

## **Teachers' Experience of Contextualized English Language Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative phenomenological study was carried out to understand the lived experience of English teachers who are teaching English in different schools. The study explores the significance of a contextualized teaching approach in teaching English and the need for its application in the EFL context. Contextualized English Language Teaching (CELT) introduces language content by employing various techniques to engage students in different activities. Students who learn in a contextual environment are motivated to learn. Traditional classrooms emphasize the active role of teachers, with students remaining passive much of the time. Contextualized teaching assumes learners are creators, not merely receivers. The teacher's main role is to create appropriate learning contexts and provide students with learning opportunities through experiences and roles. This study examines the classroom experiences of teachers teaching English in contextualized situations. The data, collected from purposively selected teachers in different schools in the Udayapur district, indicate that contextualized teaching is highly effective in developing students' language skills.

*Keywords:* approach, contextualized, education, experience, learning

### **Introduction**

Contextualized language teaching is based on student engagement in teaching-learning activities. Berns and Eriksson (2001) define contextualized learning as a "perception of teaching and learning that helps teachers relate subject matter content to real-world situations, and students to make the connection between knowledge and its application" (p. 3). Mazzeo (2008) views contextualized teaching as a "diverse family of instructional strategies" (p. 4). Learners' knowledge becomes concrete and permanent when learned

through experience. Learning occurs when the learners engage in a task rather than just focusing on the language (Halliwell, 1991 as cited in Torun, 2008). CELT makes the classroom interactive it maximizes classroom participation and provides all students the opportunity to practice skills. Miller(2016) claims that teaching English in a contextualized way requires the active participation of both teachers and students. The students engage in various roles, while the teachers focus on planning and designing tasks.

Teaching English in a familiar context supports learners' cognitive development more than teaching it in a foreign context. Teachers should focus on what students want to learn rather than solely on what needs to be taught for better comprehension. Regmi (2014) states that teachers should teach English in a "local cultural and local contextual setting." Teaching in local contexts can enhance creativity because contextual teaching addresses learners' needs. Jr (2019) claims that contextualized learning provides knowledge of the subject matter and offers career-related opportunities. Contextualized teaching allows students to transfer knowledge to new contexts and provides opportunities for real-world experiences. Perin (2011) argues that contextualized teaching develops language skills in an integrated way and fosters collaboration.

### **Importance of Contextualization in ELT**

The contextualized approach engages students in activities that connect them to their immediate situations, helping them develop concrete concepts about the teaching contents, which leads to long-lasting learning. Wong and Van Pattern (2003) state that the use of a contextualized approach helps students understand the relationship between words, sentences, and real-world effects. Nan (2018) suggests that contextualized teaching develops all language skills in an integrated way, significantly enhancing learning. Proper context selection uses the four language skills in an organized manner, fostering development. Curry et al. (2012) found that contextualized learning develops responsibility through authentic

assessments. Group work reinforces students, ensuring learning achievements. These activities provide feedback, allowing continuous progress. CELT creates a learning-friendly environment, enabling learners to expand their understanding of the teaching content.

Contextualization helps students identify the importance of topics and learning. Theoretical knowledge alone cannot lead to mature learning; a combination of theory and performance is needed (Biehl & Dellagnelo, 2016). Simply having theoretical knowledge—knowing concepts or facts—is not enough for deep, meaningful learning. True understanding comes when students can also apply this knowledge in real-world settings, combining both theory and practice. This approach not only reinforces learning but also ensures that students can use what they've learned in practical situations, leading to more effective and lasting education.

Amirian and Momeni (2012) report that vocabulary learning is highly effective when taught in context. Teaching words out of context forces students to memorize, which can lead to quick forgetting. Contextualized teaching increases student participation in communication and interaction. Language learning is primarily a matter of practice, and exposing learners to real-world language use provides them with more learning opportunities.

### **The Need for English Language**

The history of English language education in Nepal spans over 150 years. Formal education in English has been part of the system since the inception of formal education in Nepal. Both Durbar High School and Tri-Chandra College offered education in English. The academic system experienced significant changes in the curriculum after the National Education System Plan (Bista, 2011). In the current education system, English is taught from grades one through twelve as a compulsory subject. While community schools use Nepali as the medium of instruction, private schools offer education in English. English has gained prominence in Nepalese society, perceived as a gateway to international job opportunities.

Saud (2020) reported that many community schools in urban areas are transitioning to English as the medium of instruction due to its international significance.

Most parents in Nepal prefer enrolling their children in English-medium schools. Community school students often join language institutes to improve their English after completing their Secondary Education Examination (SEE) (Bista, 2011). English is often seen as the language of global communication, higher education, and international jobs. As a result, parents opt for schools where English is the primary language of instruction, believing it will give their children a competitive edge in the future.

Paneru and Joshi (2019) regard English as essential for communication, and widely used in science, technology, commerce, and diplomacy. They argue that English plays a key role in the curriculum, providing students with career opportunities, and helping them adjust to target communities.

### **Interrelation Between Social Learning Theory and CELT**

Contextualized teaching focuses on incorporating real-life situations to enhance the relevance of learning. When teachers involve students in discussions and activities connected to their personal experiences, they foster a social environment that encourages students to share openly. This approach resonates with Vygotsky's concept that knowledge is built through social interactions.

Vygotsky (1978 as cited in Turuk, 2008) argues that students depend more on teachers in their initial learning phase. The students cannot copy and memorize everything the teachers teach them, in this stage, the better way of learning is to translate their thoughts and ideas in the real world. He further mentions that the second language learners solving the tasks with their teachers and peers, they internalize it, and after that, the learners present it according to the needs of the context.

## **The rationale of the Study**

The teaching methods employed and the classroom environment significantly influence language acquisition. According to Brown (2000), factors such as teachers' teaching styles, language exposure, and personal attitudes play a crucial role in developing language competence. Second-language learners often lack opportunities for interaction with community members. Therefore, it is essential to create diverse contexts within the language classroom to facilitate contextual communication (Johnson, 2008). The critical role of effective teaching methods and a supportive classroom environment in language acquisition. It emphasizes the need for diverse, real-world contexts to support second-language learners, who may face limitations in their opportunities for authentic language practice.

Lightbrow and Spada (2006) emphasize the importance of contextualized teaching as an effective strategy for acquiring a second language. This approach is particularly beneficial for learning English as a second language, as it utilizes language functionally, engaging students in meaningful tasks (Brown, 2000). Additionally, Johnson (2008) asserts that a contextualized strategy in English language teaching preserves the "communicative properties of meaningful interaction" (p. 6). Contextualization of content has a key role in making language learning not only effective but also enjoyable and relevant to learners' everyday experiences. This holistic approach fosters a more interactive, engaging, and meaningful learning environment.

The contextualized approach not only enhances students' academic performance but also fosters a positive relationship between teachers and students through frequent interaction. Such interactions extend beyond the content being taught, encompassing inquiries about personal opinions and social or familial situations. This engagement reduces emotional distance and promotes a positive attitude toward learning.

Teachers must have sufficient experience to design diverse contexts that correspond to the language content. The effectiveness of student learning largely depends on the quality of instruction provided by teachers. Successful implementation of contextualization necessitates qualified and skilled educators who can seamlessly integrate content with relevant contexts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nepali English teachers encounter a myriad of challenges within the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT), encompassing pedagogical factors, institutional demands, and teaching-related issues. These obstacles impede their ability to deliver effective instruction, and despite these challenges, educators remain compelled to fulfill the expectations of parents, institutions, society, and students.

The role of the teacher in this context is not one of authority; rather, they are positioned as facilitators who must strategically adopt appropriate methodologies to foster effective second language acquisition among their students. This necessitates the exploration of evidence-based strategies that can enhance language learning outcomes in a challenging educational landscape.

Moreover, a significant and contentious issue within the field of second language acquisition is whether students achieve communicative competence in a second language as a result of formal learning or if such competence is developed primarily through communication and interaction. This dichotomy raises critical questions about the efficacy of traditional teaching methodologies versus more interactive, communicative approaches. Consequently, it is imperative to investigate these dynamics to identify effective pedagogical practices that can better support Nepali English teachers and their students in navigating the complexities of second language learning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the concept of contextualized English Language Teaching (ELT). More specifically, it seeks to examine the experiences of English teachers at the secondary level in implementing contextualized teaching practices. Through this exploration, the study will provide insights into the challenges and benefits associated with contextualized approaches in the ELT context.

### **Research Questions**

- What challenges do teachers frequently encounter when implementing contextualized techniques in the ELT classroom?
- How do contextualized techniques aid teachers in enhancing students' communicative skills?
- Why is it essential to integrate contextualized teaching methods in English Language Teaching?

### **Delimitation of the Study**

This study is specifically delimited to the exploration of contextualized English Language Teaching (ELT), with a particular focus on Vygotsky's social learning theory. The research investigates the experiences of English language teachers regarding the application of contextualized instruction in their classrooms.

The primary objectives of the study are to determine the effectiveness of contextualized teaching in developing students' language skills and to identify the challenges teachers face during its implementation. Given the phenomenological nature of this study, it is limited to five participants, which allows for an in-depth examination of their experiences while also acknowledging the constraints of a smaller sample size.

## Literature Review

Teaching English as a second language through contextualized techniques is vital for effective language acquisition, as the primary function of language is communication.

Language serves as a medium through which individuals express their feelings, desires, and thoughts. Therefore, effective English teaching necessitates interaction within the classroom.

Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Symwene, 2016) emphasizes that contextualized teaching enhances cognitive development in children by fostering social interaction and collaborative learning. This approach enables students to address practical problems effectively, as they engage with language in meaningful contexts.

Moreover, Mayer (2003) points out that language learning cannot occur effectively in decontextualized environments. However, the specific challenges teachers face when integrating contextualization into their pedagogy are still underexplored. Molz (2010) emphasizes the importance of connecting content with context, noting that there is limited empirical research focusing on the lived experiences of teachers implementing these strategies. MEBITIL (2012) advocates for the adoption of contextualization strategies to enhance teacher professionalism, while Moghaddas (2013) highlights that contextualization should be a central component of English teaching to promote language learners' performance. Additionally, Rohayati (2013) states that contextualized teaching creates relatable situations for students, facilitating their participation by linking new content to prior knowledge.

Research by Saqlanin, Shafquat, and Hassan (2016) supports the notion that contextualized instruction significantly aids learners in achieving language proficiency. Similarly, Rahman (2016) emphasizes the importance of involving students in meaningful interactions, asserting that creating appropriate contexts is essential for facilitating communication in the target language. Yanzi (2020) further explores this idea, indicating that



grammar can be effectively learned through context. He critiques traditional methodologies and textbooks for often neglecting communicative content, resulting in decontextualized and meaningless learning experiences, which obstruct the development of language competency.

Despite these insights, gaps remain in the literature regarding the practical application of contextualized techniques in English Language Teaching (ELT) within specific educational contexts. While research emphasizes the importance of linking new content to prior knowledge, it fails to thoroughly investigate how these practices manifest in real classroom settings. This study aims to address these gaps by examining the experiences of English teachers in Nepal regarding the application of contextualized teaching techniques and identifying the challenges they encounter in their implementation.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore teachers' experiences with contextualized approaches in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms. Phenomenological research aims to describe and interpret the shared experiences of individuals, providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007). This approach aligns with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and contextual experiences. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of language as a tool for communication and cognitive development, suggesting that learning occurs when students engage in meaningful interactions within their social environments.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with participants who had firsthand experience with contextualized teaching methods. These interviews allowed participants to articulate their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the application of contextualized approaches in their classrooms. By focusing on the lived experiences of these

educators, the study aims to illuminate how contextualization in ELT can enhance learning outcomes and the communicative competence of students.

### **Population/Sample of the Study**

Three participants from different community schools in the Udayapur district were selected using criterion sampling. The participants had a minimum of five years of language teaching experience and held master's degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT).

As the study focuses on the experience of the individuals who have enough experience with English language teaching, the researcher set some criteria to choose the informants. The criteria for selecting the informants were as follows:

- Active teaching experience in Language teaching for at least 5 years.
- Holding a master's degree in ELT.

The rationale behind selecting the participants according to the above criteria was that the experienced teachers possess rich knowledge and skills for implementing the contextualization in the ELT class. Their long experience in the teaching field is thought to add richness and depth to the understanding of Contextualized English Language Teaching through their perspective.

### **Table 1**

#### *The Participants' Profile*

Name	Gender	Academic Qualification	Teaching Experience
Rohan Poudel	Male	M.Ed. in English	10 years
Usha Kiran Lamsal	Female	M.Ed. in English	7 years
Anjana Shivakoti	Female	M.A. in English	9 years.

The researcher used purposive sampling to select informants who were experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Tools for Data Collection**

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers about contextualized teaching

practices. The researcher purposively selected three informants to gain in-depth insights into their experiences. To facilitate data collection, open-ended interview questions were designed, and the interviews were conducted via mobile phone due to restrictions imposed by the ongoing lockdown.

In addition to the interviews, the researcher conducted a thorough review of relevant literature, including books, articles, previous research, and academic journals, to contextualize the findings within the broader field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The collected information was systematically summarized and paraphrased to ensure clarity and coherence.

The interviews were structured around the central objectives of the study. All participants had over five years of experience teaching English as a second language (L2), which enabled them to articulate their experiences with contextualized teaching effectively. The rapport established between the researcher and participants contributed to a comfortable environment, allowing for open and candid discussions about their pedagogical practices.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

Data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews, during which the researcher meticulously took notes to ensure accurate documentation of participants' responses. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the notes into coherent paragraphs for further analysis.

To maintain objectivity and minimize bias, the obtained information was systematically coded, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns across participants' responses. The analysis included a thorough reading of each transcript to discern commonalities and significant phrases. From this coding process, the researcher developed overarching themes that encapsulated the essence of the participants' experiences. These themes were subsequently articulated in descriptive paragraphs, providing a comprehensive

understanding of the teachers' perspectives on contextualized teaching practices in English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts.

### **Result and Discussion**

After the transcription and analysis of the data, three themes have emerged. The following section discusses these themes.

#### **The Efficacy of Contextualized English Language Teaching in Fostering Student Engagement and Language Development**

Participants reported that contextualized teaching was highly effective for language development. They explained that this approach actively engages students, offering them opportunities to learn from peers and teachers. Students felt comfortable speaking English in the classroom due to the immediate feedback they received from teachers. This approach encouraged students to participate in classroom activities and collaborate with their peers.

When participants were asked about their experience of contextualized teaching, they explained that the contextualized approach of language teaching is very fruitful for language development.

*Contextualized English Language is very fruitful because it engages the students actively in the classroom. They get the opportunity to learn the language from their own peer and teacher. They feel comfortable speaking English since they get immediate feedback from teachers and their mistakes are limited within their classroom.*

Contextualized teaching activates the students and encourages them to participate in classroom activities. The learners perform prescribed classroom activities with their peers that create opportunities to work together and learn together. Learners are afraid of speaking English outside of the classroom but they feel comfortable in the classroom among their friends and teachers. The immediate feedback provided by the teachers helps them correct their mistakes.

## **Positive Impact of Contextualized Teaching on Academic Performance and Language Skill Development**

Participants unanimously agreed that contextualized teaching positively impacted students' academic performance. They noted that contextualized activities were relevant to students' lives, helping them develop all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One participant remarked that classroom activities were directly tied to students' interests, enhancing their learning and making them more imaginative.

*'The classroom activities are relevant to students' interests. This approach presents the learning items more effectively and will support to enhance all four language skills and make the students imaginative.'*

*'Contextualized teaching motivates students towards learning and builds up their confidence level.'*

It reveals that contextualized teaching is beneficial to the students in the context of second language teaching. The teachers present the information and students construct the meaning based on their experience. Learning materials are selected according to the interest of the students and develop all four language skills in an integrated way. When students engage in a conversation, they should be able to speak and comprehend the spoken texts by their peers.

When the teachers teach listening, students are introduced to the context, and made to recall the prior knowledge then only the listening items are presented. This process motivates the students towards learning and also helps them to comprehend the text. Similarly, the reading texts are selected according to the interests of the students. Learners' speaking skill is developed through debate and discussion on the topic that is relevant to learners. Likewise, the writing tasks are administered based on experience. Teachers present themes that are familiar to learners and relevant to real-life situations (Hinkel, 2006).

## **Challenges in Implementing Contextualized Teaching in English Language Teaching (ELT) Classrooms**

Participants cited several challenges in implementing contextualized teaching, including large class sizes, lack of teaching materials, and students' reluctance to participate. They also mentioned that classroom management issues, such as unsuitable furniture, hindered group activities. Additionally, many teachers were accustomed to traditional methods, making it difficult for students to adapt to a new approach. Time constraints for exam preparation further limited the use of contextualized methods.

### **The Participants Revealed:**

*'Undoubtedly contextualized teaching is a very effective approach in language learning, but teachers have lots of challenges to implement it in the ELT class.'*

The participants' experience supports the need and implementation of contextualization in ELT class. They are assured that contextualization is an effective approach for language teaching despite having lots of challenges.

*'Our class consists of a large number of students, so it is very difficult to involve all the students in classroom activities. We lack supportive teaching materials and the shy students do not show interest in participating in the learning activities.'*

A large number of students is one of the challenging factors for implementing contextualization in the ELT class. Contextual teaching demands related instructional materials for meaningful learning, its scarcity hinders the smooth implementation, and teachers are not motivated towards this approach.

### **Another mentioned:**

*'The classrooms are not well managed and furniture is not supportive of assigning group work and organizing any language games. Most of the students lack basic knowledge of the language, and as a result, they hesitate to speak English.'*

Classroom management is an important component of learning. Well well-managed classroom supports the students' learning. Classroom management and comfortable furniture boost the academic performance of the students. Similarly, if the students lack basic knowledge of the language, they do not like to participate in the classroom activities or they are confused about them.

*'They are used to teaching in traditional approach; therefore, the students feel quite strange to adjust in new teaching method because most of the teachers including language teachers do not use the contextualized approach in their classrooms.'*

If the students are guided by the traditional methods, it will be difficult for them to learn in the contextualized class in the beginning days. According to Bhandari (2020) majority of the teachers in Nepal do not address the need and demands of the context. So, they cannot bring qualitative change in teaching. To promote contextualization, schools should play the leading role. It should make plans and programs to enhance teaching quality that also encourages the teachers to follow the sharing culture.

*'It is not possible to contextualize the contents daily since we have to complete the course on time for the exam. On the other hand, contextualized teaching is time-consuming.'*

This exposes the bitter reality of teaching pedagogy in our academic institutions. All the participants accept contextualized teaching as an effective approach to language teaching, but they have experienced lots of challenges to implementing it in the classrooms. A large number of students has made it difficult to engage all the students in classroom activities, especially in role play. The unavailability of required teaching materials has also created another challenge for the implementation of the approach. There is a danger that only extroverted and intelligent students get the opportunity to participate in classroom activities. Such a condition keeps the shy and introverted students in the shadows.

The classrooms are designed and managed in a traditional way that has become trouble for language teachers to organize various games and assignments. It explores that only a few teachers teach subject matter using the contextualized approach. Thus, students feel this approach quite strange and they may not actively participate in the learning activities

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that contextualized English language teaching has the potential to bring about significant improvements in student learning. The approach allows students to express themselves comfortably, even when making mistakes and helps them learn through practical application. Despite the challenges, such as limited resources and large class sizes, contextualized teaching remains an effective and engaging method, particularly in community schools in the Udayapur district. Lorbis (2019) mentions that the implication of contextualized teaching in ELT class is very significant because it ‘enhances the critical and creative thinking skills and develops the problem-solving skills. It makes the learning meaningful and relevant.’ (p. 71).

Contextualized English language teaching emphasizes cooperative and collaborative learning, promotes the learners’ autonomy, and develops teachers’ professionalism. (Awasthi, 200). English in Nepal is taught for communication purposes, contextualized teaching is essential to develop the communicative and linguistic competence of both teachers and students.

Different learning activities make the learners imaginative and motivate them to achieve their learning goals. Working experience with peers and teachers concretizes their concepts about the content that connects internal learning with external life and develops a sense of cooperation.

However, there are lots of challenges in its implication in the classroom. The teachers, teaching in community schools located in Udayapur District shared their experience of



contextualized teaching as a more interesting approach to students and provided diverse contextual learning opportunities. According to their experience, the pressure to complete the course on time for the exam, the unavailability of supportive teaching materials, and the unwillingness of shy students to participate in learning activities have created challenges to apply the contextualized approach in teaching content.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends the implementation of the following strategies when applying contextualized techniques.

Reyes et al. (2019) argue that there are many ways of implementing contextualization, but the best way is to connect the students' life context with the help of information to deliver the lesson efficiently. The learning becomes mature if the information is linked with the student's live experiences. The teaching process has a direct connection with concrete application.

- **Emphasize Contextualization:** Prioritize contextualization in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it significantly contributes to achieving positive learning outcomes.
- **Connect Learning to Real Life:** Implement contextualization by linking instructional content to students' life experiences to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of lessons.
- **Focus on Practical Applications:** Ensure that teaching processes are directly connected to practical applications, facilitating a shift from abstract concepts to concrete understanding.
- **Promote Meaningful Communication:** Foster an interactive classroom environment where meaningful communication is central, aiding in language retention and recall.

- **Encourage Diverse Language Use:** Create opportunities for students to generate a variety of words and sentences, promoting meaningful learning contexts tailored to their needs.
- **Cultivate Teacher Competence:** Teachers should possess comprehensive subject knowledge and the ability to contextualize teaching materials to create relevant learning experiences.
- **Support Continuous Professional Development:** Encourage ongoing professional development and research to enhance teachers' expertise and effectiveness in implementing contextualized teaching.
- **Address Implementation Challenges:** Recognize and provide support for the challenges teachers face when applying contextualized teaching methods in their classrooms.
- **Foster Critical Thinking:** Utilize contextualized teaching to enhance critical and creative thinking skills as well as problem-solving abilities among students.
- **Promote Cooperative Learning:** Emphasize cooperative and collaborative learning strategies to foster learner autonomy and advance teachers' professionalism.
- **Adapt to Communication Needs:** In the context of Nepal, tailor English teaching to focus on developing the communicative and linguistic competence of both teachers and students.

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