Contextualization Strategies Used by Pre-service Teachers' in Teaching English Grammar in Malawian Secondary Schools

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore contextualization strategies used by pre-service teachers when teaching English grammar during their teaching practicum in secondary schools in Malawi. The study employed a qualitative single case study design. From the population of 130 University of Livingstonia pre-service teachers, 10 were purposefully sampled because they took English as their major or minor teaching subject. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and document analysis of English textbooks, lesson plans and schemes of work. After collection, data was stored in a flash disk and was served in Google drive for safety in case of loss. Analysis of the data was done thematically after sorting it into categories. Ethical principles were considered to protect participants' privacy. The criteria of trustworthiness i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were also ensured. Key findings show that pre-service teachers used a number of contextualization approaches such as authentic assessment, authentic materials, cooperative learning and integration of literature to teach grammar. The study recommends that teacher education institutions should effectively train pre-service teachers on how to use the strategies to teach English grammar so as to enhance meaningful learning among secondary school students.

Keywords: Authentic assessment; Authentic materials; Contextualization; Cooperative learning; English grammar; Pre-service teachers; Teaching practice.

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Introduction

One of fundamental issues in teacher education is how the pre-service teachers translate theory into practice. Institutions of teacher education thus struggle with making sure that the pre-service teachers are given effective pedagogical knowledge through methodology courses to enable them effectively deliver lessons. One of pedagogical strategies that is open for pre-service teachers to utilize in teaching English grammar is contextualization (Torres & Alieto, 2019). Grammar has over the years been one of the language skills that has posed a challenge to students as well as teachers, including, pre-service teachers (Flórez & Basto, 2017). Thus, through the use of strategies that are learner centered as opposed to teacher centered, learning of the target language, could be enhanced. Perin (2011) states that contextualized learning entails that learners apply new information learned to combine with prior knowledge to

construct meaning of their surroundings. Kapito, (2021) contends that English in Malawi, is taught as a second language. In addition, it is an official language of the country. English is the language of instruction from standard 5 and obligatory from form 1 to form 4 of secondary school. In order to qualify for university or college, a student has to have a pass in English. For this reason, proficiency in English is crucial for academic achievement and for progression of learners. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), (2014), the poor quality of education in the country was due to ineffective teacher training in teacher education institutions.

Reyes et al. (2019) defined contextualization as a way of engaging learners in the teaching-learning process where they would relate the lesson to their environments. Another definition of contextualization is that it is the process that helps learners to construct meaning by linking the school subject content to their daily lives (Marini, 2016). In addition, Medriano and Bautista, (2020) postulate that contextualization is the use of individual situations that happen outside the classroom to motivate and guide the learning of new concepts in school settings. Contextualization enables students to find learning meaningful because it relates to their lives.

A number of scholars have reiterated the importance of the use of contextualization strategies for teaching (e.g., Dupuy & Michelson, 2019; Warner & Dupuy, 2018). Other studies have emphasized on the effectiveness of contextualizing the teaching of language to all levels of education because context plays a major role in any learning situation (Troyan et al., 2019). Contextualization occurs when the materials and activities during instruction are linked to the experiences and environment of the student (Reyes, et al., 2019). Results of a study on challenges of contextualization by Leite et al. (2018) concluded that teachers are inspired to contextualize their daily teaching and learning activities to support their students' academic success, full development and motivation to learn.

Similar studies have revealed that teaching in real life context significantly increases retention of information because it uses real-life examples that are meaningful to students' experiences (Center for Occupational Research and Development, 2012, in Reyes et al, 2019). Contextualization has further

been found to motivate learners to know and appreciate other cultures (Bringas, 2014). Therefore, to contextualize teaching means to embrace the current environment in order to attain fairness in learning for all kinds of learners in relation their contexts.

According to Mart (2013), teaching grammar through contextualized methods helps learners effectively learn grammatical structures and master language better. Thus, teaching grammar in context enables learners to acquire and use grammar forms. In addition, learners are able to effectively use grammar for communication if they are taught in context. Contextualized teaching has the following special characteristics among others: It encourages autonomous learning through groups, it involves problem solving activities. Scholars agree that contextualized teaching has the following special characteristics among others: It encourages autonomous learning through groups, it involves problem solving activities; teaching and learning is done in authentic contexts; monitoring student learning so that it is done independently; encouraging meaningful learning tasks and encourages cooperative learning activities (Danis, et al., 2017 cited in Roza, 2019; Dewi & Primayana, 2019; Priyatni, 2002).

Contextualization also helps teachers connect content to real life situations of students (Sears, 2003). Besides, contextualized teaching helps to promote authentic learning and increases learners' success by allowing them to make connections as they construct new knowledge. Furthermore, the contextualized teaching strategies enable teachers to connect material taught to students' real-life situations as well as to encourage students to connect their knowledge and how it applies to their lives. In contextualized learning, learners use the new information they have learned and combine it with information they already have so that it makes sense to them.

Chiyembekezo et al. (2019) maintain that the teaching of English language in Malawian Secondary schools for a long time has been to master forms of language with grammar being at the center of it all. According Fernando and Marikar (2017), the Malawi Institute of Education in 2004, directed that teachers must follow techniques such as role plays, group discussion, debate and question and answer in teaching and learning which in actual sense are contextualization strategies. Since English is the

second language, it requires contextualized teaching for learners to understand (Leyi, 2020). In spite of all these studies cited, very few have attempted to focus on how pre-service teachers use contextualization strategies in teaching English grammar. Other studies in Malawi have focused on the in-service teachers approaches of teaching (see Kapito, 2021; Kishindo-Mafuta, 2022; Harushimana, & Hara, 2022; Mmela, 2006; Sanga, 2011). This study aimed to explore the contextualization strategies that pre-service teachers used when teaching English grammar to Form 3 (10th grade) learners during their teaching practice. Specifically, the study was guided by only one objective: to explore the contextualization strategies that pre-service teachers used when teaching English grammar to form 3 secondary school learners.

Related Literature

Studies in the area of contextualization have been conducted globally and locally. Margana (n.d) in a study on teaching English to young learners using contextualized instruction reveals that contextualized instruction of English is an important way to create English aptitude because learners are involved in content which relates to their situations. Another study by Reyes et al. (2019) on practices of teachers on contextualization concluded that the use of contextualization enabled teachers to delivered lessons effectively and efficiently and the focus on students' contexts ensures active participation. This in turn helped students to construct their own meaning. In addition, more literature suggests that the usage of contextualization is vital because it helps learners to appreciate the roles of language, it helps them to use grammar appropriately and it motivates them to learn meaningfully since the context is meaningful too (Rohayati, 2013; Seyyedrezaie & Barani,2018; Zhakypova, & Sydykova, 2021).

Contextualization approaches have been used in teaching grammar. For instance, Biswas and Anis (2017) in their study on effectiveness of using short stories in EFL classes to teach grammar through contextualization maintain that one way in which grammar rules can be contextualized is through short stories especially if students are involved and are taught in an interesting manner that involves the students interactively. Similarly in Malawi, studies relating to how contextualization is used to teach English grammar exist. One such study by Sanga (2011, p. 16) on teaching English as a situated practice in Malawi states that "Learners in authentic

learning environments participate in the actual experience (contextualized) rather than being external (decontextualized) to the event". He further adds that to be in context implies that learners interact with their specific values and culture. Other local studies on the use of contextualization strategies such as integration of literature (Chiyembekezo, et al., 2019; Mmela, 2006; Sailors et al., 2014; Thodi, 2000), usage of Authentic materials (Mishan, 2022; Mwelwa & Mwanza, 2020), cooperative learning (Moyo & Namphande, 2022; Tibategeza & Zimba, 2020) have been conducted.

With all the literature cited, very few studies focused on how pre-service teachers apply contextualization strategies to teach grammar. Most of cited studies have their focus on how students used the strategies for learning neglecting how they could be used as teaching strategies. Therefore, this study explored how pre-service teachers use contextualization strategies to teach English grammar to secondary school learners during their teaching practice. The findings of this study will go a long way in helping improve teacher preparedness and adding knowledge to the body of literature. It will also help methodology lecturers on best ways of delivering instruction. In the long run, results of this study will go a long way to help achieve the vision of Malawi 2063 part of which states that "Education and training institutions shall be aligned with the industrial sector to produce relevant qualifications and skills for the job-market and benchmark industry…" (Government of Malawi, 2021, p. 37). The Malawi vision 2063 relates to this study in that improvement in teacher training in teacher education institutions will produce skilled teachers with relevant qualification for the job-market.

Methodology
Research Design
This study employed a qualitative case study design, specifically, descriptive and explanatory single-case study design. Yin (2014) defines a case study as an in-depth investigation of a single person, an event or a community. Case studies are studies of individuals or groups or institutions over a considerable period of time in order to understand their experiences. In case studies, the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of the case, often a program, an event, an activity or a process (Creswell, 2014), Diop and Liu (2020, p.9) defined a single-case study as "a study on a single case with sub-cases." A single-case study involves only one

case or unit. Thus, pre-service teachers of the University of Livingstonia comprised a single-case used in this study.

Population and Sample Size

The study population comprised the University of Livingstonia Pre-service teachers who were undertaking their teaching practicum in Malawi. In total, the population consisted 130 pre-service teachers from which 10 were purposefully sampled because they took English as their major or minor teaching subject. The pre-service teachers were placed in nine secondary schools across five districts of Northern Malawi. These schools were conveniently chosen because that is where the participants were placed for teaching practice and hence were convenient. The inclusion criteria for the 10 participants were that they were majoring or minoring in English as their teaching subject and were doing their teaching practice. The participants were teaching English to form three (grade 10) classes. Form three was conveniently selected because they represent a senior class which had already passed the basic stages of grammar and have adequate prior knowledge which could easily provide necessary information relating to the topic. Those who were not English majors or minors of English as a teaching subject and not teaching form three classes were excluded from the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Livingstonia research and ethics committee (UNILIAREC). Informed consent was also obtained from the participants and they were free to participate or withdraw at will at any given point.

Data Collection

The instruments used to generate data for this study included interview schedules, classroom observation schedules and documentary analysis guides. While the interview schedule was used to collect data through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation schedule was used to collect data from classroom observations and the document analysis guide was used to collect data relevant from text books, lesson plans and schemes of work. These instruments were employed because they gave the researchers an opportunity to get detailed responses and enabled probing where there was need for precision.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed thematically by closely following the six steps for qualitative data analysis (Çelik et al., 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the initial stage, interview data was transcribed using the software MAXQD 2022 into Microsoft word texts, and the transcripts were read through to identify initial themes as well as predetermined themes and any other themes that might have emerged. Coding followed an inductive approach within each of the identified main themes. Similar expressions from transcripts were categorized into different sub-themes. Results were interpreted in descriptive passages supported by interview excerpts from participants which were directly quoted. Classroom observation and documents analysis results were presented in tables and were triangulated with findings from semi-structured interviews.

Results and Discussion

This section presents results of the study on contextualization strategies used by pre-service teachers to teach English grammar during their teaching practicum in Malawian Secondary schools. A number of strategies were unveiled. These include Integration of Literature to teach grammar, cooperative learning, authentic assessment and authentic materials presented in the same order. This section begins with a brief explanation of what contextualization means in this study.

Research Question 1: What Contextualization strategies do pre-service teachers use in teaching English grammar to Form Three secondary school learners?

In this study, contextualization is associating students' experiences and situations with classroom contexts that are related to new content being taught. The study uncovered a number of contextualized strategies which participants used to teach English grammar. Out of the numerous strategies that exist, fours strategies were commonly used by participants to teach English grammar as follows: Integration of Literature to teach grammar; cooperative learning; authentic assessment and authentic materials.

Integration of Literature to Teach Grammar

The study revealed that most participants used some literature books, stories from internet and newspaper stories to teach grammar. Integration of literature texts when teaching grammar is an approach which aims to develop learners who can participate in the lesson with different texts meaningfully in diverse contexts (Mumba &

Mkandawire, 2019). Participants explained that they used the integration of literature approach because learners easily connected to what they were learning and found lessons interesting hence easy to learn. One participant labeled PT 10 had this to say: "It makes them relate well with what they are learning, hence making connections between previous and new information. I use passages from different texts including literature book and others." Using literature also provokes learners' interest and draws learners' attention to the lesson. Another participant pointed out that; "There are some interesting stories in literature books. I come with a story which they read and I ask them to identify prepositions, conjunctions, etc. Literature texts and books contain grammar content which learners find interesting hence they pay attention" (PT9).

Previous studies confirm the findings from the above excerpts by stating that stories make learning interesting. For example, Biswas and Anis (2017) argued that since most of the secondary school students love reading stories, the stories can be used for both extracting grammar content such as parts of speech and punctuation. Other studies yielded similar findings (see Abdallah and Gadallah, 2017; Weber 2018). Integration of literature in teaching grammar is therefore important because learners find literature stories interesting and it attracts their attentions to the lesson. The study also showed that the participants used integration of literature for teaching grammar because stories and literary texts provided contexts that were familiar to students, thereby enabling them to understand the grammar content that was being presented. This enabled them not to teach grammar in isolation since this is one rule for teaching grammar if its use has to be clearly understood. Previous also supports the findings on the importance of integrating literature for teaching grammar. Furthermore, studies have affirmed that using literature enhances learning since learners understand the grammar rules easily in a context (Onchera and Kulo, 2014; Weber, 2018).

Cooperative Learning
Results also show that a majority of participants used cooperative learning activities when teaching English grammar. Cooperative learning is a strategy which allows students to work together in pairs or in small groups, helping each other to achieve a learning outcome while the teachers' role is to facilitate and coordinate the activities (Abramczyk & Jurkowski, 2020). According to Namaziandost, et al.

(2019, p.3), "Cooperative Learning is an instructional method in which students work together in small heterogeneous groups to solve problems, complete a project or reach other instructional purposes while teachers act as guides or facilitators." During the interviews, a majority of participants stated that they used group work and pair work to teach grammar lessons. Responding to the question: *What strategies do you use to teach grammar?* A participant, PT8 had this to say "Mostly, the strategy that I use is group work whereby I introduce groups with small number of students to avoid social loafing..."

Similarly, a participant, PT10 reported: "Yes group work is encouraged especially that the teaching period is limited to 35 minutes. I divide the class of 36 into 3 groups. Though time is not sufficient where group work is encouraged." Yet, another participants pointed out that he used group work and pair work because the strategies facilitate team work and motivate learners to actively participate in the lesson. Participant PT4 said: "The use of group work helps learners to work as a team. It helps them to accommodate each other's views. Through team work, they motivate each other."

In agreement with the two participants, another participant, PT 8 said; "It's very useful because during group and class discussions, some learners are able to correct themselves. During group work, they easily correct each other without shame." Previous studies show the different cooperative learning activities that teachers adopt including debates, group discussion and role-play to help students rehearse some grammatical expressions they have learned in class (see Li, 2015; Lv, 2014 in Namaziandost, et al., 2019). Studies also indicate that collaborative activities such as group work, pair work, brainstorming and whole class discussion enable learners to help one another since they work as a team (Chrisyarani & Setiawan, 2021). Similarly, Kim (2006) in Namaziandost et al. (2019) stated that cooperative learning yields greater learning achievement and motivation. In addition, Erbil (2020) maintains that through cooperative learning activities, students are engaged into active learning which enables them to carry out meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing in an active learning process. Another study by Mwelwa and Mwanza (2020) revealed some of the strategies teachers were using when teaching English grammar. These include group discussions, sentence construction and oral presentations, brain

storming and context-based storytelling. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of cooperative learning activities in teaching English grammar to secondary school learners enhances learning since it enables learners' active participation and freedom to express themselves. Hence pre-service teachers in institutions of teacher education should be taught to put theory into practice through using such strategies.

Authentic Assessment

Findings further revealed assessment methods used by pre-service teachers which enabled them to identify weaknesses and strengths in their lesson delivery. Rukmini and Saputri (2017) define authentic assessment as measuring students' English creative skills based on curriculum. It is a method of assessment where activities are matched with settings where students are going to apply them. It involves several forms of assessment that reflect on student learning, attitudes, motivation and achievement. Some participants indicated that they used debates, class presentations, projects as well as different types of tests and exercises to assess learners on the grammar aspect they have taught.

A participant, PT2 stated that she combined both traditional methods of testing as well as authentic methods such as classroom presentations and debates. She had this to say: "I use continuous assessment methods like written tests and oral tests using different topics in class where students debate on the particular topic." Making a similar statement, participant PT 4 who used both authentic and traditional assessment methods had this to say:

> I use class exercises to test if students were able to follow the lesson. Weekly and monthly tests are used to find out the progress of students in terms of the grammar aspect taught and projects are used for practical use of language.

The use of debate and classroom oral presentations depicts the use of authentic assessment. Griffith and Lim (2012) stated that teachers have a task to find suitable ways to assess whether a student can use information learned in different real-world contexts effectively. This is confirmed by other studies (Koh 2017; Moria, et al., 2017).

As results show, authentic assessment activities such as aural presentations and debates in particular were used by some participants to assess the grammar component they taught while others used traditional methods to assess learning. Instead of authentic assessment, they used traditional assessment methods. A participant, PT2 said; "Aaaa I mostly use tests at the end of the term." One of the participants, PT 5 had this to say: "I use exercises and give compositions as home work." On her part, PT 3 said "I usually give exercises and tests through the multiple-choice questions." These assessment methods are traditional methods of assessment as previous studies have shown (Koh 2017; Norova, 2020).

Looking at the above findings, the impression is that participants used both authentic and traditional assessment methods. These results are complemented by previous studies which conclude that authentic assessment enhances learning of grammar content because teachers are able to pinpoint their students' weaknesses and strengths (Rukmini & Saputri, 2017; Singh, 2017). According to Villarroel, et al. (2017), the use of authentic assessment methods enhances students' language competence. In addition, studies indicate that authentic assessment influences deep learning and students' higher achievement in addition to development of higher-order cognitive skills (Dochy & McDowell, 1997 in Villarroel et al. 2018) Furthermore, earlier studies confirm that using authentic assessment enables students to contextualize problems to everyday life, hence they find learning relevant beyond the classroom (Mueller, 2005). Therefore, from these study findings, pre-service teachers used authentic assessment methods with a combination of traditional methods.

Authentic Materials

Kilickaya (2004) in Febrina (2017) stated that authentic materials are materials that uncover the learners' real life and how to use it in the target language. A similar definition of authentic materials by Little et al. (1988) points out that authentic materials are materials which are produced for social purposes of the learners and are used likewise. Authentic materials in this study refer to materials that contain information that is easy for learners to relate to and identify with. There are numerous types and sources of authentic materials that teachers can use to teach in the classroom (Mestari & Malabar, 2016). The most commonly used by participants were textbooks, charts and audios. Other participants articulated that they used internet, newspapers, magazines and literature.

Responding materials used to teach grammar, a participant, PT 10 said: "I use grammar text books and Excel and Succeed, an English Language text book." PT 7 added by saying: "I use popular book, Excel and Succeed, I also use Senior Secondary Certificate English Student book as well as Study and Master English for Malawi. In Excel and Succeed, the activities are clear and easy to teach. They have clarity of activities in grammar."

Making the point clearer, participant PT 2 pointed out that; "I use Textbooks, charts and audios. They motivate learners to learn and make learning interesting. They also arouse curiosity and attention in students." Previous studies confirm these findings. Qodiralievich (2021) believes that the use of authentic materials in the classroom exposes learners to the actual language being used in real contexts. Other researchers agree that when using authentic materials, learners are greatly motivated and they improve performance (Febrina, 2017; Mestari & Malabar, 2016; Rusmawaty, et al. 2018). In addition, Yang, (2020), maintains that the use of most textbooks helps in imparting English grammar content. Other researchers support these results by empathizing that authentic materials relate the content to learners real life experiences hence making learning meaningful and easy (Abad 2020; Makhmudov, 2021).

Table 1: Contextualization Strategies Used to Teach English Grammar

Contextualization Strategies	Activities/ Materials Used
Integration Of Literature to Teach Grammar	Literature books, stories
Cooperative Learning	Group work, Pair work, Brainstorming, Role Plays
Authentic Assessment	Presentations, debates, projects Assignments, Exercises
Authentic Materials	Textbooks, Charts, Newspapers, Magazines, Interment

Table 2: Contextualization Strategies from Documents Used in Teaching English Grammar

Textbooks	Kadyoma F. (2017) Excel and Succeed Senior Secondary English Students Book 3, Nairobi, Longman	Cooperative learning Integration of Literature	Pair work Group work • Discussion Brainstorming Literature stories Poems
Schemes and Records of work	Pre-Service Teachers (April-May, 2022)	Cooperative Learning Authentic materials	Debate Pair work Group work • Question and Answer Chats
Lesson Plans	Pre-Service Teachers (April-May, 2022)	Cooperative learning Authentic assessment	Textbooks from other subjects English textbooks Debate

The Use of authentic materials captures students' interest and makes learning relevant and meaningful (Lorbis, 2019). A study by Assiddiq (2019) concluded that authentic materials enable students to link directly with the target grammar content and settings away from the classroom. Moreover, Melvin and Stout (1987) in Assiddiq 2019) indicate that the use of authentic materials increases student's motivation to learn and arouses their interest in the subject. Thus, once students are motivated, they develop confidence when they use materials which are authentic. Classroom observation findings also revealed that participants used the strategies mentioned above as shown in table 1. The table shows the different contextualization strategies used for teaching grammar generated through classroom observation field notes. These findings give the impression that pre-service teachers use a variety of contextualization strategies to teach English grammar. Previous studies across the globe and in Malawi supporting the use of contextualization, point to how the strategies are used by teachers to teach different language skills in addition to grammar and vocabulary (Assiddiq, 2019; Mumba & Mkandawire, 2019; Rose & Syrbe, 2018).

Table 2 shows how contextualization strategies were included in English textbooks, schemes and records of work as well as in lesson plans. These

strategies that pre-service teachers used to teach English grammar as the table indicates, include cooperative learning activities, authentic materials and integration of literature (Marini, 2016; Onchera & Kulo, 2014). These were generated through analysis of the documents used for planning and teaching English. This implies that various resources for teaching and learning grammar take into consideration the importance of context for students to find learning meaningful.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While student's ability to succeed in learning grammar depends on several teaching strategies, pre-service teachers used such contextualization strategies as integration of literature, cooperative learning, authentic assessment and authentic materials to teach English grammar. Each contextualization these strategies was used because it serves to improve the teaching and learning of English grammar. Some scholarly article (Perin, 2011; Rivet & Krajcik, 2008) supported that contextualizing teaching improves learning because it brings learners close to their experiences, making it easier for them to relate issues. Therefore, it is recommended that pre-service teachers should use various strategies to teach English grammar to secondary school learners in order to enhance meaningful learning.

The use of cooperative learning activities encouraged active participation of learners and enabled them to help each other by explaining the grammar content, hence team work. The use of authentic assessment has been found to be important because it helps relate what is being learned to real-world experiences and it enables learners to put the grammar being taught into practical use. Besides, it helps teachers to follow up the learning after the lessons. Lastly, the use of authentic, contextualized materials is important because it meaningfully relates the content to learners' real-life experiences.

Since these contextualization strategies enhance learning because they actively involve learners, the study recommends that teacher education institutions should effectively train the pre-service teachers on how to use the strategies in teaching English grammar. This can be done through including several peer teaching experiences in the curriculum.

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