ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFESSIONALS' UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT

Research article

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Abstract

Having an interdisciplinary nature, context is viewed differently in the relevant literature, calling for more clarification of the notion of context. How English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals understand the notion of context is crucial for effective teaching of English as a foreign language. To investigate how ELT professionals in Turkey understand context and reflect their conceptualization of context, two questionnaires and a task were used. The results of the descriptive study reveal that ELT professionals generally agree to the propositions made in the context-theoretic literature even though they have diverse opinions about the transparency of context and about the feasibility to re-create English oral communication contexts in ELT settings**.** It is also observed in the results that the amount of ELT professionals' thinking about what context is does not always increase as the academic degree levels go up. It is recommended that the pre-service syllabi of the courses of linguistics should be enriched in terms of the literature relevant to context.

Keywords: context, context descriptors, context types, English language teaching

1. Introduction

Social sciences in general and linguistics in particular have a number of key terms such as meaning, function, content, relation, and context, which scholars utilize to define their problems and to form their hypotheses. The terminology is so central to all phases of academic discourse that scholars and practitioners need to have clear definitions of the terms in their fields of study. Of the terms listed above, context is of primary significance since people, phenomena, events, and actions exist in contexts. It can easily be observed that context is used as a given as if all its components, descriptors, and types are self-evident. Akman and Bazzanella (2003) maintain that "[a]s with other widely used notions that are commonly referred to in everyday activities without much hesitation, context is difficult to analyze scientifically and grasp in all its different demeanors" (p. 321). Indeed, context may seem to be so familiar to scholars and practitioners that they may not feel the need to delineate the notion of context while making their claims, arguments, and hypotheses, and while offering solutions. Taking context for granted, thus, may result in various unexpected inconveniences in research and practice.

Derived from the Latin word *contextus*, context means "to weave together or to join together" (Scharfstein, 1989, p. 1). Holly (1999) enumerates the following terms used by scholars to "picture context metaphorically" (p. 49): frame (Goffman, 1974); environment (Scharfstein, 1989); background, perspective, stage (Hobart, 1985; 1986); and figure and ground (Goodwin and Duranti, 1992). For Abowd and Dey (1999), context is implicit situational information. Besides its transdisciplinary, multidimensional, vague nature, it is also conceived as a given (Akman, Bouquet, Thomason & Young, 2001; Bouquet, Serafini, Brézillon, Benerecetti & Castellani, 1999; Tracy, 1998). Scharfstein (1989: 1) views context as "that which environs the object of interest and helps by its relevance to explain it". For

Dilley (1999: 3), "context is a device … to reveal hidden meanings and deeper understandings, or to forward certain kinds of interpretation and particular kinds of explanation". Abowd & Dey (1999: 304) approach context as "any information that can be used to characterize the situation of an entity, where an entity can be a person, place, or physical or computational object". While addressing context, Fetzer and Akman (2002: 391) state that:

> In traditional linguistic accounts of context, one thinks of the immediate features of a *speech situation*, that is, a situation in which an expression is uttered. Thus, features such as time, location, speaker, hearer and preceding discourse are all parts of context. But context is a wider and more transcendental notion than what these accounts imply. For one thing, context is a relational concept relating social actions and their surroundings, relating social actions, relating individual actors and their surroundings, and relating the set of individual actors and their social actions to their surroundings (*italics are original*).

Context is often referred to in linguistics while setting the boundary between semantics and pragmatics (Chapman, 2011; Maienborn, von Heusinger, & Portner, 2011; O'Keefe, Clancy, & Adolphs, 2011; Recanati, Stojanovic, & Villanueva, 2010). Semantics is conventionally defined as the study of context-independent meaning, as opposed to pragmatics studying context-dependent meaning (Börjesson, 2014). Besides the variety of approaches to and definitions of context, there are many context typologies. Hall (1976) proposes a high context versus low context dichotomy. The former involves emotions, close relations, indirect communication, and nonverbal cues whereas the latter is logical, less personal, direct, and verbal. In another pair of context types hypothesized by Penco (1999), objective context covers metaphysical state of affair, and a set of features of the world we can express as time, place, and speaker. Subjective context, on the other hand, involves cognitive representation of the world, a set of assumptions on the world we can express as language, axioms, and rules. Thirdly, in the typology by Kecskes (2008), prior experience creates private context that gets encapsulated in lexical items in the mind of speakers of a particular speech community. The public part of the private context, however, is available to each speaker of that speech community because it refers to relatively similar conceptual content that is conventionalized.

Despite the definitions and types of context provided in the relevant literature, there is still a definite need for more clarification of the notion of context. Complementary to the current typologies given above, a new dichotomy can be hypothesized: prime context and post context (Cakir, 2009; 2011). In the prime context, people discover or create, share, negotiate, globally agree upon, and mentally codify primary salient content. Prime (i.e., semantic) meaning emerges in the prime context. But non-primary salient content can be needed and created, shared, negotiated, globally agreed upon, and mentally codified in a relative relation to the prime context (Cakir, 2009; 2011). The most salient difference between prime context and post context is that the former is discovered or created whereas the latter is created. "Salient contents of prime contexts are first discovered/created, whereby prime (i.e., semantic) meanings emerge. Once the prime meanings get established, post (i.e., pragmatic) meanings are (needed and) created in post contexts. Post context stands in a relative relation to the prime context. Post context and post meaning can be created by negating, broadening, narrowing, differentiating etc. the prime context and prime meaning. Thus, a certain relationship with the prime context is prerequisite for a post context to exist. Cognition is operated by or as syntheses of prime and post context representations" (Cakir, 2011). In a nutshell, it can be hypothesized that content of context constitutes concept.

Meaning is presumed to be in a continuum from outside the brain to the mind (Clark, 2008; Gibbs, 2005; Robbins & Aydede, 2009; Semin & Smith, 2008). Context plays a crucial role as an interface between the outer world and cognition. People discover/create salience in almost infinite number of contexts in the nature and internalize them as meanings and meaning networks. Human mind basically seeks, discovers or creates contexts, and synthesizes the discovered/created contexts. This results neither in totally fixed meanings nor in haphazardly formed meanings. When people discover or create salient contextual content, they communally share, negotiate, globally agree upon, and mentally codify it. The communal codification is necessary for people's co-reference in repeated contexts (Cakir, 2011). At the same time, people leave certain links and components unmapped because, beliefs, attitudes, and intentions can be subjective, relative, and dynamic (Foxall, 2004). The salient content is agreed upon an used by the community, and the disagreements are genuinely and situationally handled by the participants (Kecskes, 2008). Human mind forms context categories to avoid 'contextual flux' and to stabilize frames (Givon, 2005).

Human brain can be described as context seeker, context discoverer/creator, context analyzer, context synthesizer, and context library. The neurobiological basis for these mental operations is billions of neurons and thousands of connection routes for each neuron (Yaşargil, 2003). When something is to be uttered for communication, depending on the context or intention, speakers presumably visit the context library within a short period of time, check the relevant prime context(s), and, if any, post context(s), recall the relevant linguistic or extra linguistic features and utters them. Similarly, when something is heard, hearers begin to check mental representations of context to find the best or most relevant match with the utterance, relevance being the most central operation for meaning making in the cognition (Sperber & Wilson, 1996).

Table 1 summarizes the context dichotomies and other context types that have been enumerated so far in the context-theoretic literature.

Table 1. *Context types (Akbaş & Çakır, 2021, p. 254)*

Source	Context types
Hall, 1976	high context: emotions, close relations, indirect, nonverbal
	low context: logical, less personal, verbal
Kecskes, 2008	private context, public context
Çakır, 2011	prime context, post context
Fetzer, 2012	speaker-centered context, hearer- and collective-centered context, linguistic context, cognitive context, social and sociocultural context
Meibauer, 2012	intratextual context ('co-text'): the relation of a piece of text to its surrounding text
	infratextual context: the relation of a piece of text to the whole of the text
	intertextual context: the relation of a text to other texts
	extratextual context ('situational context'): the relation of a text to aspects of the situation in which the text has been produced or interpreted

1.1. Research Questions and Hypotheses

In the expanding circle countries like Turkey, where English is basically taught as a foreign language (Kachru, 1992), English-as-a-foreign-language teachers (EFLTs) as practitioners are most likely to face the challenge of creating contexts in which English is presented, practiced, produced, and assessed. Therefore, how EFLTs understand key notions of their work, exclusively the notion of context, is crucial for their effective implementation of goals, objectives, operations, and evaluation in EFL classes. Any inadequate or immature conceptualization of the notion of context may have a debilitating effect on the EFL lessons. The current study, then, sets out to see how English language teaching (ELT) professionals in Turkey understand context and reflect their conceptualization of context. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no study carried out so far to identify how ELT professionals in Turkey and abroad conceive context. It is, therefore, aimed to contribute to the professional development of ELT people by mirroring their look at the notion of context. In the light of the literature reviewed above, the current study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do the ELT professionals view the notion of context?

2. What alternative terms or descriptors do the ELT professionals use for context?

3. Does the amount of thinking about what context is increase as the academic degree levels of the ELT professionals go up?

4. What are implications of ELT professionals' understanding of the notion of context for teaching English as foreign language?

The six hypotheses in relation to the first three research questions are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: ELT professionals generally agree to the propositions made by in the context-theoretic literature.

Hypothesis 2: ELT professionals disagree on that transparency of the notion of context.

Hypothesis 3: ELT professionals disagree on the feasibility to re-create FL oral communication contexts in FLT settings.

Hypothesis 4: ELT professionals and ELT students disagree on the context-theoretic terms or descriptors used for the notion of context.

Hypothesis 5: ELT professionals and ELT students view *situation*, *setting*, *circumstance*, *environment* and *state* as strong alternatives to context.

Hypothesis 6: The amount of thinking about what context is increases as the academic degree levels of the ELT professionals go up.

2. Method

This descriptive study presents the data collected through three instruments: a multiple-choice questionnaire about the ELT professionals' understanding of context, a context task about the alternative terms for context, and a short questionnaire that seeks to elicit ELT professionals' reflections about context. Context was chosen as the research topic because it exists as if it is the fifth element of communication when its absence is deeply felt in teaching EFL, primarily in teaching oral communication skills. Even though context occupies a significant place in ELT, it may be argued that, due to its opaqueness (Malpas, 2002), ELT professionals (from teaching, linguistics, and literature majors) may cling to incomplete or

misguided conceptions of context in setting goals and objectives, preparing and implementing materials, and assessing learners. Hence, how ELT professionals understand context is worth investigating.

2.1. Participants

Fifty-two ELT professionals (Group A), ranging from BA holders to MA/PhD students/holders, teaching English as a foreign language, answered CQ1. Table 2 shows the distribution of the educational statuses of the participants who completed CQ1.

Table 2. *Distribution of the educational statuses of the cq1 respondents (group a)*

Educational Status	Number
BA holder	14
MA student	6
MA holder	9
PhD student	9
PhD holder	14
Total	52

The CT was administered to two separate groups of participants: (a) 36 ELT Program sophomore students (Group B) of a faculty of education at a state university based in Ankara, and (b) 36 ELT professionals (Group C), ranging from BA holders to MA/PhD students/holders. CQ2 was given 36 ELT professionals (Group D), ranging from BA holders to MA/PhD students/holders. Although it was aimed to give the CT to a different group of 52 ELT professionals from those in Group A, only a different group of 36 ELT professionals in Group C participated in the task, which can be regarded as a limitation of the study. Also, CQ2 was given to another different group of 36 ELT professionals in Group D. The participants of Group A, Group C and Group D each were composed of different participants but Group C and Group D had the same distribution of the educational statuses. CT was given to sophomore students because they had not yet taken any theoretical course about linguistics and pragmatics and it was assumed that they had not thought so much about the notion of context. In a way, they are at the initial phases of the ELT profession, so the data elicited from the sophomore students can be regarded as the baseline data to help compare the data elicited from the ELT professionals. The distribution of the educational statuses of the ELT professionals who did CT (Group C) and who completed CQ2 (Group D) is shown on Table 3.

Table 3. *Distribution of the educational statuses of the elt professionals who did ct (group c) and who completed cq2 (group d)*

Educational Status	Number
BA holder	7
MA student	9
MA holder	8
PhD student	9
PhD holder	3

Total	36

2.2. Instruments

The multiple-choice questionnaire, Context Questionnaire 1 (CQ1), prepared by the researcher, has two parts (Appendix 1): (1) Fourteen context-theoretic statements with "I agree", "I disagree" and "I have no idea" options, and (2) Six multiple-choice items. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, and 14 were directly borrowed from, respectively, Bosco, Bucciarelli, & Bara (2004: 472), Kecskes (2008: 388), Kecskes (2008: 388), Kecskes (2008: 392), Malpas (2002: 410), Malpas (2002: 415), Malpas (2002: 416), and House (2006: 343). Nine items (6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18) were paraphrased from Arvaja (2007), Kecskes (2008), House (2006), and Malpas (2002). The remaining three items (5, 19, and 20) were originally developed by the current researcher to elicit the participants' opinions on (a) the possibility of existence of a root context where a linguistic unit gains its primary meaning, (b) what portion of oral communication contexts of a foreign language can be re-created in foreign language teaching settings, and (c) the priority of speaker or hearer in communication.

The second instrument (Appendix 2) is Context Task (CT), in which 42 defining terms about context are listed and the participants are requested to pick (a) five terms (out of 42) which they find as weak alternatives to context, and (b) five terms (out of the same 42-item list) which they find as strong alternatives to context. The majority of the items in the list of 42 terms were elicited from the context-theoretic literature and from the following online English dictionaries: Webster's and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

The third instrument is a short, three-item Context Questionnaire 2 (CQ2), which seeks to find answers about the ELT professionals' cognitive state about context. The first item is a Yes/No question: "Have you ever thought about what context is? Item 2 asks the participants how much they have thought about what context is if they have ever thought about it, with three options given to the respondents: 'little, 'neither little nor much', and 'much'. Item 3 is an open-ended task that seeks to elicit what words come to their mind when they hear the word context, and the participants are requested to write as many words as they wish. Item 3 of CQ2 was administered to crosscheck the data elicited from the ELT professionals through the CT.

2.3. Data Collection Procedures

Four different groups of participants took part in the study. After CQ1 was given to 52 ELT professionals, 36 ELT sophomore students and 36 did the CT. The CT was used to see the ELT professionals' specific understanding about the notion of context. As mentioned above, the CT was also given to the ELT sophomore students so as to use the data elicited from the ELT sophomore students as the baseline data to help compare the student data elicited from the ELT professionals. The sophomores had not yet taken any theoretical course about linguistics and pragmatics and it was assumed that they had not thought so much about the notion of context. Finally, CQ2 was given to 36 different ELT professionals to elicit data about ELT professionals' further reflections about the notion of context.

2.4. Data Analysis

The results of the multiple-choice items of CQ1 and CQ2 were given in frequencies and the weak and strong alternatives picked by the participants in the CT and the words and phrases provided in the open-ended item of CQ2 were ranked in terms of frequency.

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of CQ1, the CT, and CQ2 will be presented, analyzed, and discussed in relation to the research questions and hypotheses of the study.

3.1. Context Questionnaire 1

The participants generally agreed to the statements derived from the propositions made in the context-theoretic literature, thus confirming Hypothesis 1**.** The almost unanimous result is that all the professionals except for one think that context is determined by the physical environment, the social world, and the psychological world, agreeing with Bosco et al (2004, p. 472) (Item 1). Similarly, the participants with a majority (sometimes almost majority) of nine out of ten agree that:

- Language is never context-free (Kecskes, 2008: 388) (Item 2).

- When people speak or write, they design what they need to express to fit the actual situational context in which they are communicating (Kecskes, 2008: 388) (Item 3).

- Context, meaning and understanding are interconnected notions, no one of which can be explored independently of the others (Malpas, 2002: 410) (Item 7).

- To place something within a context is already to make it meaningful (Malpas, 2002) (Item 10).

- Identification of contexts is partly dependent on the identification of the objects that are present within those contexts (Malpas, 2002:415) (Item 11).

- Human mind is a combination of pattern recognizer/builder and rule-following logical calculator (Kecskes, 2008) (Item 15).

- Context covers both external social-situational factors and internal cognitive factors (House, 2006: 339-342) (Item 16).

- Both the speaker and the hearer are of equal importance in communication (Item 20).

Four-fifths, sometimes almost four-fifths, of the participants believe that to ask "what is context?" is to ask "what is meaning?" or "what is understanding?" (Malpas, 2002) (Item 9), that the "meaning of a linguistic unit cannot be captured unless one takes account of the interrelationship between linguistic units and the context of the situation" (House, 2006:343) (Item 14), and that context-language relation is dynamic (Arvaja, 2007; House, 2006) (Item 18). Tables 4 and 5 give the frequencies and percentages of the responses given to CQ1. The context-theoretic propositions on which there is a seven-out-of-ten agreement among the participants are that "concepts are culture-specific" (Kecskes, 2008:392) (Item 4), that there is always a root context (i.e., prime context) in which a linguistic unit gains its primary meaning (Çakır, 2008) (Item 5), that actual situational context is the most decisive factor in the process of meaning construction (Kecskes, 2008) (Item 6), that "every context always implicates other contexts, just as one meaning always implicates others" (Malpas, 2002:416) (Item 12), and that language shapes context as much as context shapes language (House, 2006) (Item 17).

Table 4. *Results of the part a of cq1 (52 participants)*

Questionnaire Item	I agree		I have no idea		I disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	51	98	1	2	0	0

2.	45	87	0	0	7	13
3.	47	90	3	6	2	4
4.	36	69	5	10	11	21
5.	37	71	11	21	4	8
6.	37	71	7	13	8	16
7.	48	92	0	0	4	8
8.	25	48	12	23	15	29
9.	41	79	2	4	9	17
10.	47	90	1	2	4	8
11.	47	90	2	4	3	6
12.	36	69	7	13	9	18
13.	15	29	3	6	34	65
14.	42	80	6	12	4	8

Table 5. *results of the part b of cq1 (52 participants)*

Questionnaire Item	N	%
15 a.	3	6
15 b.	1	2
15 c.	48	92
16 a.	6	12
16 b.	0	0
16 c.	46	88
17 a.	37	71
17 b.	2	4
17 c.	13	25
18 a.	10	19
18 b.	52	81
19 a.	4	8
19 b.	26	50
19 c.	18	34
19 d.	4	8
19 e.	0	0
20 a.	4	8

20 b.	3	6
20 c.	45	86

Contrary to the above-mentioned general tendencies among the participants, almost half of the participants believe that context is *not* a transparent concept (Item 8), agreeing with Malpas (2002), and three out of ten are of the opinion that context *is* a transparent concept. A bit less than one-third of the respondents have no idea about the transparency of context. Confirming Hypothesis 2, this result shows that there is disagreement among the ELT professionals and that more than half of the ELT professionals seem to not have developed a well-demarcated understanding of context. Now that context is one of the central concepts of ELT, pre-service and in-service ELT professionals should be provided with opportunities so that they can develop insights into the nature of the notion of context and into possible links between ELT and context.

A similar dispersal of opinions, which is parallel with the issue of the transparency of the notion of context, is observed in the question of the feasibility to re-create FL oral communication contexts in FLT settings (Item 19). Half of the professionals state that most of FL oral communication contexts can be re-created whereas slightly more than one-third believes that some of the FL oral communication contexts can be re-created in FLT settings like Turkey. Also, four people say that very few can be re-created, in disagreement with four others who believe that all can be. These results confirm Hypothesis 3 and may imply that most of the professionals tend to regard context as something transportable from the native communities of the language being taught (from the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in the case of ELT) into the FLT settings in countries like Turkey, where the language is taught as a foreign language. The transportability of FL contexts from home settings into foreign settings stands out as an important issue to be addressed in both pre-service and in-service ELT activities.

3.2. Context Task

When it comes to the results of the CT, as shown in Tables 6 and 7, only one of the terms that are suggested in the context-theoretic literature as an alternative to context is selected as the strong alternative to context, which is *environment* (Scharfstein, 1989). In the CT, 13 ELT professionals rank *environment* in the third place of the list of 42 items, and only five ELT sophomore students do so, ranking *environment* in the 13th place. This result appears to be confirming Hypothesis 4, which stipulates that the ELT professionals and the ELT students disagree on the context-theoretic terms or descriptors used for context**.** Similarly, only six ELT professionals and three ELT students prefer *frame* as the strong alternative to context (Goffman, 1974), which is used to define context in the literature. The term *ground*, suggested by Goodwin and Duranti (1992) as a descriptor of context, is chosen by only two ELT professionals while no ELT student picked it as a strong alternative to context, which nullifies Hypothesis 4 because the ELT professionals and the ELT students agree that *ground* is not a strong alternative to context.

Strikingly, seven professionals see *ground* as a weak alternative to context just as five professionals see *frame* as a weak alternative to context. This result may also hint that the pre-service syllabi of the courses of linguistics (and, if included in the ELT curricula, the syllabus of pragmatics) that the ELT professionals in our study had followed appear to not have covered the basics of the context-theoretic knowledge. It is also possible that the ELT professionals in our study had been taught but had not paid enough attention to the context-theoretic knowledge in their undergraduate and/or graduate studies. The reason for the ELT students to not have picked *ground* at all as a strong alternative can be that they are the

sophomore students who have not yet studied any context-theoretic content offered to them in the syllabi of the courses of linguistics (and pragmatics).

Table 6. *Results of the students' ct (36 participants)*

	Chosen as Strong Alternative	Chosen as Weak Alternative		Chosen as Strong Alternative	Chosen as Weak Alternative
	N	N		N	N
Circumstance	20	2	Neighbourhood	3	15
Situation	18	1	Milieu	3	2
Condition	14	2	Incident	3	2
Setting	10	2	Frame	3	1
State	8	2	Surrounding	2	3
Plot	8	5	Realm	2	7
Framework	8	1	Happening	2	7
Scenario	6	4	Habitat	2	7
Case	6	2	Environs	2	2
Schema	5	2	Domain	2	6
Scene	5	1	Atmosphere	2	5
Occasion	5	5	Territory	1	7
Environment	5	0	Stage	1	1
Vicinity	4	5	Mise-en-scenes	1	8
Sphere	4	4	Event	1	4
Position	4	2	Ecology	1	11
Dimension	4	6	Terrain	0	5
Contexture	4	3	Location	0	8
Circle	4	6	Ground	0	4
Area	4	6	Climate	0	12
Place	3	0	Ambient	0	2
			Total	180	180

Table 7. *Results of the professionals' ct (36 participants)*

	Chosen as Strong Alternative	Chosen as Weak Alternative		Chosen as Strong Alternative	Chosen as Weak Alternative
	N	N		N	N

Setting	20	0	Dimension	2	7
Situation	20	1	Ground	2	7
Environment	13	2	Occasion	2	4
Circumstance	12	1	Place	2	3
Case	10	0	Stage	2	6
Domain	10	1	Circle	1	6
Framework	9	1	Habitat	1	5
Scenario	9	2	Happening	1	6
Condition	8	4	Incident	1	4
Contexture	7	1	Location	1	8
Frame	6	5	Mise-en-scenes	1	4
Surrounding	6	3	Neighbourhood	1	13
Scene	5	1	Plot	1	3
Event	4	5	Position	1	7
Milieu	4	2	State	1	1
Atmosphere	3	5	Terrain	1	5
Environs	3	0	Vicinity	1	6
Realm	3	4	Ecology	0	13
Ambient	2	2	Schema	0	9
Area	2	5	Sphere	0	4
Climate	2	7	Territory	0	7
			Total	180	180

On the other hand, *situation* was chosen as the strong alternative to context by slightly more than half of the ELT professionals and by exactly half of the ELT students, which partly confirms Hypothesis 5: ELT professionals and ELT students pick *situation*, *setting*, *circumstance*, *environment* and *state* as strong alternatives to context. While 20 ELT professionals see *setting* as a strong alternative for context, only 10 ELT students do so. Interestingly, 20 students pick *circumstance* as a strong alternative for context, which puts *circumstance* in the first rank as opposed to 12 ELT professionals picking *circumstance*, ranking in the fourth place, as a strong alternative for context. The ELT professionals and the ELT students almost unanimously agree on not selecting *situation*, *setting*, *circumstance*, *environment* and *state* as weak alternatives for context. However, the ELT professionals and the ELT students differ from each other in that only one professional views *state* a strong alternative for context whereas eight students select *state* as a strong alternative for context. One final note regarding the CT is that *contexture* is put in the 10th and 18th ranks of strong alternatives by the professionals and students, respectively, despite the fact that *context* and *contexture* share the same root morpheme. One possible reason for this hesitancy could be that they have not chosen *contexture* deliberately in order to avoid a circular definition, i.e., defining the unknown by the unknown itself.

Overall, the fact that *situation* and *setting* have not been picked by all the ELT professionals in the study is thought-provoking because *situation* and *setting* are of the most relevant descriptors of context, especially in ELT. As summarized on Table 1 above, situational context or context of situation is classified as a key context type in the context-theoretic literature, making *situation* central to contextual analysis. Hence, it is strongly recommended that the pre-service syllabi of the courses of linguistics (and, if included in the ELT curricula, the syllabus of pragmatics) should be enriched in terms of context theory, with a special focus on such descriptors for context as *situation*.

3.3. Context Questionnaire 2

Items 1 and 2 of CQ2 were asked to elicit further reflections of the ELT professionals, and to see similarities and differences in the reflections of the participants of various educational statuses ranging from BA holders to MA/PhD students/holders. Table 8 reveals that all the participants who answered Item 1 gave an affirmative response to the question of "Have you ever thought about what context is?"

Table 8. *Results of cq2 (items 1 & 2)*

		Yes	No	Little		Neither Little Nor Much		Much	
		N %	N %	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Have you ever thought about what context is?	36 100	0 0	N/A*		N/A		N/A	
2	If you have ever thought about what context is, how much have you thought about what context is?			6	14.7	18	50	12	3.3

*N/A: Not applicable

Nevertheless, the amount of thought about what context is differs from professional to professional. While exactly one-third of the participants say that they have thought *much* about what context is, half of them have thought *neither little nor much* about what context is. One out of six has thought *little* about what context is, which is an interesting result given the fact that context is a central concept in both general language studies and specific ELT activities. Table 9 below presents educational statuses of the participants and the frequencies in relation to how much they have thought about what context is: *little, neither little nor much, much.*

Table 9. *Results of cq2 (item 2)*

	Amount of thought about context		
	Little	Neither little nor much	Much
	N	N	N
BA Holder	1	7	1
MA Student	2	3	3

MA Holder	3	3	3
PHD Student	0	2	1
PHD Holder	0	3	4
Total	6	18	12

Of 18 participants who picked the option that they had thought *neither little nor much* about what context is, there are three PhD degree holders, two PhD students, and three MA degree holders. This result is not in line with what was anticipated in Hypothesis 6: the amount of thinking about what context is increases as the academic degree levels of the ELT professionals go up. Conversely, of the 12 participants who picked the option that they had thought *much* about what context is, there are three MA students and one BA degree holder, which has not been hypothesized either. The hypothesis is partly confirmed by the fact that none of the PhD degree holders and none of the PhD students say that they had thought *little* about what context is. The result that half of the participants have thought *neither little nor much* about what context is reminds us of the comment made about the CQ1 results, and it would be best for ELT curriculum designers and teacher trainers to incorporate both theoretical and practical context-related content into pre-service and in-service ELT activities.

As a crosscheck to the CT, Item 3 of CQ2 was given and Table 10 shows that *environment*, picked in the CT in the third rank by 13 ELT professionals as a strong alternative to context, is also brainstormed by 12 ELT professionals upon being asked in CQ2 what words come to their mind when they hear the word context. The term *environment* has the second highest frequency in the CQ2 Item 3 data after *situation*, which has 15 hits. Another term with quite closer frequencies in both the CT and CQ2 is *condition*, with 8 and 9. The result that attracts the most attention is that 29 terms listed in the 42 items of the CT were not at all brainstormed by the participants who answered CQ2. Yet they brainstormed more than once the following words and phrases for context, which are not included in the 42 items of the CT (the numbers in parentheses show the total amount of the tokens for each word/phrase written for context):

> meaning (7), people (involved) (6), connection (5), discourse (5), place(s) (5), relation(s) (5), appropriate(ness) (4), background (4), culture (4), theme (4), topic (4), communication (3), linguistic context (3), meaningful(ness) (3), pragmatics (3), time (3), authentic materials (2), authenticity (2), awareness (2), comprehension (2), content (2), detail(s) (2), dynamic (2), interaction (2), language (2), meaningful interactions (2), reading(s), sentences (2), scope (2), teaching (2), unity (2), whole (2), words (2)

The terms *place*, *atmosphere*, and *schema* are brainstormed in CQ2 more than when they are selected from the CT list (two to five, three to four, and zero to two, respectively), which is the most adverse result of the CT and CQ2 comparison. Also, CQ2 respondents produced 128 other words or phrases (with a frequency of one), which are not included in the 42-item CT list. Appendix 3 gives 128 other words or phrases (with a frequency of one), which are not included in the 42-item CT list but produced by CQ2 respondents.

Table 10. *Combined results of the professionals' ct and cq2 item 3*

	Chosen as Strong Alternative	Brain-Stormed in Professionals		Chosen as Strong Alternative	Brain-Stormed in Professionals

	in Professionals CT (36 Participants)	CQ2 Item 3 (out of 286 Tokens of Words)		in Professionals CT (36 Participants)	CQ2 Item 3 (out of 286 Tokens of Words)
	N	N		N	N
Setting	20	10	Dimension	2	0
Situation	20	15	Ground	2	0
Environment	13	12	Occasion	2	0
Circumstance	12	2	Place	2	5
Case	10	0	Stage	2	0
Domain	10	0	Circle	1	0
Framework	9	1	Habitat	1	0
Scenario	9	1	Happening	1	0
Condition	8	9	Incident	1	0
Contexture	7	0	Location	1	0
Frame	6	0	Mise-en-scenes	1	0
Surrounding	6	3	Neighbourhood	1	1
Scene	5	0	Plot	1	0
Event	4	1	Position	1	0
Milieu	4	0	State	1	0
Atmosphere	3	4	Terrain	1	0
Environs	3	0	Vicinity	1	0
Realm	3	0	Ecology	0	0
Ambient	2	0	Schema	0	2
Area	2	0	Sphere	0	0
Climate	2	0	Territory	0	0
			Total	180	66

3. Conclusions and Implications

A first tentative conclusion of the current descriptive study is that ELT professionals generally agree to the propositions made in the context-theoretic literature even though they have diverse opinions about the transparency of the notion of context and about the feasibility to re-create FL oral communication contexts in FLT settings. In addition, the study reveals that ELT professionals and ELT students do not have full agreement on the context-theoretic terms or descriptors used for context. While the ELT professionals regard *setting*, *situation*, *environment*, and *circumstance* as the strongest alternatives for context, the ELT students consider *circumstance*, *situation*, *condition*, and *setting*. It is observed in the results that the amount of thinking about what context is does not always increase as the academic degree levels of the ELT professionals go up.

Overall, it appears that not all of the ELT professionals have developed a well-demarcated understanding of context. Hence, it is strongly recommended that the pre-service syllabi of the courses of linguistics (and, if included in the ELT curricula, the syllabus of pragmatics) should be enriched in terms of context theory, with a special focus on such descriptors for context as *situation*. Now that context is one of the central concepts of ELT, pre-service and in-service ELT professionals should be provided with opportunities so that they can develop insights into the nature of the notion of context and into possible links between ELT and context. Finally, the transportability of FL contexts from native language settings (i.e., from the U.K or any other inner circle country) into foreign language teaching/learning settings (i.e., into Turkey or any other expanding circle country) stands out as an important issue to be addressed in both pre-service and in-service ELT activities.

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Appendix 1

Context Questionnaire 1

Dear Participant,

This questionnaire is about the definitions, characteristics etc. of the concept of context. In each item, please specify the option that best reflects your opinion. Your responses will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for spending your valuable time and energy.

PART A: Please read the following statements and three options: "I agree"; "I disagree"; and "I have no idea" and choose the option that best reflects your opinion by putting (X) in the parantheses.

Statements	I agree	I disagree	I have no idea
1. Context is determined by the features of the physical environment, by the features of the social world, and by the features of the psychological world.	( )	( )	( )
2. Language is *never* context-free.	( )	( )	( )
3. When people speak or write they design what they need to express to fit the actual situational context in which they are communicating.	( )	( )	( )
4. Concepts are culture-specific.	( )	( )	( )
5. There is always a *root context* in which a linguistic unit gains its primary meaning.	( )	( )	( )
6. Actual situational context is the most decisive factor in the process of meaning construction.	( )	( )	( )
7. Context, meaning and understanding are interconnected notions, no one of which can be explored independently of the others.	( )	( )	( )
8. Context is *not* a transparent concept.	( )	( )	( )
9. To ask "what is context?" is to ask "what is meaning?" or "what is understanding?"	( )	( )	( )
10. To place something within a context is already	( )	( )	( )

to make it meaningful.			
11. Identification of contexts is partly dependent on the identification of the objects that are present in those contexts.	( )	( )	( )
12. Every context always implicates other contexts, just as one meaning always implicates other meanings.	( )	( )	( )
13. Social aspects of language are more important than the speaker's state of mind, intentions and feelings.	( )	( )	( )
14. The meaning of a linguistic unit cannot be captured unless one takes account of the interrelationship between linguistic units and the context of the situation.	( )	( )	( )

PART B: In each item below, please read the statement and circle <u>only one</u> option that best completes it.

15. Human mind is ……….
    a. a pattern recognizer and builder
    b. rule-following logical calculator
    c. a combination of pattern recognizer/builder and rule-following logical calculator

16. Context ……….
    a. covers *external social-situational* factors
    b. covers *internal cognitive* factors which depend on an individual's psychological processes
    c. covers *both* external social-situational factors and internal cognitive factors

17. The idea that ……… is true.
    a. language shapes context as much as context shapes language
    b. language always shapes context
    c. context always shapes language

18. Context is ……….
    a. a set of pre-fixed, pre-defined variables that *statically* surround language
    b. dynamically related to language

19. ……… of the oral communication contexts of *a foreign language* can be re-created in foreign language teaching settings.
    a. All   b. Most   c. Some   d. Very few   e. None

20. The idea that ……… is true.
    a. the *speaker* is more important in communication than the *hearer*
    b. the *hearer* is more important in communication than the *speaker*
    c. both the *speaker* and the *hearer* are of *equal* importance in communication

Appendix 2

Context Task

LIST OF CONCEPTS THAT MAY BE ALTERNATIVES TO <u>CONTEXT</u> (SOME ARE <u>WEAK ALTERNATIVES</u>; SOME ARE <u>STRONG ALTERNATIVES</u>)

circumstance, environs, occasion, scene, scenario, framework, stage, condition, domain, state, happening, incident, contexture, frame, habitat, location, case, ecology, schema, plot, milieu, setting, surrounding, environment, atmosphere, climate, terrain, ground, place, event, mise-en-scènes, ambient, sphere, position, area, territory, realm, situation, circle, dimension, neighborhood, vicinity

Task A: Please list below <u>five</u> concepts above that you think are <u>weak alternatives</u> to context:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Task B: Please list below <u>five</u> concepts above that you think are <u>strong alternatives</u> to context:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Appendix 3

The list of 128 other types of words or phrases (with a frequency of one), which are not included in the 42-item CT list but produced by CQ2 respondents

1. acting out	44. foreign publications	88. personal features (age, gender, etc.)
2. age	45. formal	89. perspective
3. age-appropriate	46. framework	90. phrases
4. analysis	47. fun	91. point of view
5. anecdotes	48. generative context	92. purposeful
6. antonym	49. genre	93. role plays
7. appealing to different senses and levels of the learners	50. goals and objectives	94. readiness
8. around	51. grammar	95. reading texts
9. association	52. guess	96. real/meaningful organization
10. attribution	53. guessing meaning	97. realia (menus, tickets, timetables, etc.)
	54. ideas	
	55. inclusive	

11. borders	56. index	98. real-life
12. brainstorming	57. informal	99. reference
13. change	58. information	100. register
14. classroom	59. intention	101. relatability
15. classroom environment	60. interactive	102. related
16. combination	61. Interpretation	103. relevance
17. communication purposes	62. items	104. situational context
18. communicative strategies	63. intelligibility	105. sociolinguistics
19. complexity	64. joke	106. songs
20. comprehension	65. knowledge	107. specifications
21. concept	66. labs with materials, apps and digital tools	108. speakers
22. connotation	67. learning	109. status
23. consciousness	68. learning attitude	110. stories & role-plays
24. context-based approach	69. level-appropriate	111. story
25. contextualization	70. limited context	112. strategic competence
26. contextualizing	71. listening	113. subject
27. contextually	72. listening texts	114. surface meaning of words/sentences
28. country	73. logic	115. synonym
29. creativity	74. logical responses	116. teaching vocabulary & grammar
30. decontextualized teaching	75. material	117. technology use
31. depth	76. meaning fluctuation	118. text
32. differences	77. meaningful input	119. the general meaning in communication
33. different meanings	78. motivation	120. the preposition 'in'
34. different usage purposes	79. native speakers	121. traditions
35. diversity	80. natural language	122. transition
36. drama	81. neighborhood	123. variation
37. elicitation	82. nonnative teachers	124. videos-trailers-pictures
38. examples	83. norm	125. vocabulary
39. expectations	84. open-minded	126. weather
40. experiences	85. opportunity	127. web 2.0 tools
	86. peripheral	128. work place
	87. peripheral learning	

41. facilities 42. familiarize/familiar 43. feelings		495