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CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE TEFL IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING THE LANGUAGE IN CONTEXT.

(Contextualisation de l'enseignement de l'anglais langue étrangère dans les lycées et collèges béninois : La perception des enseignants sur l'enseignement contextuel de la langue)

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have emphasized that a language can be acquired or learned through contextualized practices. The current study aims at investigating teachers' perceptions about teaching a language in context. In order to successfully reach such a goal, we have administered a scale questionnaire and have gone through structured interviews with EFL teachers of some secondary schools of Benin.

The results have revealed the significance of the contextualization of teaching, and they also show that teachers are able to use different techniques of creating contexts during their sequence implementation. We do suggest that they should have more samples of teaching materials of different contexts for teaching different subjects so as to plan and teach more effective lessons.

Keywords: contextualized practice; teachers' perceptions; creating a context.

RESUME

Plusieurs études ont insisté sur le fait que la langue peut être acquise ou apprise à travers la pratique contextuelle. C'est ce qui fait l'objet de la présente étude qui vise l'investigation des perceptions des enseignants du secondaire au sujet de l'enseignement contextuel. En vue d'atteindre un tel objectif avec succès, un questionnaire fut administré à quelques enseignants des lycées et collèges du Bénin et il y eut aussi des interviews bien structurées.

Les résultats obtenus ont mis en exergue la portée de l'usage du contexte et montré que les enseignants sont en mesure d'utiliser

différentes techniques pour créer le contexte requis au cours de leur enseignement. Notre suggestion à leur endroit est qu'ils aient à leur disposition plus de matériels didactiques relatifs à différents contextes pour faciliter l'apprentissage de différentes matières en vue de les aider à planifier leurs leçons et à enseigner plus efficacement.

Mots clés: pratique contextuelle; perceptions des enseignants du secondaire; créer un contexte.

1. INTRODUCTION

EFL teaching is a very important issue and teaching the language focusing on either all the four skills or on only one, and editing the lesson content before, during and after the planning of the lesson depends on the requirements of the target situations and of the learners' needs as well. This is the main reason why Merrifield (2000) maintains that the focus is on the application rather than on the possession of basic skills and knowledge.

Beninese educational system has undergone many reforms so far, for example "*Ecole Nouvelle*" (New School), "*Programmes Intermédiaires*", which we had experimented before the advent of the current Competency-Based Approach (CBA), and all of them were designed for the improvement of the educational system. Yet, most Beninese internal and external stakeholders of education complain about the level of learners that has been decreasing from year to year due to the poor quality of teachers' teaching. Learners seldom grasp what is taught as teaching is most of the time not contextualised.

The core of the problem is that few EFL teachers are trained to do the job conveniently. EFL teachers do not succeed in giving real communicative value to the language that learners meet. They just make their learners manipulate the language somehow. They hardly ever care about the meaningfulness of the different items they select.

The main objective of the current study is to make EFL teachers more interested in the teaching of EFL in context so as to enable learners to study the English language simultaneously. One specific objective is to

focus Beninese teachers' attention more on the country's scarce learning materials and on the necessity to create favourable conditions to use them appropriately.

Here below are the research questions:

- 1- How important is contextualized EFL teaching in Beninese secondary schools?
- 2- How can EFL teachers teach the language in context in Benin?

2. Critical Literature Review

The definition of context varies from one researcher to another. The concept "context" can be defined as the situation or body of information which provides the background for a lot of language use (Harmer, 1991); as a word or phrase placed in a meaningful language sequence (Brown, 1994); as the learning situation in which learners can get the meaning that makes sense (Van Oers, 1998). It is important to encourage learners to use English sufficiently and adequately. This sufficient use of English will create many opportunities to EFL learners for the effective acquisition of fluency and accuracy.

Moreover, when forming a context, students' immediate environment and some pedagogical principles when teaching a language such as moving from known to unknown, from local to global, from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract should be considered. Consequently, teaching skyscrapers to the students of Adjarra in Benin is totally useless without any use of pictures or any other relevant visual aids. Using pictures of these skyscrapers is then better, and the use of the pictures of the people, animals, places and objects they really know and see is the best way of creating context.

Furthermore, language input is not only comprehensible but also memorable when the language is contextualized by using relevant topics for learners (Bourke, 2006). With the onset of the Communicative Approach in the 1970s and several other methods such as the Cognitive Approach and the Natural Approach, teachers tended to refer to certain standards in their curricula and teaching.

In addition, the notion of context as background information for understanding comes from theories of reading, listening comprehension, and vocabulary building (Walz, 1989). The rationale for contextualizing language teaching can be based on Ausubel's Subsumption Theory (1968) which emphasizes the importance of already existing knowledge that can be activated via different opportunities to relate the new material with the existing schemata. In fact, another theory that supports the use of context in language teaching is Schema Theory which was proposed by Bartlett who believed that preexisting knowledge with reference to the relevant information in memory promotes understanding and recall in language learning (Nassaji, 2007).

Hinkel and Fotos (2002) focused particularly on a contextual grammar and referred to contextualized teaching as related elements and structures to be taught. Contextualization helps students gain the way of constructing meaning which changes depending on the context in which meaning occurs through different activity types such as writing, speaking, reading and listening. Yin Mee (2002) also emphasized that language learning should not be considered by teachers and textbook producers as a linguistic activity through a grammatical syllabus which is deprived of stimulating content. Moreover, she advocated the importance of contextualizing language use for language learning by referring to the idea of literacy which provides different text types to contextualize the teaching of grammar.

Hence, the decontextualized, sentence-level presentation of grammar that dominates many

pedagogical materials by following a discrete-point approach should be redesigned as a contextualized language instruction (Schneider, 2005). The use of stories particularly authentic animated ones for children might provide not only rich, varied, and contextualized language but it might also provide opportunities to the language teacher for presenting and practising language through tasks and activities derived from story themes which enable teachers to contextualize the whole lesson (Tosun, 2008). The courses in ELT programs do not include a course precisely aimed at educating student teachers in terms of contextualization but contextualizing language teaching has been emphasized in different methodology courses in teacher education programs. Therefore, this study aims to investigate teachers' perspectives about creating a context to make language input more comprehensible for learners of a new language.

3. Methodology of the Study

To investigate on the contextualization of EFL teaching, we have addressed a questionnaire to EFL teachers and interviewed some learners and teachers. From the Forty-five (45) questionnaire sheets distributed to these teachers, we have been able to get back only twenty-five (25).

3.1 Description of the Research Instruments

3.1.1 Teachers' Questionnaire

The questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers is made up of the eight (8) points presented as follows and it aims at inquiring about their opinion on the creation of contexts:

- using brainstorming to create contexts
- the way fill-in exercises are used to create contexts
- how dialogues can create contexts
- the use of visual aids to create contexts
- the use of audiovisual aids to create contexts
- how learners can access their EFL lexicon
- the way contextualisation favours a relevant choice of language
- how learners are given opportunities to develop their own context

3.1.2 Teachers' Interview Schedule

In order to get EFL teachers' viewpoints on the importance of the contextualization of teaching, we have conducted interviews with some of them to get to know:

- the advantages of teaching in context
- how teachers should use brainstorming in their classes
- the different ways teachers might create contexts through dialogues
- the importance of teachers' use of visual aids
- the reasons why audiovisuals should favour EFL teaching

3.1.2 Class Observation Grid

While observing teachers in their classes, we have succeeded in checking:

- teachers' efforts in teaching through contextualization
- teachers' use of brainstorming
- teachers' context creation through dialogues
- teachers' use of visual aids
- how learners have felt at ease with the learning process through the vivacity of the class

3.2 Teachers' Results

We have used tables for the presentation of the results, as follows:

Table 1: Context Creation

N.B. Frequency/Percentage (example: 20=Number of participants; 100%=Percentage)

Brainstorming	Appropriate to create a context? (Yes) 20/80%	No 5/20%	Total 25/100%
Fill-in exercise	Appropriate to create a context? (Yes) 20/80%	No 5/20%	Total 25/100%
Dialogue	Appropriate to create a context? (Yes) 25/100%	No 0/00%	Total 25/100%
Visual aids	Appropriate to create a context? (Yes) 25/100%	No 0/00%	Total 25/100%
Audiovisual aids	Appropriate to create a context? (Yes) 25/100%	No 0/00%	Total 25/100%
EFL lexicon	Can be accessed by learners? (Yes) 13/52%	No 12/48%	Total 25/100%
Choice of language	Is it favoured? (Yes) 25/100%	No 0/00%	Total 25/100%
Create and develop their own context	opportunities 16/64%	No 14/36%	Total 25/100%

Almost all of the respondents have recognised the importance of the use of brainstorming, fill-in exercises, dialogues, visual aids, audiovisual aids, EFL lexicon, choice of language, own context development, for creating a context.

Here's a table for the presentation of teachers' interview results:

Table 2: Teachers' interview results

Total: 25/100%

N.B. Frequency/Percentage (example: 25=Number of participants; 100%=Percentage)

Contextualization	Favoured by brainstorming 25/100%	Favoured by Dialogue 25/100%	Favoured by visual aids 25/100%	Favoured by Audiovisuals 25/100%
Brainstorming	Favours speaking skills 25/100%	Favours reading skills 25/100%	Favours listening skills 25/100%	Favours writing skills 25/100%
Dialogue	Favours speaking skills 25/100%	Favours reading skills 25/100%	Favours listening skills 25/100%	Favours writing skills 25/100%
Visualaids	Favours speaking skills 25/100%	Favours reading skills 25/100%	Favours listening skills 25/100%	Favours writing skills 25/100%
Audiovisuals	Favours speaking skills 25/100%	Favours reading skills 25/100%	Favours listening skills 25/100%	Favours writing skills 25/100%

All of the respondents have judged it positive to use effectively brainstorming, dialogue, visual aids and audiovisuals for teaching through contextualization in EFL classes.

3.3 Class Observation Data Analysis

We have observed ten (10) classes and at the very beginning, we have asked learners to feel at home adding that their teacher will encourage them by giving them a lot of presents if they speak English very well.

- Very few teachers, i.e. two (2) out of ten (10), i.e. twenty per cent (20%) have made efforts in teaching through contextualization. However they have done it in a wrong way. We have got to know that they have been informed about contextualization by their teaching advisers and their inspectors; nevertheless, they have failed in implementing it because they have not received a particular training for that. Eight (8) out of the ten (10) teachers, i.e. eighty per cent (80%), have got no ideas about what teaching in context refers to.

- Some teachers, while using brainstorming, have not used it in an appropriate way and this inappropriate use does not favour language teaching / learning.

- We have noticed that many teachers have not succeeded in creating a context through the use of dialogues.

- Teachers' use of visual aids is not relevant.

- Learners have displayed a poor performance in their learning process, which shows a failure in the EFL teaching.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

We have analysed the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire in order to have simple statistical results for each item. Regarding the qualitative aspect of the study, we have transcribed the data obtained from the interviews, have analysed and arranged the contents in groups so as to get deeper understanding of the participants' views on contextualization. The questionnaire to EFL teachers, made up of the eight (8) items, has pointed out that brainstorming should create context whenever it is well-used by EFL teachers in their classes. This also makes

learners guess and find right answers quickly for the success of English language teaching/learning. Fill-in exercises are also used to create contexts and they can help to encourage the use of adequate words, expressions and ideas at the required moment. The appropriate use of dialogues helps to create contexts as well and can help develop language skills. It is very important for language teaching and learning. EFL teachers have to use dialogues to reach their objectives. Visual aids as well as audiovisual aids can also be used to create contexts and should be regarded as important and have to be used conveniently in language classes.

- When teaching is contextualised effectively, learners can access their EFL lexicon and, consequently, they can identify appropriate words according to their various meanings. This lexicon appropriation may help provide various vocabulary fields such as some collocations or discourse markers. As we have already mentioned it above, contextualisation favours a relevant choice of language, and when learners are able to make such a choice of language, they can make good use of it as well. Furthermore, if learners are given opportunities to develop their own context, they will show language autonomy and will be able to do well regarding the use of English in their daily life situations.

- None of the 25 EFL teachers interviewed has objected to any of the positions pointed out through the different items. All of them, 25 (100 percent), have pointed out enormous advantages related to teaching in context. This way of teaching triggers learners' love for the English language. It also enables them to remember words and expressions, sentences and ideas, and is even good for solving problems. Several teachers know or hear about the word brainstorming but they do not put it into practice effectively in their classes. The way some teachers use dialogues is not appropriate and this does not favour teaching/learning in context. To my mind, this is due to a lack of training as trained teachers,

certified teachers, are very scarce nowadays in Beninese secondary schools. As far as class observations are concerned, we have noticed that 2 out of the 10 EFL teachers observed have made many efforts in teaching in context but their efforts are still not enough. Those teachers who have tried to make their learners brainstorm have recognised after the classes that something still remains to be known and done to facilitate brainstorming. In addition, dialogues and visual aids while used effectively should create context and help learners in their language learning.

- EFL teaching in context is important in Benin secondary schools. Some materials that can successfully create contexts for Adjara's EFL learners are: pictures and other visual aids related to this area's realities such as cultural and religious ones. Pictures and other visual aids can be the ones of King Toffa's statue, *Zangbéto*, *Egun*, *Caléta*, *Kpodjiguèdè*¹, Drums from Adjara Holuko village, mat, palm tree, educated people in Adjara, schools, hospitals, markets, factories, cars, motorbikes, wells, *Ouémé* (or *Weme*) River, the National Assembly, Charles de Gaulle Stadium, roads, streets, radio stations and TV stations.

- EFL teachers can teach the language in context in Benin in many ways. They need to take into account the realities of Benin and learners' diverse ethnic groups, languages, tradition and culture. While planning their lessons, they need to insert pictures of learners' areas, their ways of behaving and other parameters; otherwise learners will not be interested in their teachers' teaching and this will be a waste of time and energy.

- This study has revealed that the fact that learners are not involved in the learning process well does not depend necessarily on learners. Learners are not to be blamed whenever teaching is unsuccessful. It is up to teachers to face successfully their several challenges.

¹ African, especially Beninese, cultural and traditional dances

5. Suggestions and Recommendations

There are many opportunities of context creation in the EFL teaching/learning process in Benin secondary schools.

5.1 Inviting native speakers in classes

The teacher of English, who is teaching for example in Porto-Novo, can get used to inviting native speakers who are living in Porto-Novo for some days, or those who have come for even a short stay, such as tourists, so as to create a favourable context for learning. If he gets used to formally inviting them to restaurants and hotels or elsewhere, he will be accustomed to snatching conversations with them, and then accustomed to their accent and fluency. He may ask for the help of the school administration and invite those native speakers to his English classes frequently. The frequent presence of native speakers in the classroom setting will motivate the learners and foster their language learning in context and the efficient teaching in context.

5.2 Contextualising the Teaching

The teacher can use PowerPoint to show pictures appropriate to the learning situation or to the sequence that is being covered. For example, the pictures of *caleta*, *kpodjiguede*, *egun*, *zangbeto* are necessary to create a context while teaching culture and tradition in form 4 and in form 1 in Adjarra's secondary schools because the learners see such things daily, weekly or monthly. For this implementation, the pictures of Porto-Novo's kings (De-Toffa, De-Lokpon), or others, can also be shown to the learners.

As far as the pictures appropriate to the learning situation 1, *Youth problems*, of form 4,

are concerned, we can mention, for example, the ones of robberies that take place frequently on the Porto-Novo-Cotonou road or on the different roads and paths of the country. Other pictures which are worth showing for the different sequences of this learning situation may be the ones of young people smoking cigarettes, inhaling drugs, drinking alcohol and these pictures will show the dangerousness of some children's behaviours.

5.3 Recording the relevant events

The teacher can record the most relevant events which took place in Adjarra, in Porto-Novo, in Benin, in Africa and elsewhere in the world that are related to a learning situation or another, and make his/her Beninese learners listen whenever necessary. Of course, he/she must have narrated these events in English or asked a colleague of his/hers or a native speaker to narrate them for him/her. A variety of speeches will make the learners accustomed to different English accents.

CONCLUSION

By teaching the English language, EFL teachers should use it as a medium to help promote the language of Shakespeare. They should favour interactions among students in their classroom and foster the appropriate use of the language in their daily life situations. According to Vygotsky, quoted by Scovel, children attempt to communicate and, in doing so, acquire language (Scovel 2001). It is then fundamental that EFL teachers should provide their learners with the suitable English language they really need to communicate successfully in and outside their classes.

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