
Impact of Field-Based Contextualized English Language Teaching on Students' Engagement

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Abstract

The growing emphasis on context-responsive, student-oriented and experiential teaching practices in English language teaching (ELT) has encouraged teachers, researchers and educators to shift from traditional pedagogy which often neglects students' real-life experiences. This study explored the significance of field-based contextualized ELT on learners' involvement and learning outputs in the community schools of Pokhara, Nepal. Based on the ecological, constructivist, and experiential learning theories, this study examines how context-based pedagogy promotes learners to enhance their language knowledge through their own local contexts. Implementing qualitative participatory action research paradigm, the data were collected through classroom observations, field notes, in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (FGD). It has been seen that field-based contextualized ELT considerably enhance students' motivation, active participation, and collaborative behavior, emotional and cognitive involvement in their real-life experiences. The study also reveals significant improvement in learning vocabulary, descriptive and creative writing with full confidence. Despite the positive results, the research also identified several challenges such as teacher preparation, time constraints, curriculum rigidity, logistical limitations and pedagogical resources. The study suggests the needs of policy-level reforms, flexible curriculum and teacher development by integrating local context. It also promotes the implementation of ecological approaches that provide real-life practice in multilingual and multicultural settings.

Keywords: field-based ELT, contextualized learning, ecosystem-based pedagogy, students' engagement, experiential learning.

Introduction

Field-based contextualized English language teaching and learning is a pedagogy that implements real-life local resources in language teaching and learning. This pedagogical approach enhances behavioral, cognitive, and emotional involvement of learners in the authentic and meaningful local context of language teaching and learning (Ye, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). The significance of contextual, experiential, and learner-oriented teaching pedagogies has been increasing in the present context of

English language teaching (ELT), connecting classroom learning with learners' real-life experiences and local contexts. Traditional approaches of language teaching mainly emphasized textbook dependency and rote learning. Teacher-oriented practices failed to establish contextual and meaningful relations between language learning and the authentic socio-cultural context of learners (Brown, 2007). So, the inclination towards learners engaged approaches is immensely felt. The traditional teaching pedagogies prioritized learners as passive listeners of knowledge despite the focus on active participants in the communicative and experiential learning process (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).

Considering these limitations, contextual ecosystem-based pedagogical approaches have proposed a transformative language learning framework. This framework emphasizes the interconnection among language, learners, culture, local environment, and socio-cultural interactions (Van Lier, 2004). Such eco-based pedagogies emphasize language learning as meaningful social interaction within an authentic social environment, not just as the acquisition of linguistic structures within a limited classroom context. In this regard, experiential learning theories (Kolb, 1984) claim that learners' active engagement with real-life experiences and critical reflection enhances meaningful learning.

Field-based contextualized ELT has been growing as a broad educational shift to engage learners in real-world ecological context (Dhanyamol & Sethunarayanan, 2025). Learners are exposed to contextual language use, social interaction, observation, collaboration, and reflective learning opportunities by integrating local contextual learners' experiences. These pedagogical practices connect with constructivist learning theories that focus on active meaning-making through local contextual interactions (Piaget, 1970; Bruner, 1966).

In the Nepalese context, due to examination-centered pedagogical practices, inadequate learners' engagement and limited contextualization, English language education has faced significant pedagogical challenges (Poudel & Baral, 2021). English language teaching has become essential in academic, professional, and global contexts, but the use of traditional teacher-oriented instructional pedagogical methods disconnects language from learners' socio-cultural real-life context. It could be the reason behind students' low-level motivation, constrained communicative opportunities, and limited participation in language learning activities (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978; Nunan, 2004).

Pokhara is one of the most culturally and ecologically rich cities of Nepal. It has been a significant context for implementing ecosystem-based pedagogy in ELT. The diverse natural landscapes, culture, heritage, and socio-cultural environment offer great opportunities for local context integration into language learning activities. In this regard, field-based contextualized ELT in such a diverse setting can meaningfully fill the gap between classroom pedagogy and authentic language use by enhancing students' real-life interaction with their surroundings.

The empirical evidence regarding ecological and contextualized language teaching remains constrained, although there is a growing need of theoretical discourse surrounding ecological and contextualized language teaching. The field-based pedagogical practices influence students' language engagement and learning outcomes in English classrooms. Thus, this study addressed this gap by exploring the impact of field-based contextualized ELT on students' engagement and language development in selected government schools in the semi-urban area of Pokhara.

The aim of the study was to explore how ecosystem-based pedagogy enhances students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, language proficiency development, and wider academic outcomes. It also aimed to investigate the pedagogical implications and challenges allied with implementing contextualized and real-life experiential ELT practices in government schools in the Nepalese context.

Literature Review

Ecological Perspectives in English Language Teaching

Ecosystem-based pedagogy in language education characterizes language learning as a dynamic, socio-cultural, and environmentally embedded process. This approach emphasizes language as an interactive process among learners, teachers, contexts, communities and socio-cultural environments (Van Lier, 2004). This paradigm considers learning occurs through active participation in real-life communicative practices within meaningful authentic context.

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) highlights ecological system theory that interconnected individual, social, institutional and environmental factors influencing human development and learning. Ecological perspectives promote teachers and educators to integrated local context and environments in ELT contexts. Lier (2010) stated that ecological language learning emphasizes on the learner agency, affordances and relationship of learners and contexts. Learner agency refers to students' active involvement with learning opportunities and affordance involves learning opportunities

available for learning within a specific environment. Thus, ecological perspectives define language as a socially mediated and contextually situated practices shifting attention from language as a static system.

Likewise, Kramsch and Steffensen (2008) highlighted language learning as deeply connected with socio-cultural interactions and ecological environments. They said that learners' communicative competence develops through meaningful participation in social contexts rather than isolated grammatical instruction. Additionally, ecosystem-based pedagogies also enhance multilingual awareness, local knowledge systems, and culture-responsive language pedagogies.

ELT has gained increasing intellectual attention toward ecological teaching and learning pedagogies. Rai (2021) argued that eco-based pedagogical perspectives enable teachers to connect their teaching and learning with local culture, community experiences, and environmental realities. Similarly, Poudel and Baral (2021) further highlight that ecological pedagogy helps to disconnect imported ELT practices and local educational contexts in Nepal.

Ecosystem-Based and Place-Based Pedagogy

A context-based pedagogical approach focuses on the connection among learners, communities, the environment, and instructional strategies. It also promotes pedagogues to integrate ecological awareness, local contexts, and experiential activities into teaching and learning procedures. Context-based approach connects the learning process within local contexts and communities to make education more meaningful and socially appropriate (Sobel, 2004).

Field-based approaches develop academic competencies and enable learners to discover local cultures, landscapes, and ecosystems. This approach promotes the connection between emotions and environments and fosters active engagement in community-based teaching and learning activities. In language teaching and learning, context-based pedagogy supports learners in authentic communication, observation, reflection, and contextual vocabulary expansion (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2004).

Contemporary research revealed the role of context-based language teaching and green pedagogy for promoting sustainable and transformative educational practices (Nur et al., 2022; Verma & Ara, 2025). Such approaches promote critical awareness, communicative competence, and learners' involvement in real-life contexts.

Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb (1984) proposed experiential learning theory that fosters learning through a cyclical process engaging real-life experience, field observation, conceptualization of content, and reflective involvement in local environments. The experiential learning theory closely links with context-based ELT as it highlights active engagement, reflection, collaboration, and real-life application of knowledge. Context-based pedagogy focuses on field visits, observations, community-based discussions, and contextual learning activities and provides opportunities for learners' engagement in an experiential language learning context. In this regard, Zhao et al. (2025) emphasized learning activities that underpinned Kolb's experiential learning theory, promoting learners' learning and academic enhancement. Likewise, Hafsa and Majid (2026) promoted learners' motivation, satisfaction, and overall learning with the positive impact of their contextualized learning.

The reviewed research studies show that experiential learning promotes students' engagement, critical thinking, and communicative competence. In English language classrooms, experiential learning permits learners to use authentic language rather than linguistic rote learning.

Constructivist Perspectives and Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Constructivist theories emphasize that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their social and physical environments. In this regard, Piaget (1970) argues that learning involves cognitive adaptation and meaning-making processes, while Bruner (1966) emphasizes discovery learning and learner agency. Student-centered teaching pedagogies developed from constructivist theories (Piaget, 1970) emphasize collaboration, inquiry, dialogue, and active participation of language learners. Such practices contrast with teacher-oriented approaches that constrained learners' involvement and creativity (Vygotsky, 1978; Freire, 1970). Furthermore, field-based contextualized English language teaching shows constructivist principles that promote learners to explore authentic environments, engage in collaborative activities, and create meaning through observations and real-world-based interaction Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978).

Student Engagement in Language Learning

Fredricks (2004) identifies student engagement as a broadly recognized multidimensional construct of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Behavioral involvement indicates learners' engagement and involvement in learning

activities. Emotional involvement denotes learners' interest, enjoyment, and emotional connection.

Recently, Gan et al. (2026) explored that positive and emotive engagement in contextual learning promotes learners in English language learning classrooms. Likewise, Liang et al. (2025) revealed that teachers' positive support influences students' involvement in the language, that promote their learning efficiency. In this regard, Schlechty (2011) suggests that authentic and meaningful learning experiences are most important for enhancing deep involvement among students. Regarding these findings, students' contextual supportive learning contexts play a great role in behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement of language learners. In ELT contexts, authentic and contextualized instructions have been linked to learners' participation, motivation, and communicative competence. Learners tend to participate more actively when learning activities connect with their lived experiences and local realities.

Contextualized ELT in Nepal

In Nepal, English language teaching has been influenced by imported pedagogical approaches ignoring local socio-cultural realities. English language teaching and learning still focuses on traditional grammar translation, rote learning, and examination-centered practices in classroom teaching (Phyak, 2013). As a result, it frequently neglects communicative competence and results in students' limited involvement in classroom activities.

In recent years, context-based and ecological pedagogies in ELT (Giri, 2020) focus on the significance of English language teaching in local linguistic realities. Similarly, Sharma (2023) emphasized that eco-pedagogical approaches to language learning can help teachers and students through context-responsive pedagogical approaches in real-world practices. Shrestha et al. (2024) explained the urgency of contextualized and ecological pedagogy in English language teaching and learning. It enhanced learners' engagement and collaboration among stakeholders through classroom activities and their real-world local contexts. Consistent with this, Pokhrel (2023) reported that real-world contexts enhance students' active participation and learning outcomes. Moreover, K.C. (2024) conducted research on contextual English language teaching in the Nepalese context that indicates learners' motivation and active participation connect them with their socio-cultural contexts. Based on a review of empirical studies, locally contextualized teaching practices remain constrained. Thus, this study promotes the existing literature by exploring how ecosystem-based pedagogy

impacts students' participation and language learning outcomes in a government school of Pokhara.

Methods

This research implemented a qualitative participatory action research design (Kemmis et al., 2013). It investigated the impact of field-based contextualized ELT on learners' engagement and language learning. Participatory action research was selected as it promotes collaborative inquiry, reflective practice, and pedagogical transformation within classroom academic settings (Salmon et al., 2026; Wright, 2026). This design also promotes the exploration of students' real-life experiences, classroom live interactions, and contextual learning processes within authentic academic contexts.

This study was conducted in a selected community school of Pokhara, which is rich in ecological, cultural, and socially diverse environments that provide appropriate opportunities for implementing contextualized and field-based teaching and learning. Non-random purposive sampling was implemented to select one English language teacher and thirty Class Nine students as participants in data collection procedures.

Multiple qualitative data collection methods were used to confirm data triangulation and promote trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin, 1978). Classroom observation was conducted to explore learners' participation, interaction, engagement, and contextual language use getting insights into their behavioral and communicative involvement. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with teachers, focus group discussion (FGD) was carried out with students to explore their experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding field-based contextualized English language teaching and learning. Teachers also used reflective journals for their teaching experiences, observations, and students' emotional responses. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis by generating themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For ethical principles and consent, the participants were clearly informed about the research objectives, used pseudonyms, and had the right to withdraw at any stage.

Findings and Discussion

Baseline State of Learner Engagement and Contextual Language Use

The baseline observation showed that classroom teaching and learning activities were predominantly teacher-centered and students' engagement was limited. Classroom communicative activities were controlled by teachers, and only a few students actively

responded to teachers' questions. Most of the students just remained passive listeners with limited interactive and collaborative learning activities.

The observation further revealed that students' participation remained just in completing textbook exercises. They were rarely involved in classroom discussion, peer work, and communicative activities. Such context indicated that students were not involved in the learning process. The observation further indicates that students' participation in learning activities is dynamic and depends on the classroom nature and learning environment. They only used English to respond to textbook questions and prepare for examinations. They just memorized language expressions rather to use in contextual communication in real-life situations. Students were limited for expressing their lived experiences in contextual realities (Sulis & Mercer, 2025). Furthermore, meaningful engagement in language learning is facilitated through collaborative and interactive activities rather than teacher-centered pedagogies (Xiao et al., 2024).

Thus, the baseline observations indicated that students are limited in classroom engagement, restricted in group discussion, and rarely engaged in contextual communicative activities in English. These findings provided a strong rationale for field-based contextualized English language teaching practices for contextual, meaningful, collaborative, and authentic language use.

Enhancement of Students' Engagement

This study found that field-based contextualized English language teaching (ELT) substantially promoted students' multi-dimensional engagement in language learning activities. Students showed increased behavioral, emotional and cognitive involvement while language teaching and learning were connected with an authentic ecological and socio-cultural environment in a natural context. In field observations and collaborative activities, students actively engaged in group discussion, field observation, presentations, and interaction activities. In this regard, one of the students said:

Before this time, I only listened to what our teacher said, but now in this field work I get a chance to participate myself in observation activities and share my observation in the English language. This makes me more active and interested in learning.

It claimed that students showed great curiosity, activeness, enthusiasm and willingness to use the English language in real-life situations compared to conventional classroom-based pedagogy.

The study also explored that contextualized pedagogy enhanced learners' behavioral engagement by encouraging their active participation in peer collaboration and social interaction. Passive students during traditional classroom-based lessons also confidently engaged in field activities, group discussion, asking questions, sharing ideas, and interacting with teachers and other students. Most of the participants agreed that English language learning became more lively, interesting, and meaningful and less challenging when they connected with the local environment, familiar places, and real-life experiences. In this context, student C said, *"This kind of real field-based tasks motivate me to observe very carefully, help me think differently and find the solution of real problem myself that make my learning more interesting, meaningful and engaging."* It indicates that students actively engaged in reflective observation, critical thinking, and problem-solving activities during contextualized tasks showed their active cognitive engagement.

These above findings support the multi-dimensional framework of learners' engagement developed by Fredricks et al. (2004), which highlights behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of involvement. This study connects with the experiential learning theory proposed by Kolb (1984) that claimed learning becomes more fruitful when learners construct knowledge through direct engagement and reflection within a real-life context. Likewise, the findings also link with constructivist perspectives claimed by Bruner (1996) and Piaget (1970), highlighting active participation and student-centered meaning-making processes. Thus, the field-based pedagogy creates an authentic and collaborative learning environment that supports students to become active participants rather than passive listeners of information as in the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy.

Improvement in Language Skills

This study explored notable improvement in language skills mainly in vocabulary, oral interaction, descriptive writing, and contextual real-world language use. In this regard, one of the students said, ... before this field visit, I knew only a few English words related to our local plants and ecosystem. After the field observation and discussion with my friends, I knew many new words, and now I could use such words in my speaking and writing.

Similarly, during the field-based activities, students increased contextual vocabulary more effectively through direct connection with nature, culture, local geography, and social interaction with authentic environments. The connection between vocabulary and authentic experiences expanded both comprehension and retention

abilities of students. Supporting this finding, one of the students stated, "*... observing new and real things supported me to remember new words and explain them easily in the English language.*"

Students revealed great fluency and confidence in spoken English during field-based interactions, discussions, and presentations. Despite rote learning and memorized grammatical structures, the real-world authentic communicative environment promoted students using the English language continuously in meaningful contexts. Students who hesitated in classroom learning also became more confident in collaborative and creative writing abilities as they produced descriptive, reflective narratives and observation-based writing connected to real-life experiences. Thus, their writing and expressions showed rich improvement in vocabulary use, contextual awareness, and performance abilities.

These findings support ecological perspectives in language education developed by Lier (2004) that highlighted language learning through authentic real-world interaction and field-based communication. This study claims that communicative competence can be enhanced by engaging meaningful context rather than classroom-based, isolated, and grammar-based exercises. The findings also connect with the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky (1978), emphasizing the role of social interaction and contextual interaction in language development. Students enhanced language skills more prominently through collaborative interaction, observation, and experiential real-world communication practices.

Broader Educational Outcomes

This study also explored several broader educational benefits connected with ecosystem-based and contextualized pedagogy. Students confidently expressed their ideas, opinions, and observations during collaborative and experiential tasks. The real-world interactive environment also promoted students to develop self-confidence and active participation in experience-based activities.

The findings also showed that authentic real-life experiences enhanced students' creativity and imagination skills. The reflective, descriptive, and observation-based writing as well as collaborative project work engaged learners in creative communication and developed imaginative thinking. Field-based language learning also emphasized analytical thinking and reflected students' critical observation around their surroundings, interpreted information, and connected experiences with classroom concepts. Participants continuously agreed that field-based contextualized activities

made learning more meaningful, memorable, and relevant to their real-life and local environments.

The findings strongly connect with constructivist (Piaget, 1972) and experiential learning (Dewey, 1938) perspectives, which promote active learning, creativity, and learner autonomy. The study also connects with place-based pedagogy proposed by Sobel (2004), promoting the pedagogical implication of integrating the local eco-cultural environment into academic practices. The rich ecological and cultural diversities of Pokhara provided a significant learning environment that enhanced students' academic experiences and strengthened the connection between language learning and local realities.

Teacher Reflections on Field-Based Contextualized ELT

The teacher's reflections revealed that field-based contextualized English language teaching (ELT) facilitated more contextually interactive and meaningful learning than conventional classroom practices. Learners exhibited greater eagerness, engagement, and curiosity to interact during field-based practices. The local context integration environment motivated students to learn the language with their lived experiences. It makes classroom learning more relevant and lives. Addressing the implementation process, the teacher stated:

I found that students who remained passive during classroom learning seem more active and curious in field-based activities. They were curious to ask questions, discuss their observations, and share their experiences in English. Language learning becomes more meaningful when they engage directly with their local environment.

The teacher also stated that contextualized learning activities promoted vocabulary enhancement and authentic language use. Students were motivated to explain local contexts and their lived experiences more confidently than in textbook-based lessons. However, the teacher experiences challenges in time management, organizing field-based tasks, and fostering active engagement of all students.

Collectively, the teacher's reflections indicated that field-based contextualized English language teaching promoted learner participation and meaningful language use with good planning and management of the classroom.

Challenges in Implementing Field-based Contextualized ELT

Despite the benefits of field-based contextualized ELT, there seem to be institutional and structural challenges that limit the implementation of such practices. Curriculum rigidity is one of the major challenges that hinder the implementation of

context-based pedagogy in real-life teaching and learning environments. The examination-centered curriculum, prescribed textbooks, pressure to complete the syllabus in a limited time, and limited opportunities for innovative and experiential teaching practices. Thus, many teachers and educators found it complicated to allocate sufficient time for contextualized field-based activities.

Another major challenge was the limited opportunities for professional competencies enhancement regarding ecological and contextualized pedagogy. Teachers advocated that they had inadequate professional training in experiential learning activities and effectively integrating local contextual resources into ELT practices. This finding integrates with Hammond's (2017) argument that emphasizes the significance of continued professional development for contextually meaningful pedagogical transformation.

Resource and logistical management also emerged as another challenge to implement field-based contextualized pedagogy in English language teaching and learning. Inadequate pedagogical materials, transportation difficulties, financial limitations, and managing time constrained the continued implementation of such learning activities. Furthermore, inadequate institutional support and policy-level enhancement for innovative instructional practices are also challenges to implementing this pedagogy. Despite emphasizing learner-centered and experiential pedagogical practices, most educational institutions often emphasized examination results, reflecting broader systemic limitations within formal educational structures.

The findings of the study indicate that field-based contextualized ELT is most important to promote students' engagement, language development and broader academic outcomes, and sustainable implementation. For this, it needs a flexible curriculum, institutional support, pedagogical training, and contextually appropriate resources. The study highlights the need to transfer teacher-centered pedagogy to learner-centered and context-based pedagogies fostering real-world authentic collaborative, creative, and critical thinking. It further emphasizes the significance of integrating the local environment, culture, and social context in ELT to uplift meaningful and culturally appropriate learning experiences, by encouraging teachers to utilize locally available and contextually appropriate resources to construct authentic pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the findings also emphasize the teacher education program to incorporate eco-based instruction, experience-based learning, and contextualized teaching methodologies. Teachers' sustainable professional enhancement programs sustain teachers' context-based competences to implement field-based

learning pedagogy. In addition, the curriculum framework also needs to provide enough flexibility to encourage innovative and contextually grounded pedagogical practices. Thus, educational policy designers need to acknowledge and emphasize the core value of practice-based and field-based contextualized instruction for overall language learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that field-based contextualized pedagogical approaches significantly promote learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive advancement and contribute to enhancing language proficiency, confidence, creativity, and critical thinking abilities. Field-based contextualized ELT connects classroom instruction with authentic social and ecological field-based practices by promoting more meaningful, interactive, and contextually appropriate learning experiences. It motivates learners' active engagement, contextual vocabulary enhancement, and fluency in the target language and promotes descriptive writing practices.

Thus, the study emphasizes the transformation of field-based and experiential instruction, resolving the limitations of traditional teacher-centered pedagogical practices. These pedagogical practices foster deep engagement, authentic communication, and holistic academic enhancement by contextualized language learning within real-world environments. However, the successful implementation of such pedagogical practices needs sufficient institutional support, curriculum flexibility, teacher professional enhancement, and availability of appropriate pedagogical resources at the practice level. In general, this study supports enhancing ecological and contextualized pedagogies in language education and provides significant implementation for promoting English language teaching practices in Nepalese and other multilingual academic contexts.

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