

Teaching Grammar Communicatively: Creating Tasks for Context

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Abstract:

Most language teachers break down the teaching of grammar into two parts : giving instructions on the form (often seen as a formula : S+ HAS/HAVE+PAST PARTICIPLE= PRESNT PERFECT), and the function where they learn why and when to use such rules. However, the ultimate goal of teaching grammar is to teach both of these within one real comprehensive world and a meaningful context. Thus, grammar based context will more motivate learners, as they will have more opportunities to use the grammar rules easily according to real situations. In this regard, this article explains why we should teach grammar in context, and how it will be. The scope of this study will be reached through two main research instruments: teachers' questionnaire and teachers' interview. Thus, qualitative and quantitative analysis of the collected data revealed that teaching grammar in context helps learners to improve their communication skills through suitable grammatical choices with reference to the context that fit their communicative needs.

Key words: teaching of grammar, the form, function, meaningful context, communicative needs

1 .Introduction:

It has been approved that English grammar is the skeleton of the English education, especially when students start first studying at the middle school and secondary school. It is just like our bones to our bodies since students are provided with grammatical knowledge that may enhance their confidents to know the language. However, nowadays one of the main

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goals of learning English is to be able to communicate effectively in the target language. Therefore, it is really important to lead students to the phase of using their grammatical knowledge in real communication. The main question is how grammar should be taught, as well as, what are the most effective and fruitful tasks that may fit students' needs and necessities that enhance their oral proficiency so, it is the case where to find the place of spoken grammar in the teaching and learning English. Thus, to what extent spoken grammar can be used by students, as well as, the effectiveness of teaching different spoken grammar aspects to engage students in a natural English conversation.

2. Literature Review :

2.1 Grammar Teaching :

Many EFL learners are seen to be skillful in mastering grammatical knowledge, but still not able to communicate effectively in the target language. Therefore, English teachers should know how grammar teaching is including principles and roles of grammar teaching. Besides, one must echoes the role and position of grammar in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL context.

• 2.1.1 Role of Grammar Teaching:

Many scholars has defined grammar as a system of structures that make up a language to make learners aware of these rules and structures, that means make them aware of the grammatical knowledge. Many trends have appeared to address the role of grammar knowledge in learning a foreign language based on researchers' personal experience. Some of them have argued that the role of grammar should be the corps of Second Language Learning. Others have attributed very little importance to its position in language learning. It is agreed that the grammatical knowledge may increase language learners' comprehension of a language. Learners will be aware of different parts of speech, such as verbs, nouns, objects, etc, as they will be able to understand the nature of a language and how it functions. Thus, language learners will be able to communicate and convey meaning rather than having some single words, expressions or a body language only. Rechards and Renandya point out two main reasons for teaching grammar:

A. Comprehensibility :

Without grammatical skills language learning development will be a constrained equation. Indeed language learners will fail to use grammatical structures without which it will be so difficult to build correct sentences, and to communicate some meanings effectively. Thus, it is a must to teach or/ learn these structures well.

B. Acceptability :

At this level, language learners will process the grammatical knowledge in production so that they will use the language effectively in social contexts, for they will be taken seriously by native speakers.

Teaching grammar facilitates understanding the relationship between grammatical concepts, and using them in better cases which lead to better improvement of language skills.

2.1.2 Grammar roles in Communicative Language Teaching :

It is true that even foreigners can do mistakes when speaking, even though CLT does not include any grammatical aspects since it focuses on communication only. However, being excellent at grammar and mastering grammatical knowledge will help learners to get

meaningful conversations and to understand the purpose of the speaker. In fact during communication, if grammar is used correctly people will understand the meaning, as they will be understood.

So many scholars believed that communicative language teaching does not include any grammar, while others considered it as a “myth” since so many CLT syllabuses are designed with the focus on forms and form. That is to say, teaching grammatical rules, as well as, helping learners to draw learners’ view on grammar in practice and context. Thus, CLT syllabuses are organized according to situational context and function, which are connected to their corresponding grammatical items. Indeed, when discussing the role of grammar within a communicative approach, it should be dealt with the two types of CLT the shallow-end approach and the deep-end approach Thornbury (1999, qtd. In José López Rama and Gloria Luque Agulló 2012).

✓ **The shallow-end approach :**

This approach is based on the idea that learners should first master grammatical knowledge and rules to use them in suitable situational contexts, that why some scholars support the exclusion of teaching and learning grammatical items in CLT.

✓ **The deep-end approach :**

It is based on the belief that including grammar teaching to CLT is useless since grammar cannot be learned, but rather it is acquired using communicative situations where they use the grammatical backgrounds only the monitor to correctness of language use.

2.2 Principles of grammar teaching :

Teaching grammar effectively is crucial for helping students develop language proficiency.

2.2.1 Creating context for grammar teaching:

Many scholars agree that students may fail to apply their knowledge of grammar when they are communicating. Thus there is no connection between the implicit knowledge of grammatical rules and explicit use of that knowledge in communication since they do not know how grammar rules works within a sentence to perform a comprehensible speech. So when teaching grammar, one of the most important teacher’s roles is to show the students what the grammatical items are and how to use them in situational contexts.

Therefore, students need to draw conclusions on how the language is used by native speakers and the best way of doing this is to present the language in context Harmer (1991, p.69, qtd. In Çağrı Tuğrul Mart January 2013). “Context gives a more precise understanding of how to use the grammar, and provides accuracy in the studied language both in oral and written skills” (Wajnryb, 1990, p.6, qtd. In José López Rama and Gloria Luque Agulló 2012). Context based instruction can be useful for learners, as Hadley (2003, p.152, qtd. In Çağrı Tuğrul Mart January 2013) states that Students need to learn language in logical contexts, either through authentic discourse-

length input or through language learning materials that stimulate authentic input using sentences that follow in logical sequence. Thus, these aids will help teachers to provide learners with real context that contain certain criteria such as, authenticity, informative and interesting :

❖ **Authentic context :**

It is very crucial when the teacher brings something real and original from outside the classroom to make learners able to know how language is used by native speakers on logical contexts.

❖ **Informative context :**

Learners need a comprehensible input and easy to remember, as well as, the information gathered from different situations should be clear and useful for daily activities.

❖ **Interesting context :**

It is very important when students feel interested in to learn real contexts and eager for more practice in any kind of activities without hesitation and fear of making mistakes during oral performances, but rather they need to feel ready to take part of authentic and real conversations.

2.2.2 Creating tasks for grammar teaching :

When teaching grammar, one of the main teacher's roles is to make the teaching of grammar meaningful with a contextualize grammar instruction through effective activities to make learners look at the language in a new way as a new vehicle design. Thus, learners will be able to make different kinds of meanings, as they can decide exactly what they wish to convey as a message in the target language with others. Therefore, teachers should create "ice-breakers" tasks to engage learners in grammar learning process without any fear in the classroom, of face to face interactions. While designing such tasks teachers should take into consideration students needs, lacks, wants and necessities, so that these tasks will be related to suitable structures and form based contents. Besides, these tasks should be various and can meet both learners' needs as well as social needs.

3. Research methodology:

The purpose of this research work aims to investigate the importance of teaching grammar through task based context, and what kind of affective task-based context activities that would make the teaching of grammar so meaningful and comprehensible to learns where they can achieve fluent and accurate conversations. The results obtained may be helpful to teachers, educators, or educationalist in general to reflect upon their teaching grammar methodology, to select the best way that grammar can be taught, and to blend form, meaning and use to make learner understand and communicate effectively in real situations. This study is based on the following research questions :

- ✓ Why should teachers teach grammar through task-based context?
- ✓ What are the affective tasks for teaching grammar in context?

Two hypotheses were assumed answering the previous questions:

- ✓ Teaching grammar through context is so important for it gives learners the ability to communicate and know how the language works
- ✓ The affective tasks based context are : exploratory tasks, creation of coherent discourse, generative situations

3.1 Participants:

In this study, ten teachers from Tlemcen University have contributed in the process of data collection through their cooperation in answering the questionnaires and four teachers from other universities have allowed the researcher to be interviewed. Their experience of being teaching grammar varies from ten to twenty years, as they are in charge of these modules: linguistics, communicative language teaching and testing, linguistic theories.

3.2 procedures:

There are many types of research instruments that can help to gather data, such as questionnaire, interview and observation. In this work, the researcher designed two research tools, they are: teachers' questionnaire and teachers' interview. The questionnaire was devoted to Ten English teachers at University of Tlemcen, English Department, and the interview was addressed to four English teachers; two of them are from Algiers University, and the others are from Oran University.

4. Results and interpretation:

At this phase of study, the researchers report and analyze the data collected from the questionnaire and interview mentioned above. It aims to reach fruitful answers of the research questions sited in this study, as well as, it determines the validity and credibility of the proposed hypotheses at the beginning of this research paper. The latter encompasses a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a set of yes/no questions and open-ended questions.

4.1 analysis of questionnaire to teachers:

As it was mentioned previously, this questionnaire was addressed to ten English teachers at the University of Tlemcen, English Department. It included two yes/no questions, three multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions, as it is composed of three sections. It aimed to collect information about the importance of teaching grammar in context, and what effective context activities that makes the teaching of grammar meaningful to students.

Section one: teachers' profile

Teachers were asked to provide the researcher with information about: gender, EFL teaching experience and how long they have been teaching grammar. The following table summarizes the main results:

Section two: the importance of teaching grammar through context

Question one: do you like teaching grammar module ?

❖ Yes

❖ No

This question demonstrates whether or not teachers like to teach grammar module. All the teachers have shown their passion to teach grammar module

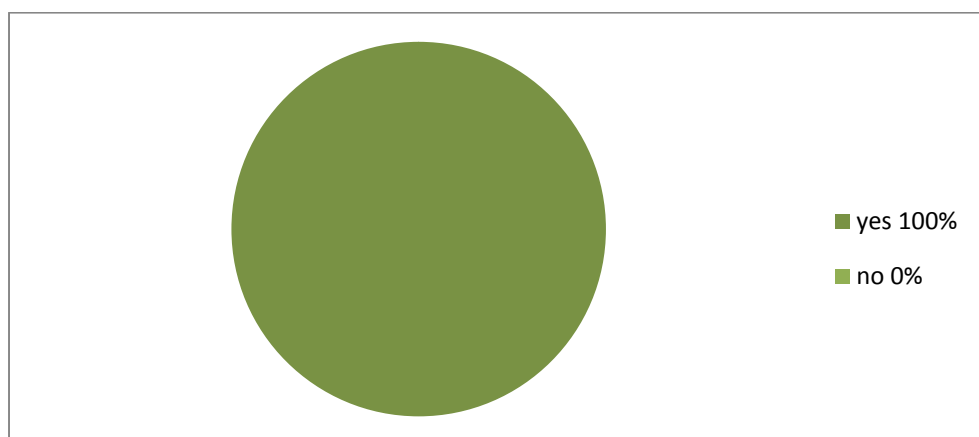


Figure 1: teachers' passion towards teaching grammar

Question 2: how is grammar best taught?

✓ In isolation

✓ In context

This question was designed to know what methodology teachers can rely on to teach grammar. Eight teachers prefer to teach grammar in context, whereas the rest have been teaching grammar in isolation since their beginning of their career. The following figure summarized the findings :

Table 1 : teachers profile

Number of Teachers	Gender		EFL teaching Experience		Grammar Teaching Experience	
	males	females				
10	6	4	2	20 years	4	15 years
			5	8 years	3	7 years
			3	13 years	3	10 years

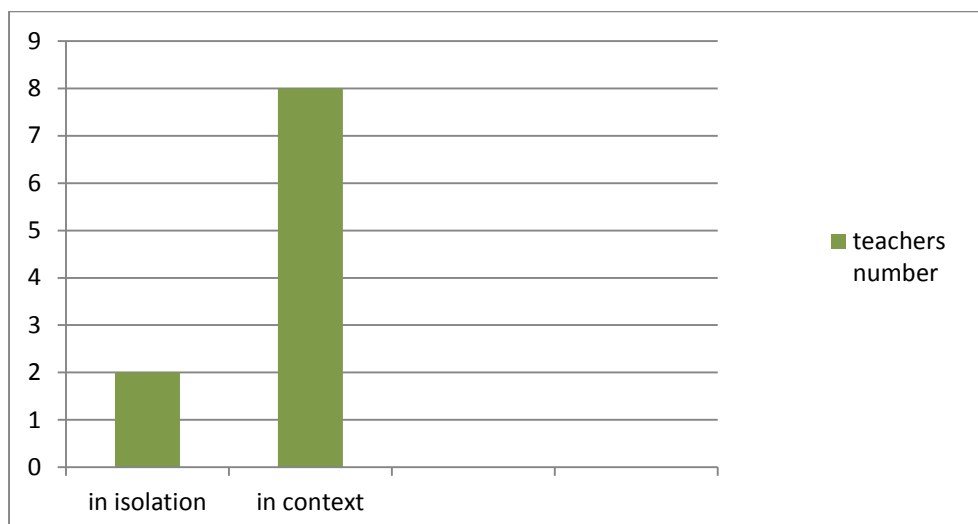


Figure.2 teachers' best way of teaching grammar

This finding indicates that most teachers rely on context-based teaching of grammar in their teaching process

Question Three: do EFL teachers think that they have been well prepared to teach grammar in EFL classrooms?

- Yes
- No

If 'No', say why ?

This question was asked to know whether or not teachers have well informed about teaching grammar methodologies, and well trained to make the teaching of grammar suits students needs and make them able to use grammatical knowledge in real life situations. Three teachers believe that they have been well prepared to teach grammar while seven of them do not believe that they have been well prepared to teach grammar in EFL classroom as the following figure describes the finding:

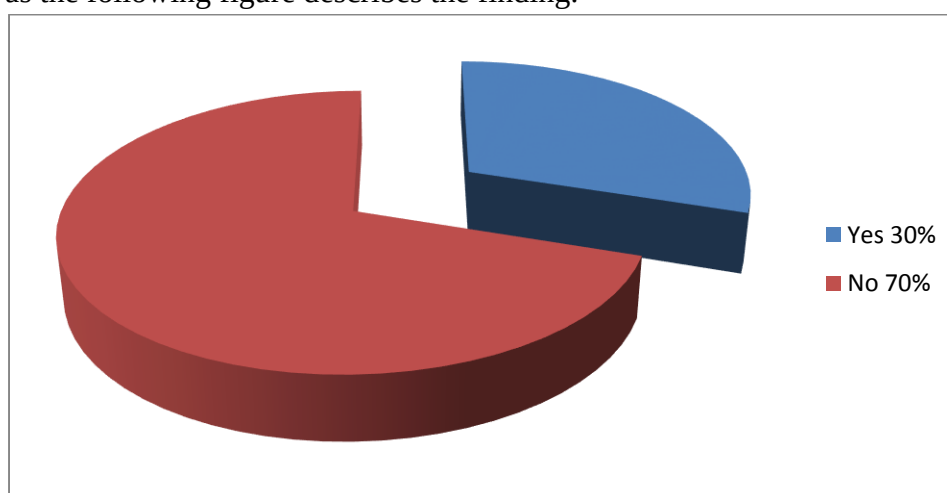


Figure 3: teachers' believes of the teaching of grammar competence

This implies that (70%) of teachers believe that they have not been well prepared to teach grammar in EFL classroom due to the lack of teachers training, the incapability of choosing

the right methodologies and techniques that suits students' needs for they have been aware only of the theoretical applications of grammar approaches neglecting the practical side. Thus, they have gain their own experience of teaching grammar by their own surveys, students' needs analysis and doing reflections on their grammar teaching methodologies.

Question Four: in your opinion, why are meaning and use important to understand in grammar teaching?

As for the last question, which revolved the importance of meaning and use to make students understand and make the teaching of grammar meaningful, as well. The answers were different, some teachers said that it gives learners the ability to communicate and share their ideas and experiences with others through real conversations. Whereas other teachers maintained that it develops a sense of how a language works and students become more effective communicators.

Section Three: task based context activities to grammar teaching

Question One: how do you set a context in classroom ?

- **Thinking Routines**
- **Learners' Needs and Interests**
- **Imagining the Situations**

This question was addressed to teachers to know certain criteria that they rely on to choose the suitable situational context to be described in their classroom. Five teachers rely on the learners' needs and interests, three of them set the context through imagining the situation while the two of them rely on the thinking routines.

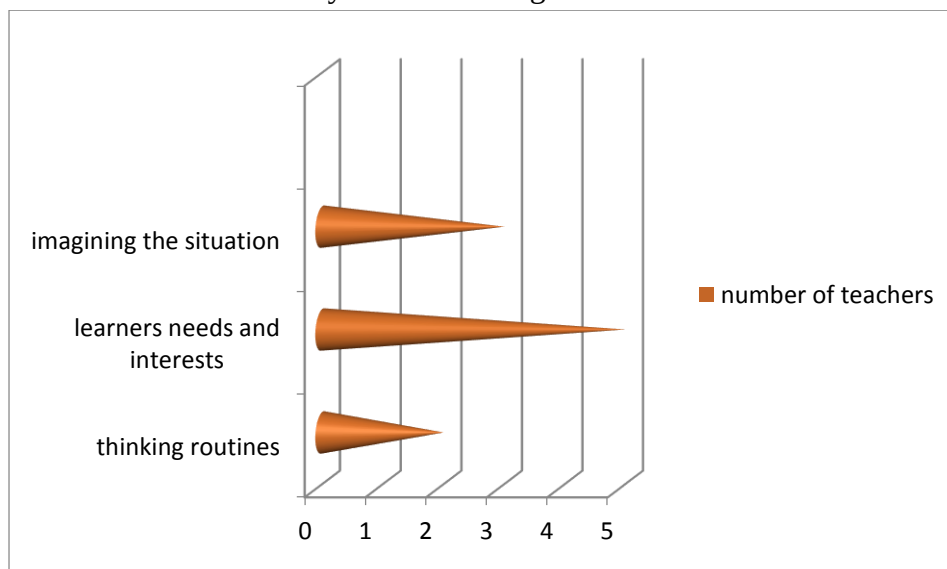


Figure 4: teachers' criteria to set the context in their classroom

The findings have shown that the context goes hand in hand with learners needs and interests to make them engaged with grammar topics and use them in real communications

Question Two: how is the context better presented ?

- **At the beginning of the class**
- **Throughout the lesson**

This question is administered to teachers to know the right time for presenting the context in their classroom. Four teachers prefer to present the context at the beginning of the lesson

while six of them prefer to present the context throughout the lesson the following figure summarizes the findings:

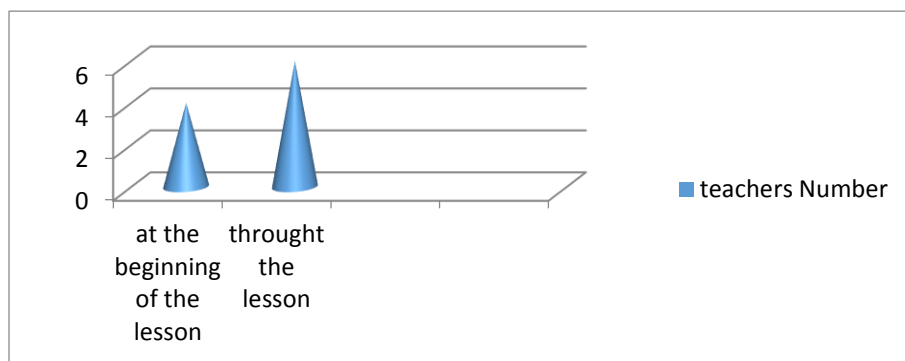


Figure 5: the best time for presenting the context

This maintains that the best time to present the context is throughout the lesson to keep students engaged inside the class as they keep working on topics throughout the lesson

Question Three: as a teacher, what do you suggest as effective task-based activities to make the teaching of grammar meaningful?

As for the last question, which revolved about the suggestions of some task-based activities to make the teaching of grammar meaningful to students, the answers were different. Some of them suggested generative situations (see appendix C), others have suggested exploratory tasks (see appendix D), as well as, creating coherent discourse.

4.2 Analysis of Interview with teacher:

This part includes the interview with teachers' result. In order to remind the reader, this structured interview was devoted to four (4) English teachers from different universities. This interview was divided into two sections, and the findings were as follow :

Section One : the importance of task based context teaching of grammar

- ✚ As for the first question, one of the teachers rely on classical grammar based on the form, however the three teachers rely on situational-functional teaching of grammar for it is helpful to keep learners engaged and do not get bored.
- ✚ As for the second question, all the teachers think that context is important in teaching grammar where students are exposed to authentic data and see how language functions in real contexts.
- ✚ For the third question, the teachers have given different answers. Some said that through situational context based teaching of grammar students will have accessible knowledge about the language use, others have answered that learners will be fluent and accurate communicator for they will be engaged in authentic situations

Section Two: effective context activities to make the teaching of grammar meaningful

- ✚ For the first question, the teachers replied they have a positive attitude towards grammar instruction based context and most of their teaching was based and some situational activities by wish they kept students attention throughout the lesson.
- ✚ As for the second question, all the teachers have given the same answers in which they have maintains that tasks are selected through on long survey on learners needs and necessities so that the context of the task suits their interests.

- ✚ As a concluding question, the interviewees provided a number of suggestions concerning the task based context activities. Two teachers have suggested dialogues descriptive cards by which they imagine the situation and then they describe it, while the two others have proposed short narrative stories, describing routines.

5 Discussion of main results:

This section of research is a gateway to discuss the findings obtained from the research tools that sought to indentify the importance of teaching grammar in context, as well as, the effective context based activities that make the teaching of grammar meaningful to students. Thus, this part of investigation will determine whether the research hypotheses are valid or not.

The collected data from the research tools helped in achieving the expected outcomes. The results obtained from teachers' questionnaire and interview revealed that it is really important to not teach grammar in isolation but rather to relate its teaching to a situational context in which the teaching of grammar is completely shifted from a classical grammar to spoken grammar in communicative settings. In the light of this, this obtained data confirm the first research hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was that teaching grammar through situational context may rely on certain task based context activities namely: generative situations, exploratory tasks, creation of coherent discourse. Indeed, the results gathered from questionnaire to teachers confirm that for that kind of activities show learners how language works and functions in real contexts. Hence, teaching grammar with these kinds of activities facilitates the understanding of grammatical topics, and makes it meaningful to students. They allow students to communicate fluently and accurately, and share their ideas and experiences with others, as well. Besides, they help learners to develop a sense of self-confident to produce the language effectively and use it to appropriate situations with foreigners in the target language. From interview with teachers, the data collected showed that teachers may use dialogues and narrative short stories to teach grammatical tenses.

6. Conclusion:

In seeking to teach grammar consistent with the need to focus on form within meaning based communicative approach, teachers should create a suitable balance between exercises that help learners understand grammatical forms, and tasks that explore the use of those forms in situational contexts to communicate effectively. Thus, if students under study receive instruction of a selected range of spoken grammar aspects, their conversational English is likely to be more natural.

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Appendix 'A'

Questionnaire to Teachers

Dear teachers,

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect information about the importance of teaching grammar in context, and the kind of golden task-based context activities that can be used to make the teaching of grammar meaningful to students. It will be so helpful if you complete this questionnaire.

Section one : teachers' profile

Gender : M..... F.....

Length of EFL Teaching Experience : years

How long have you been teaching grammar : years

Section two : the importance of teaching grammar in context

Q 1 : do you like teaching grammar module ?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Q 2 : how is grammar best taught ?

- ☐ In Isolation
☐ In Context

Q 3 : do EFL teachers think that they have been well prepared to teach grammar in EFL classrooms

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If 'No' Why ?

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.....
.....

Q 4 : in your opinion, why are form, meaning and use important to understand in grammar teaching ?

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Section Three : task-based context activities to grammar teaching

Q 1 :how do you set a context in classroom ?

- ☐ Thinking Routines
☐ Learners' Needs and Interests
☐ Imagining the Situations

Q 2 : how is the context better presented ?

- ☐ At the Beginning of the lesson
☐ Throughout the lesson

Q 3 : as a teacher, what do you suggest as affective task-based context activities to make the teaching of grammar meaningful to students ?

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Appendix ‘B’

Interview with Teachers

Section One : the importance of task based context teaching of grammar

Q 1 : what is the best way to teach grammar ?

Q 2 : do you think that context is important in teaching grammar ?

Q 3 : how does teaching grammar through context affect students’ English language proficiency ?

Section Two : effective context activities to make the teaching of grammar meaningful

Q 1 : what is your attitude towards grammar instruction based context ?

Q 2 : how do you select the appropriate tasks for any given context ?

Q 3 : what are the most supported tasks for teaching grammar in context ?

Appendix ‘c’: generative situations

The generative Situation is a situation which the teacher sets up in the lesson in order to “generate” several example sentences of a structure.

Example :

By using a picture on the board, the teacher will choose a character with a name. The teacher draws a rough map of a chosen place or town, placing next to it some means of transports. The teacher will give students to try to find the connection between these pictures establishing the ‘situation’ which is that “character” will travel across “a place” by “one of the means of transports”.

In the second step :

The teacher explains that “the character” did not prepare for the travel, so he asks the class : what do you think about the character ? (Stupid, ..., etc.), then why ? At this point students will venture sentences having thus established disapproval idea of past actions.

In the third step :

The teacher will ask students to imagine the dialogue between the character and another person on the road. Then students will work in pair imagining the situations

Appendix ‘D’ : exploratory tasks

These kinds of tasks show learners that grammar and discourse are interlinked, as they help learners to explore the functioning of grammar in context.

Example :

- ❖ Teaching is considered as an a science
- ❖ Teaching is considered as an art
- ❖ Teaching involves a lot of methods and techniques

These can be ‘package’ in one single sentence using grammatical resources :

The teaching process is considered as an art and science, as it involves a lot of methods and techniques.

From this sentence, the student can start rearranging his ideas and learn how to connect ideas avoiding repetition