Contextualisation in the EFL Primary Classroom: A Neglected Issue in Teacher Education[[1]](#footnote-1)

İngilizce’nin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretildiği İlköğretim Sınıflarında Bağlam İçinde Öğretme: Öğretmen Eğitiminde İhmal Edilmiş Konu

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*Abstract*

This study aims to determine whether Turkish EFL student teachers (STs) studying at Uludağ University can contextualise their lessons during School Experience (SE) and to what extent they can use various techniques at primary education level.

Although STs were expected to use six different techniques of contextualisation, namely personalisation, individualisation, localisation, modernisation, the use of immediate context and formulated information, they were able to use ‘*Personalisation*’ as the only main technique of contextualisation, and even then in a limited way. In an attempt to use personalisation, they tended to use audio-visual materials and stories, and to a certain extent, they could elicit information from the learners.

These results show that STs need to go through a training programme in which they actively practise contextualisation techniques by means of which they can present language topics in a meaningful way and thus relate the English language to the learners’ lives.

*Key words:* contextualisation, young learners, teacher education.

*Öz*

Bu çalışma Uludağ Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi öğretmen adaylarının (ÖA) Okul Deneyimi sürecinde ilköğretim seviyesinde verdikleri derslerini bir bağlam içinde öğretip öğretemediklerini ve bir bağlam içinde öğretme tekniklerini ne derecede kullanabildiklerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Öğretmen adaylarının altı farklı bağlam içinde öğretme tekniği (Kişileştirme, Bireyselleştirme, Yerelleştirme, Güncelleme, İçinde Bulunulan Fırsatları Değerlendirme, Belli bir Formatta Sunulan Bilgi Kaynağını Kullanma) kullanmaları beklenirken, sadece sınırlı bir şekilde ‘Kişileştirmeyi’ ana teknik olarak kullanabilmişlerdir. ‘Kişileştirme’ tekniğini kullanmak için öğretmen adaylarının görsel-işitsel materyaller ve hikayeleri kullanma eğilimi gösterip belli düzeyde de soru sorma yolula öğrencilerden bilgi alabildikleri bulunmuştur.

Sonuçlar, öğretmen adaylarının öğretilen konuları anlamlı bir şekilde sunucakları ve İngilizceyi öğrencilerin hayatı ile ilişkilendirebilmelerini sağlayıp, böylece dili bir bağlam içinde öğretmeyi aktif olarak uygulayabilecekleri bir eğitim programından geçmeleri gerektiğini göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bağlam içinde öğretme, çocuklara yabancı dil öğretimi, öğretmen eğitimi

*Introduction*

With the introduction of communicative language teaching methodology, presentation of appropriate language in meaningful real life contexts has been given priority. In the early days of the communicative approach, Widdowson (1978) stated that “normal linguistic behaviour does not consist of the production of separate sentences but in the use of sentences for the creation of discourse” (p. 22). Real life communication is not always conveyed at sentence level and we have to go beyond the sentence. In daily communication, any coherent stretch of language is interpreted within a context of situation to achieve meaning. It would not be very meaningful to teach language through isolated, grammatically well formed sentences without any contextual information (Cook, 1989). Thus, encouraging teachers to teach the language for real purposes and to design appropriate activities has become an essential necessity for EFL teacher education. This is why, this study aims to help STs realise the significance of presenting and practising language within a meaningful context and enable them to use contextualisation techniques systematically and consciously.

The Concept of Contextualisation

Language use in real life situations requires learners to learn through contextualised materials (see Hadley, 2003). Thus, the role of context and its significance in the language learning process in teacher education should be considered. From this perspective, contextualisation is defined as

the meaningful use of language for real communicative purposes. It helps students understand how language users construct language in a given context (Opp-Beckman & Klinghammer, 2006: p. 13).

However, in foreign language classrooms, language teaching is not realised in the way to help students how meaning is constructed in a context. On the contrary, most of the class time is occupied with activities which present decontextualised language (Hatch 1992). Unfortunately, this is seen as a natural part of the Turkish foreign language education system which still favours the notion of knowing rather than of doing. As Brown et al. (1989) state “the primary concern of schools often seems to be the transfer of this substance [knowledge] which comprises abstract, decontextualised formal concepts” (p. 32). The Turkish education system is oriented towards preparing students for multiple choice tests at different levels in all subjects including English. These English tests usually measure knowledge of grammar and vocabulary rather than the ability to use the language for communication. Nunan (2000) also states that decontextualised grammar instruction potentially helps learners work on forms and even pass tests but it does fail to enable them to use these forms in a meaningful way.

As Hadley (2003) rightly puts it, even in (supposedly) communicative classroom material, it is possible to find isolated language practice activities in which meaningless and mechanical structure analysis which emphasises drilling is highlighted. Clearly, such activities do not enable students to use language for a communicative purpose in real life situations. When the content of a language class does not look meaningful to learners, they cannot relate it to their lives and to their own experiences. Consequently, learning a foreign language becomes an irrelevant and meaningless activity for them.

Therefore, it is essential that teachers should be able to present language activities in such a way that learners can relate these to their lives at least to a degree. For instance, Schneider (2005) suggests bringing community issues into the classroom since “it provides an opportunity to make learning more engaging and relevant because students have the opportunity to understand new material in terms of their own lives and realities’’ (p. 298).

The present study proposes the idea that by means of contextualised activities, language teachers are expected to engage learners in meaningful and comprehensible activities. They should make use of such types of activities which could be “clearly relatable to existing knowledge that the learner already possesses” (Hadley, 2003: p. 131). The language input in these activities is expected to be comprehensible.

As defined by Krashen (1986), comprehensible input is a bit above the learners’ language level but it is accessible for them. It is the teachers’ responsibility to make the input comprehensible by presenting it within a context and providing support for the learners. This support can be provided within the young learners’ Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as the area of support provided by an adult (the teacher in our case) so that the child can complete a task which s/he cannot do on his/her own. This type of support can be given through interaction within the learners’ ZPD. In Bruner’s (1978) terms the teacher ‘scaffolds’ learning by asking questions, using audio-visual materials and stories. This becomes even more important when teaching English as a foreign language in a country where the learners are not exposed to the target language in their own lives. Because of this, it is important to provide students with meaningful input in the classroom.

*Meaningful Learning*

The use of contextualisation techniques will help teachers provide comprehensible input for their learners in order to make language learning more meaningful. As stated by Williams & Burden (1997), “everyone makes their own sense of the world and the experiences that surround them” (p. 21). In order to make sense of foreign language materials, learners rely on their “pre-existing knowledge” (Cook, 1989). This knowledge is referred to as schema which is defined as the previously acquired knowledge structures accessed in the comprehension process (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Students in an EFL context are also expected to be able to “construct meaning from their own cognitive structure” (Hadley, 2003: p.134). Therefore, it is the teachers’ responsibility to relate the target language with the students’ experiences. The teachers are expected to use various contextualisation techniques such as activities, exercises, audio-visual materials and stories, by means of which s/he could activate learners’ previously acquired knowledge.

One of the techniques of contextualisation is *Personalisation,* which refers to the process of making the content of a material or part of a lesson relevant to learners’ interests and educational or professional needs.

Visual materials which will prepare the learner to understand the context of the activity are expected to activate learners’ pre-existing knowledge. This is particularly helpful with learners who have lower level of proficiency. Thus, the use of visual materials becomes even more significant in a context in which one deals with young learners.

Stories can also be exploited for the same purpose. In language lessons, stories are used as a means to create a situation so that a specific language item can be accessible to the learners. It allows both teachers and learners to share their own stories related to the language item depending on their personal experience. The teacher is expected to elicit the learner’s story by asking questions.

The type of contextualisation techniques and the way teachers use them will show variations depending on the age and proficiency level of the learners. Specifically, when teachers deal with young learners, (5-12-year olds), they need to use a good variety of visual materials whereas adults can handle more cognitively demanding materials and tasks such as texts without much visual support.

Learners’ individual characteristics should be taken into account when making decisions about the kind contextualisation techniques in order to meet individuals’ needs. That is, prioritising individual differences can be referred to as *Individualisation* following McDonough and Shaw (1993) terms. This issue will be returned in the following section.

Some materials containing features of foreign culture and life style can be made accessible by using *Localisation* techniques. McDonough and Shaw (1993) interpret *Localisation* as relocating the topic of the lesson and course material within the learners’ geographic area and culture.

The next category is *Modernisation*. In the rapidly changing world, a particular piece of information becomes out of date very quickly. This may hinder comprehension as learners do not have pre-existing knowledge about a particular piece of information. Therefore, teachers should look for outdated information in course materials and update and modify them.

Another type of contextualisation technique is the source of *use of formulated information,* which includes authentic materials such as charts, time-tables, statistical information, a restaurant menu or manuals for electrical devices etc. Teachers should be careful when choosing them because the language of authentic materials can be very challenging and thus demotivating for EFL learners.

The last contextualisation technique is *Using the Immediate Context* based on Harmer’s (2006) definition of learners’ “physical surroundings” (p. 57) as the places where they spend time such as the classroom and school. The use of immediate context can be really practical for teachers since it refers to the learners’ current schemata which can be activated easily.

The use of all these techniques will help the EFL teachers to present meaningful, contextualised and comprehensible language in their lessons.

The Significance of Context for Young Learners

Children’s natural abilities and characteristics, which help them to learn a language, need to be taken into consideration. This issue is actually included within the description of English teacher competencies at primary school level by the Turkish National Ministry of Education (http://otmg.meb.gov.tr /alan\_ingilizce\_ortaöğretim.html )

Children can make sense of the language they are exposed to and can use the language rather creatively (Moon, 2000; Cameron, 2001). They have the ability to go for meaning even though they do not really know about the language forms. This ability helps them to work out what is happening in a situation and attach meaning to the language used. In the meantime, they can actually learn quite a good number of language features unconsciously, mostly by focusing on the meaning of the language. In order to provide experience of language for them, teachers need to consider different learning channels. Linse (2005) suggests that teachers use different types of input such as visual, auditory and tactile input in order to deal with individual learning differences. . McDonough (1981) states that it is essential for teachers to find out differences among their learners which can be searched under the categories of intelligence, aptitude, learning style and personality so that they develop possible strategies to cope with these differences among their learners. The main challenge for teachers is to match the methods and materials to the learners’ preferred learning styles and experiences. It will be possible to deal with individual differences through a meaningful context in which a framework of new knowledge is related to the learners’ knowledge and experiences.

The Place of Contextualisation in Teacher Education Programmes

Although current ELT methodologies require teachers to present appropriate language through meaningful context and to take learners’ individual differences into account, teachers still tend to teach language through grammar and devoid of stimulating content. Especially, the teachers who are not trained to teach English to young learners attempt to use the bottom-up approach only in a more traditional way, by which learners learn grammar rules and vocabulary through mechanical drills and focus on correct forms rather than on the meaning (Schrum and Glisan 2000, p. 13). This type of teaching would not be suitable for children to learn a foreign language. Instead, a top-down approach as suggested by Schrum and Glisan (2000) will let them learn language through a meaningful context with the help of thematic units and communicative activities related to the children’s own experience. In fact, even children learning their mother tongue can have difficulties when they are expected to learn words from abstract definitions and sentences taken out of the context of normal use (Brown et al,1989). When it is about learning a foreign language through isolated, decontextualised materials, learning becomes even more difficult. To compensate for this situation, Scrivener (1994) states that teachers are expected to “create situations, perhaps using pictures, in order to provide a context for a language item and give the learners an illustration of a way that it would typically be used” (p. 213).

Moreover, real teaching environments, such as a class of learners with different learning styles and proficiency levels, present challenges to teachers. Textbooks which are selected by the educational authorities may or may not be very suitable for adaptation. The researchers believe that a special emphasis on how to do contextualization during the School Experience course would be a timely intervention to assist STs to put their accumulation of theoretical knowledge into practice.

*Turkish Teacher Education Programme*

In Turkey, those who graduate from a four-year EFL Teacher Education programme at the faculty of education of universities qualify to teach English at different levels of education in various institutions. During this programme, STs take different kinds of courses (see for details Turkish Republic Higher Education Council Booklet). A detailed course content description in English can be found on the website of Uludag University Faculty of Education English Language Department (<http://egitim.uludag.edu.tr/YDE/ingilizce/dersleren.html>) (available November 2011). These descriptions have been translated from the booklet of the Higher Education Council.

Table 1. Description of the Teacher Education Programme (Summarised from the Turkish Republic Higher Education Council Booklet.)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Categories of courses | Course names |
| Basic Language Skills | Reading, Writing, Speaking/Listening, Vocabulary, Grammar |
| ELT Methodology courses | Approaches to ELT Methodology, Teaching Young Learners, Teaching the Four Skills; Materials Evaluation and Design |
| Applied Linguistics | Introduction to Linguistics, Language Acquisition, Pragmatics; |
| Educational Science | Educational Psychology, Comparative Education, History of Turkish Education |
| Teaching Practice Courses | School Experience (primary level), Practicum (high school level) |

As seen in table 1, STs take a variety of courses. Most of the courses are theoretical and they aim to prepare STs for the upcoming teaching practice in the final year. In the teaching practice courses, groups of STs are allocated to particular schools for 10 weeks, during which they observe classes and perform teaching under the supervision of mentor teachers.

Although courses such as Teaching Foreign Languages to Young Learners, Teaching the Four Skills and Pragmatics could be a good opportunity to teach the process of how to present language in a contextualised way and how to convert context-reduced textbook activities into comprehensible and meaningful ones, this does not necessarily happen in our specific institution.

One week’s work during the Materials Evaluation and Design course is devoted to the issue of contextualisation specifically. Part of the course requirement is to design teaching materials within a certain context. Some of the STs are successful in creating a context which is accessible to their hypothetical learners while the others present language items in a decontextualised way. However, this course does not specifically aim to introduce STs to the subject of how to use contextualisation techniques in a systematic way.

The researchers feel that contextualisation should be further emphasized during the SE (see the Method section) course in a more systematic and structured way to help STs see for themselves how it works in the classroom either when they are practising themselves or when observing the actual practising teachers and their peers.

This case study is part of a larger-scale project which aspires to incorporate a component on how to contextualise course material and language topics into the present teacher education programme. The study questions to what extent our STs can contextualise their lessons during their SE in primary level classes.

Methodology

Being a qualitative study, the present study can be categorised as action research which is defined as the method of professional self development which involves the systematic collection and analysis of data related to practice. The study fits in the description of action research in three aspects:

1. Action research is described as initiated by a problem (Nunan 1992). The authors of the present study have been experiencing the problem in focus here over many years.
2. Action research is usually carried out by the authors who are directly influenced by the consequences of the problem situation (Nunan 1992). Yıldırım & Şimşek (2005) emphasises the importance of researcher’s involvement in the process of research. The authors have been involved in teacher education for long years. They have been concerned with particular aspects of deficiencies of the present teacher education programme. The teacher trainers can use action research as a means to improve the programme. This will also contribute to their own professional development and the development of the institution.
3. Action research is described as a means to lead to improvement and change Research results can be applied in the classroom (Nunan 1992). That is, action research is an approach with three processes: participatory, reflection and improvement (Nunan 1992).

*Participants and Setting*

A total of 24 final year STs, two university based mentor teachers and two independent raters (practising teachers working at the primary education level) contributed to the study. All ST participants studied ELT in the Faculty of Education at Uludag University and they were still doing their SE at two different state-run primary schools in the city of Bursa at the time of data collection. There is a need to provide information about the background of the subjects.

*The Background of the Study*

The SE course is the first teaching practice course the STs take. It provides an opportunity for STs to put theory into practice at primary level. It requires STs to attend one theoretical class hour in a week in the faculty and four hours of practical lessons in the practice school under the supervision of practising teachers and their supervisors. During the first three weeks, STs observe the teachers in the practising school. Then, as part of the course requirement, they plan their lessons based on the textbook which is published by the Turkish National Ministry of Education. They are encouraged not to depend on the textbook themes but to create their own contextualised activities. Every ST did at least 5 hours of teaching but the researchers observed each ST for two lesson hours. One of these lessons were recorded and rated by the researchers and two independent raters by means of an observation inventory form.

The groups which participated in this study were taught about contextualisation techniques during the one-hour theoretical course and told that they were going to be evaluated in terms of the extent to which they could contextualise their lessons. They were also introduced to the observation inventory developed by the researchers (Karatepe & Yılmaz 2010).

*Data Collection*

*Preparation of the Observation Inventory*

In order to enable the observers to record only the particular specific teaching practices during classroom observation, the researchers need to prepare a specific inventory to include all possible contextualisation strategies (Yıldırım & Şimşek 2005). The observation Inventory used in this study has been informed by two main sources of information (see Appendix I).

The first one has been documented in Karatepe & Yılmaz (2010) where the researchers first asked a group of final year STs how they would contextualise their lesson if they were to teach a language point of their own choice to an imaginary group learners. The researchers analysed their lesson descriptions to identify particular contextualisation strategies.

The second source of information, upon which the inventory has been based is McDonough & Shaw’s (1993) categorisation of principles of contextualisation. These are ‘personalisation, individualisation, localising and modernising the content and form of teacher’s talk’ (p. 87). In addition, the researchers borrowed the idea of ‘using the immediate context and using formulated information’ from Harmer (2006, p. 58).

In order to enable the observers to record only the particular specific teaching practices which are used by the STs, the researchers first asked a group of final year STs how they would contextualise their lesson if they were to teach a language point of their own choice. Karatepe & Yılmaz (2010) analyses these lesson descriptions to find out which categories of contextualisation strategies they would use in their hypothetical lessons.

The observation inventory has been prepared with the upmost care as it is an important tool, by means of which the researchers record to what extent STs can use various contextualisation strategies. Yıldırım & Şimşek (2005) highlights the significance of determining the type of behaviours that the researchers will focus on during the observation. A well-prepared observation inventory is a good guide for the researchers.

The present study regards contextualisation strategies as part of social aspect of classroom environment. By means of such strategies (e.g. asking real questions), the STs can initiate classroom interaction. This way, learners can be involved in a meaningful interaction in English. Yıldırım & Şimşek (2005, p. 176) defines ‘observation of social aspect of the environment’ as one of the aspects of an observation inventory. Therefore, the observation inventory should enable the researchers to gather information on patterns of strategy by the STs.

Yıldırım & Şimşek (2005, p. 176) includes ‘observation of activities in the environment’ as another aspect of an inventory form. Through the observation inventory, the researchers also aim to collect information on the kind of activities used by the STs during the lesson. Designing and using classroom activities (e.g. pair work activities and games) where learners are to use English in a meaningful way is regarded as a type of contextualisation strategy (see Data Analysis). Therefore, the observation inventory has been designed to collect information on the activities used by the STs and how they make use of these activities to foster real interaction in the classroom.

Following Yıldırım & Şimşek (2005) the observation inventory has been prepared to cover all possible practice of contextualisation strategies in order to enable the observers to record occurrences of these in all possible forms and for a variety of purposes.

In addition to the researchers, two practising EFL teachers, who were at the same time postgraduate students, had been asked to examine the inventory and to give feedback on the practicability of its content and format. These raters also participated in the data analysis of the study. After preparation of the format of the inventory had been finalized, the raters were asked to watch video recordings of the lessons and make an entry in the inventory form whenever the ST used any of the contextualisation techniques. STs’ classroom practices were categorized based on these raters’ decisions. When at least two of the raters agreed on the category of a classroom practice, it was included in the data. When there was no rater agreement, the researchers talked to the raters. In cases when a consensus could not be reached, the practice in question was not included in the analysis. By talking with the raters, the researchers attempted to clarify any doubts in the raters’ minds about how to use techniques of contextualisation and which category a classroom practice could be included in.

*Data Analysis*

In order to find out the frequency of use of the contextualisation techniques in the inventory, all the entries for each category were counted.

Findings

The main findings are presented under six main headings: personalisation, individualisation, localisation, modernizing, using the immediate context and the use of formulated information. The reader will find 4 raters’ counts of STs use of contextualisation techniques. Categories of *Modernising* and *Formulated Information* are not included in the graph as they did not occur in the data.

*Figure 1*: Distribution of contextualisation techniques counts across raters.

*Categories of Contextualisation*

The reader will be presented a detailed description of the categories of contextualisation while presenting the findings. The observation data is based these categories.

*Personalisation*

The analysis of the results revealed that on many occasions the STs tended to use personalisation techniques in an attempt to contextualise the subject matter. However, they could not fully exploit the audio-visual materials to activate the learners’ schemata. They sometimes failed to point out to learners how a particular visual aid was related to the subject matter. All of the 24 STs used various pictures such as pictures of house parts, food, seasons and weather conditions. This was a very common practice among the STs in various stages of the lessons, (warm-up, presentation, practice). These pictures were generally downloaded from internet websites. Some of them were drawn by the STs themselves. Almost all of them were used to teach vocabulary items, to present reading passages and to do speaking activities.

In addition to pictures, real objects (10 occasions), such as a picnic basket, a magazine, a puppet, a clock, some clothes and a remote control were used at different times especially during the warm-up stage and practice stage. These were mainly exploited to set the context, to create a situation and to introduce and practise vocabulary items.

Audio- visual materials such as fragments from TV programmes and TV serials were also exploited by 8 of the STs. Three of these were a collection of various different TV programme clips. Short cartoons were shown on 2 occasions. Recordings downloaded from the internet were used on 3 occasions during lessons. Together with these 3, a total of 11 STs used the computer and projector to present visual materials. Only one of these was a failed attempt, in which the ST was unable to relate the animation with the subject matter.

STs also preferred to use traditional visuals such as flashcards (3 occasions) in order to present vocabulary items and a map (1 occasion) in order to present the relevant context of a reading text. One ST preferred drawing pictures on the board himself to make vocabulary items more concrete. When almost all of the STs used visual materials for warm-up, presentation and practice, only one of them asked the learners to make guesses about the visual material (a cartoon model house). That is, most of the time, learners were not guided to think about the visual in order to relate it with themselves directly.

On the one hand, 10 of the STs told several stories about themselves, their daily lives, houses and the picnics they had been on, in an attempt to personalise the topic. On the other hand, 12 of them preferred eliciting stories from their learners. Learners were asked to tell stories about their journeys to other countries and their picnics. During these phases of the lessons, some STs and learners tended to interact in Turkish. Other attempts at personalisation included appealing to learners’ interests, hobbies and capacities (12 occasions). Although STs used a number of contextualisation techniques, they were not able to use them effectively.

*Individualisation*

Only a limited number of individualisation techniques for contextualisation were used, possible reasons for which will be discussed later. Different learning styles were dealt with by 13 of the STs on various occasions. For example, STs tended to address themselves to both extrovert and introvert learners by presenting them with different types of activities. Some of them presented the language items first orally and then in the written form. They used both individual activities, and pair-work and group-work activities. Besides, only 4 STs attempted to guide learners to use different learning strategies such as helping them to learn and to remember vocabulary items through association.

*Localisation*

In an attempt to localise their lessons, STs used a number of visual materials such as photos of popular Turkish TV characters and famous holiday resorts near Bursa, Turkey. With the help of these materials, they aimed to relate the subject matter to the learners’ schema of their hometown and local life examples (8 occasions), and refer to the current events in Turkey (2 occasions) and Turkish culture and tradition (3 occasions). Thus, they wanted to activate learners’ pre-existing knowledge of the events and issues related to their country.

*Modernisation and use of formulated information*

None of the STs attempted to modernise the material. This is probably because the recently published materials did not require modernisation. They did not use any kind of formulated information such as time-tables, menus, graphs, etc.

*Use of the immediate context*

As materials and events were within close reach in the immediate context, STs were expected to make use of the immediate context often. However, only on 9 occasions of this was observed. In some cases, classroom furniture such as the teacher’s desk and chair and the students’ desks and chairs were made use of. In other cases, some displays around the classroom (maps, pictures, posters) were pointed out by STs. Some of them referred to both their own and learners’ belongings such as pencils, rulers and a hand bag and the items in it. In one case, a ST referred to the actual weather conditions by looking out of the window and pointing to the sky. However, none of STs attempted to make use of any event taking place in the classroom such as the teacher dropping an object or a learner sneezing.

STs started their SE with a sound theoretical background on teaching and learning a foreign language. However, as has been seen this does not suffice to relate language to the learners’ background knowledge. STs appear to need to receive more support and guidance on how to put what they know into practice fully.

Discussion

It was found that STs tended to make use of only one category of contextualisation, namely personalisation. They preferred using this technique when they were presenting vocabulary items, reading passages and speaking activities, mostly in the warm-up stage and practice stage.

There were several reasons why they limited their choice of contextualisation techniques to personalisation only. They appear to have realised that they were actually dealing with young learners who learned best through concrete examples due to their cognitive developmental characteristics. Guided by Piaget’s theory, Linse (2005) and Cameron (2001) suggest that since young learners were at concrete-operational level, they could learn through visual, auditory and tactile materials best.

They restricted the lesson with lesson themes already available in the textbook considering that it would do the job better than they could. This was expected to some extent, but their dependency could be limiting especially when the textbook did not support contextualised teaching.

It is useful to consider and discuss some possible reasons for their failure in using a variety of contextualisation techniques. They may not have felt that they belonged to the practice school. It seems that in the STs’ minds, the class was the other teacher’s responsibility. However, this should not be seen as an irresponsible stance since it was partly a consequence of the nature of this arrangement (see also Vancı-Osam & Balbay 2004). As they did not feel that they belonged to the institution, they were hesitant to take the liberty to make independent decisions. They had to consult the practising teacher and the mentor teacher about their plans, materials, and choice of activities on a regular basis. This could have limited their individual decision making process when they attempted to contextualise their lessons.

Another consequence of this ‘otherness' was that they did not really know about their learners, for example their interests, their family background or their attitudes towards learning English. In fact, they did not have enough time to learn about these as the School Experience covers only one term. For the same reason, they seem to have failed to make use of the individualisation technique. This could be partly due to the fact that they did not have time to get to know learners and their capabilities, their learning styles and preferences, or individual differences among the learners. This is described as one of the requirements for planning for teaching by Nunan & Lamb (1996).

Albeit to a limited extent, they were able to use personalisation when they were teaching vocabulary, reading and listening. However, when it was time for structural presentation, they attempted to present language items rather mechanically and in isolation. Moreover, they were expected to teach structures indirectly within a context, which is a requirement of young learners’ methodology. This time, however, they seem to have failed to envisage their learners’ characteristics and abilities.

One of the reasons why they failed to contextualise their lessons may be the limitation of time. Contextualising language takes a long time. As Walz (1989) also states, the presentation of a meaningful discourse would require a substantial amount of time. It seems this is why the teachers generally tend to postpone meaningful language practice. Since our STs were not so experienced in contextualising activities, it was possible that it would take twice as much time for them to plan and prepare activities for their lessons. Student teachers are not able to use the classroom time efficiently either. Besides, this kind of work requires teachers to be aware of what goes on in the local environment as well as in the world.

Localisation is one of the techniques which was not used to a great extent. The reason for this can be the fact that STs cannot somehow detach themselves from the themes in the textbook and see the relationship between community life and these themes. This kind of dependence on the textbook became a safe haven for them. They deliberately avoided adapting the activities in the textbook for the purposes of contextualisation. Consequently, they tended to make their lesson plans entirely based on the textbook. A similar dependency was reported by Vancı-Osam & Balbay (2004). It is understandable that they do not have enough self-confidence at this stage in their education.

However, Schneider (2005) has shown an example of how to integrate local issues to the language lesson. He prepared a reading lesson by using newspaper quotations about an actual strike taking place in the campus area in order to teach the passive voice. In the present study, STs were expected to have such awareness to the extent that they could relate subject matters to real life issues.

It has also been found that STs did not use modernisation and formulated information sources. ELT textbooks used in primary schools in Turkey are new, and are revised and reviewed regularly. Thus, the materials do not require updating. This appears to be the main reason for not using this technique.

Since formulated information sources are generally authentic materials, they require a higher level of language proficiency from learners. However, our STs do not really know how to exploit authentic texts for teaching purposes. They might have thought that authentic materials could be too difficult for primary school level. However, tasks for learners at different levels can be created out of an authentic text (Gilmore, 2007). Our STs need to be more informed about teaching material adaptation.

Coming from a very form-focused educational background, our STs have difficulties in changing their concept of language learning and teaching. They appear not to be concerned about the absence of meaning-focused language teaching. For this reason, we observe that they have not been very successful in putting theoretical knowledge about contextualisation techniques into practice in the classroom.

Conclusion

The results show that they make use of certain contextualisation techniques investigated in the inventory to a limited extent. However, some of these instances appear to be coincidental and fragmentary. That is, these techniques are not presented as part of a whole meaningful set of activities.

The findings of this specific action research suggest some improvements to be made to the inventory. Modernising has not been used by the STs. That is why, we can omit this category on the inventory. It seems that the technique of modernisation will not be needed in the School Experience process in the following years.

Based on the results, we conclude that STs need to go through a more systematic training course with a specific focus on contextualisation. The nature of this course should include activities to exemplify each category in the inventory. In these activities, textbook samples can be adapted with the help of contextualisation techniques and presented for the STs’ evaluation. Afterwards, they can be asked either to do adaptation themselves or to create their original contextualised materials. The results show that STs have not made use of any authentic language materials and they have used localisation and individualisation in a very limited way. For this reason, the new version of the course should focus on not only how to use a variety of contextualisation techniques but also how to exploit these to their full extent.

This course should be process oriented and encourage the STs to consider their own practice in a more analytical and critical way. They are expected to be able to look back to what extent their choice of contextualisation could address their learners. Thus, this will lead to professional development of STs.

The results of this action research have given the researchers valuable information about how to improve the theoretical aspect of the SE course. By looking back through the process this study they have realised that they need to ask STs to justify the underlying reasons for their choice of contextualisation techniques through self-evaluation reports following their lessons. Thus they will be more conscious about their choice of techniques. In addition, STs will watch themselves on the video recordings during the feedback sessions and will have a chance for critical self-evaluation and peer evaluation. STs will be involved in the process of course improvement thus they will become the part of this study.

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