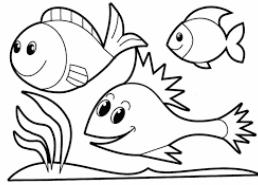
1. What do you see in the picture?
2. Where do you think these animal going?
3. What kind of place is this?
4. How many they are?
5. In pairs, write a sentence to describe these animals?

#### Q.2/ Matching between the shapes and their suitable names!(10M)

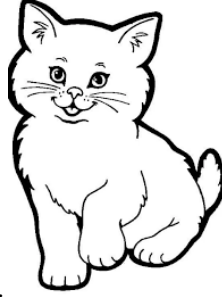
- A. A cat , B. An elephant , C. fish , D. A horse, E. A lion







3.



4.



5.