

## Teaching Grammar in Context to Improve Speaking Skills for Pet Candidates

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**Abstract:** *Speaking is one of the most important skills in learning a foreign language, which has a great effect on your failure or success. Grammar is one of the most important criteria to assess the speaking skill of the PET exam. In an attempt to increase the band score for the PET candidates' speaking skills at the EEG center, the researcher did this study to find out the effects of teaching grammar techniques in context. Experimental research was carried out by using two data collection instruments, including questionnaires and pre and post speaking tests. The results showed that all of the students have a positive attitude toward this technique and they think this technique helps them learn grammar better. In addition, it also helps the students to improve the score of the PET speaking skill. Hopefully, this study will make a relative contribution to help students improve their speaking skills and teachers have more techniques to make their grammatical lessons more interesting.*

**Keywords:** *teaching grammar, grammar in context, speaking, PET exam*

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### I. Introduction

For the past few decades, English has become one of the most widely used languages all over the world. This language was considered as an international language, which is the official language of more than 50 countries in the world and acts as the working language of almost all international organizations. Due to the popularity of English, a multitude of people in different countries learn English to serve their work or study.

In Vietnam, there is a huge number of people at different ranges of age learning English. It is one of the core subjects at all school levels. In some major cities such as Ho Chi Minh, Ha Noi, Thai Nguyen, etc., children have become accustomed to this subject, when they are from 4 to 5 years old or even younger. Almost all students in Vietnamese universities are required to achieve an English certificate to graduate. There are many test types for them to choose from, such as IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, PET, and so on. In Thai Nguyen, most students learning at EEG center want to get the B1 level to serve their jobs and study. They opted for the Preliminary English Test (PET) as an English certificate.

To reach the B1 level, EEG center students who do not major in English have faced many difficulties and speaking is one of the challenging skills for them. One of the problems that they had is grammar mistakes. They often used English grammar incorrectly when they spoke; therefore, they were not confident in their speaking. Being afraid of making grammar mistakes confused them to express their idea and affected their fluency.

Because of these problems, to help students improve their speaking scores for the PET, it is necessary to apply effective techniques to teach speaking skills. One of those is teaching grammar in context. These above reasons urged the researcher to do this study “*Teaching grammar in context to improve speaking skills for PET candidates*”.

The study was carried out to evaluate whether the technique of teaching grammar in context improves the speaking competence of students and find out their attitude towards this technique. In other words, it facilitated to answer two research questions:

1. To what extent does the technique of teaching grammar in context have effects on the PET candidates' speaking competence?
2. What is the student's attitude towards the technique of teaching grammar in context?

## **II. Review of Related Literature**

### **Teaching grammar in context**

Teaching grammar in context is a technique of the inductive method of teaching grammar, which involves presenting examples to illustrate a particular concept. Riddell (2003, p.46) stated that teaching grammar in context means "students are exposed to the target language in an authentic or near authentic setting, they see or hear the target language before having to focus on it". One of the most effective ways of teaching grammar in context is using dialogues. Thornbury (1999, P.76) highly recommended "The use of dialogues in grammar teaching is useful because the use of dialogues generally matches learners' expectations of how language is used in the real world: people use language in primarily to talk to each other". Apart from dialogues, teachers can use other authentic materials to teach grammar such as stories or short videos.

The technique of teaching grammar in context is widely used by many teachers all over the world. According to Thornbury (1999, P69), language, and context have a close connection, which has effects on finding out the intended meaning of a word or phrase. As he mentioned, context plays a very important role in both learning and teaching grammar.

### **Approaches to teaching grammar**

Learning English grammar is quite boring; this explains why students do not like grammar lessons much. To cope with this, teachers have a tendency to find out different teaching methods to raise students' interest and help them learn more effectively. There remain a huge number of approaches used in teaching this component of English. Richard and Rodgers (2001) in the research on approaches and methods in language teaching illustrated that "As the study of teaching assumed a more central role within applied linguists from the 1940s on, various attempts have been made to conceptualize the nature of methods and to explore more systematically the relationship between theory and practice within a method". In this study, some common methods will be presented briefly.

Scott Thornbury (1999, P29) defined both inductive and deductive approaches for teaching English grammar to distinguish. He illustrated that the deductive approach starts with giving a rule and then, examples, while the inductive approach starts with examples before giving the rule. Thus, the difference between inductive and deductive approaches is the way structures are presented.

### **Deductive approach**

Scott Thornbury (1999, p30) has listed the possible benefits and drawbacks of this approach. At first, he showed some advantages for both learners and teachers. One of the most outstanding benefits of this approach is time-saving. If the teachers use the deductive approach, they do not need to spend much time on eliciting from the examples. Besides, this approach enables us to confirm the expectations of many students, who like an analytical learning style about classroom learning. Additionally, the deductive approach is also beneficial for the teachers because they can anticipate and prepare for language points before coming up.

From the opinion of Thornbury (1999), the deductive approach is more teacher-centered. To follow the deductive approach, the teachers will introduce the new concept that they are going to learn, give an explanation for it, and take time for their students to practice.

### **Inductive approach**

The inductive approach reverses the deductive one, which "learners studies examples and from these examples derive an understanding of the rule" (Thornbury, 1999, p49). Similar to the deductive approach, Thornbury (1999, p54) also illustrated the positive and negative points of the inductive approach as followings:

The inductive approach creates chances for learners to work rules out by themselves. The learners discover the rules from examples, so the rules become more memorable, serviceable, and meaningful. Furthermore, students become more active during the learning process. It challenges the learners to make them more interested in lessons. Besides, the inductive approach offers greater self-reliance for students to support their autonomy.

Apart from the advantages, this approach has some disadvantages. The first thing that can be seen is energy and time-wasting. The students have to spend much time learning about the rules. Also, sometimes, they can find the wrong rules.

### **Previous studies**

The effect of teaching grammar in context was illustrated in many studies with different levels and backgrounds of subjects. The participants of these studies were university students. In this section, three relevant studies are listed.

The study by Murti Bandung was conducted to illustrate the effectiveness of contextual teaching and learning method in teaching speaking. The participants of this study were classified into two classes, including

the control class and experimental class. The contextual teaching and learning method was used in the experimental class, and the conventional method was used for the remainder. The result showed that teaching speaking through the method of contextual teaching and learning was quite successful.

Fariza&Khalida (2012) investigated the effectiveness of teaching English as Foreign Language grammar in context. This was a case study of third-year pupils in Middle schools in Algeria. To illustrate whether and what extend this technique can be adapted, and the satisfaction of both teachers and students with the way they are teaching and learning, they used questionnaires for both teachers and students to collect the data. The sample for teacher questionnaires was 27 teachers, who were teaching in the middle school from different places, while the sample for students was 50 third-year students at the Middle school TohamiAbd Rahman in BouriBouArriridj and IkhouaBarket in Biskra. The result showed that teaching grammar in context developed students' language and without teaching grammar in context, the students were not able to make even a simple sentence.

The group of researchers, whose names are Kiki Astuti, HeryYufrizal and Budi Kadaryanto, conducted the study "The implementation of contextual teaching and learning in teaching speaking". This was also a classroom action research and done at the SMP N I TanjungBintang Lampung Selatan second grade. This study was implemented with two kinds of instruments, including the observation sheet and speaking test. The collected data were divided into the data of the learning process and learning product. Afteranalyzing the data, these researchers concluded that contextual teaching and learning can enhance the speaking score of the students.

As the results of these studies, it is clear that the technique of teaching grammar in context has positive effects on both writing and speaking skills. It enables to improve students' speaking ability. Although there are a huge number of studies conducted with the effectiveness of teaching grammar in context, no study focuses on the effects of this technique on improving speaking skills for PET candidates in general, and PET candidates at the EEG center in particular. This enabled the author to do this topic to find out its effects on the students and their influences.

### **III. Methodology**

This study followed the experimental research of John W. Cresswell (2009) and participants are divided into a control group and an experimental group with the number of 10 students for each group.

To collect the data for this study, a mixed quantitative-qualitative was used to ensure the objective for the final results. The qualitative data was collected from the questionnaires. Following the Likert scale, the questionnaire sheet was designed to cover two parts, including students' attitudes towards the technique of teaching grammar in context and its effects on the speaking skill of PET candidates. The quantitative data was obtained from the results of students' pre and post speaking tests.

#### **Participants**

This study involved 20 students learning at the EEG center who are from different universities in Thai Nguyen city and do not major in English. Those 20 participants were divided into 2 groups, including the control and experimental groups. Both of them took part in doing questionnaires, pre, and post speaking tests. The experimental group participated in a process of applying teaching grammar in context technique, while the control group did not.

All the participants did a pretest before starting this course. The results of the pretest were used to classify students into either the experimental or control group.

#### **Data collection instrument**

This study aims at illustrating the effects of teaching grammar in context techniques on improving students' speaking skills for PET and how the learners feel about the way they are being taught. For these purposes, questionnaires for students would be distributed to students at 2 PET intensive course classes at the EEG center. Besides, pre and post speaking tests would be conducted to clarify the effects of this technique.

#### **Data collection procedure**

The PET intensive course at the EEG center lasts for 3 months, and 3 lessons per week. The speaking skill is taught in 12 lessons. This experiment was carried out in 4 weeks. During this time, the researcher was responsible for teaching both the control and experimental group. To assure validity and reliability, the data collection procedure included these following steps:

Firstly, the pre speaking test was done with the control and experimental groups on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, 2019 when the technique of teaching grammar in context has not applied yet. This pre-test was retrieved from the Preliminary English Test number 1 of Cambridge. It was recorded and assessed by following the PET

speaking score chart of Cambridge. The results of the pretest were used to compare with the results of the post-test to indicate the influences of the technique of teaching grammar in context.

Secondly, after having the results of the pretest, the researcher applied the technique of teaching grammar in context for the experimental group in 12 weeks. Other techniques were applied to the control group.

Thirdly, the survey questionnaires were distributed for students to collect the data. This questionnaire form consisted of 7 questions. There were 3 questions about students' attitudes towards this technique and 4 other questions were designed to know how this technique affected their speaking skills.

Finally, the students of the control and experimental groups did the post speaking test. This posttest was also recorded and used the PET score chart to assess. The results of the pre and post speaking tests were compared to find out whether this technique is effective.

#### IV. Data Analytical Method

Firstly, the writer calculated the Range (R) to see the difference between the highest (H) and lowest (L) scores of the PET candidates.

Secondly, the mean was computed to find out the average score of all participants to examine the speaking performance of all PET candidates as a whole.

Finally, to check the enhancement of the PET candidates on their speaking performance, the formula to calculate as follows:

$$P = \frac{T2 - T1}{T1} \times 100\%$$

#### V. Findings and Discussion

##### 4.1. Students' attitude towards the technique of teaching grammar in context

To learn about the attitude of those students towards the technique of teaching grammar in context, 3 related questions were made to collect their opinions. In general, most of the participants have a positive attitude towards the technique of teaching grammar in context, but with different levels. Some of them may agree, while others strongly agree or even they may feel neutral. Students' opinions of the technique are shown in the following table:

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
1. Learning English Grammar is very important for PET in general, and PET's speaking skills in particular.	0%	0%	0%	85%	15%
2. I am interested in learning English grammar in context because it is easy to understand and memorize.	0%	0%	0%	70%	30%
3. I do not feel under pressure when I learn English grammar in context.	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%

*Table 4.1. Students' attitude towards the technique of teaching grammar in context*

##### 4.2. Students' viewpoint about the technique of teaching grammar in context

In the second part of the questionnaires, there are 4 questions designed to collect the students' answers to know their opinions about the technique of teaching grammar in context. The results were analyzed from the data gathered from the students in control and experimental groups and presented as the table below:

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly disagree
Teaching grammar in context is a good technique to help me understand and use grammar properly in speaking.	0%	0%	5%	65%	30%
This technique helps me structure quickly and remember them for a longer time.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
This technique helps me speak English faster and more confidently.	0%	10%	30%	60%	0%
Learning grammar in context helps enhance my vocabulary.	0%	5%	10%	15%	70%

*Table 4.2: Students' viewpoint about the technique of teaching grammar in context*

As can be seen, the students had different ideas about the improvement that the technique of teaching grammar in context brought to them. 95 percent of the participants agreed that teaching grammar in context is a

good technique that helps them understand and use grammar properly in speaking skills. In addition, there is 5 percent of them who did not agree or disagree with the positive effect of this technique on their speaking skills for the PET. These results demonstrated that in the opinion of the participants, this technique is helpful for their speaking skills to get ready for the PET.

### 4.3. Results from pre and post speaking tests

The results of both pre and post speaking tests of two group were showed through the diagram below:

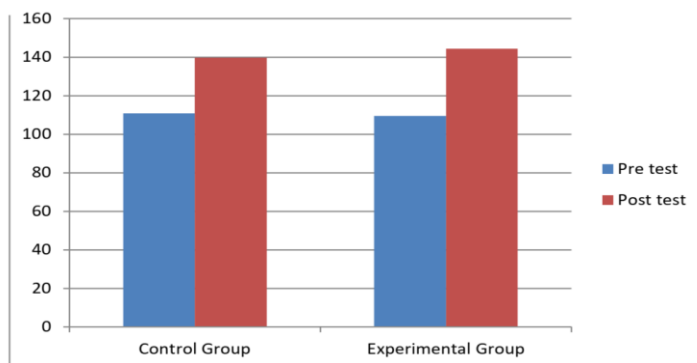


Chart 4.1: The average scores of both groups

According to the chart, it is clear that these groups nearly have the same results of the pre speaking test or even the results of the Control group is even higher. In the post speaking test, both groups witnessed an increase and there remained a big difference between them. The Experimental group had a higher average score that showed better improvement.

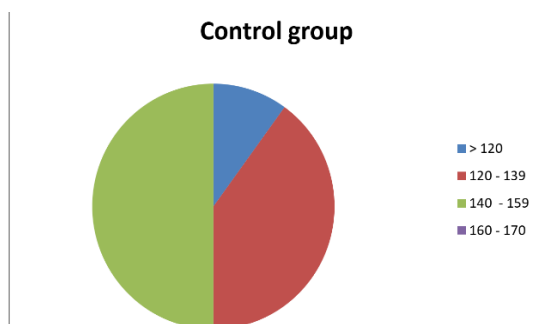


Figure 4.1. The proportion of the Control group's post speaking test



Figure 4.2. The proportion of the Experimental group's post speaking test

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 showed a big gap between the two groups in the results of the post speaking test. As the scale of Cambridge, if students want to get the level B1, they need to get at least 140. If they get under 140, they will achieve the level A2. The proportion of the students who got under 120 of the control group was 10 percent, while the Experimental group's was 0 percent. Besides, from this chart, it is clear that the proportion of the students who passed the level B1 of the Experimental group is higher than the Control group.

### 4.4. Students' progress in their Grammar competence

The results of the post speaking test indicated the progress of these participants. The score of the Experimental group for the grammar and vocabulary criteria increased rapidly, while the control group rose slightly. The highest score for these criteria is 5.

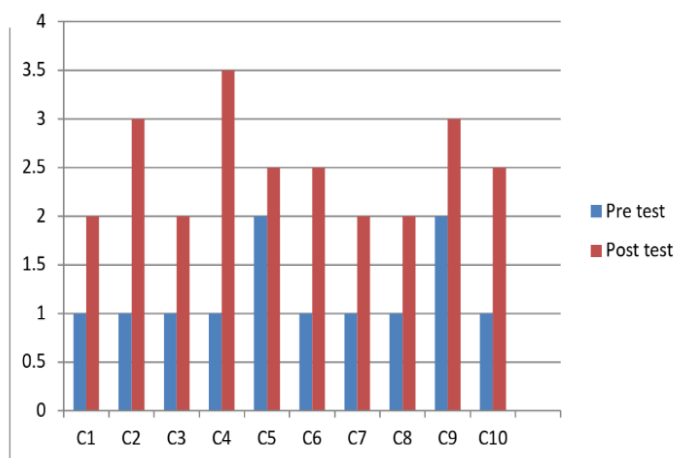


Chart 4.2: Grammar assessment in the pre and post speaking test of the Control group.

Looking at this chart, all of the participants in the Control group increased their score. Most of them had progressed after the course, but they still need to work harder and harder. The score of C4 went up from 1 to 3.5, while C2 raised from 1 to 3. The results of the pre speaking test showed that the highest score was 2, which belonged to C5. However, this student did not develop much after the course. She just increased 0.5 for the post speaking test, compared to the pretest she did before. Overall, all participants in this group rose at least 1 mark.

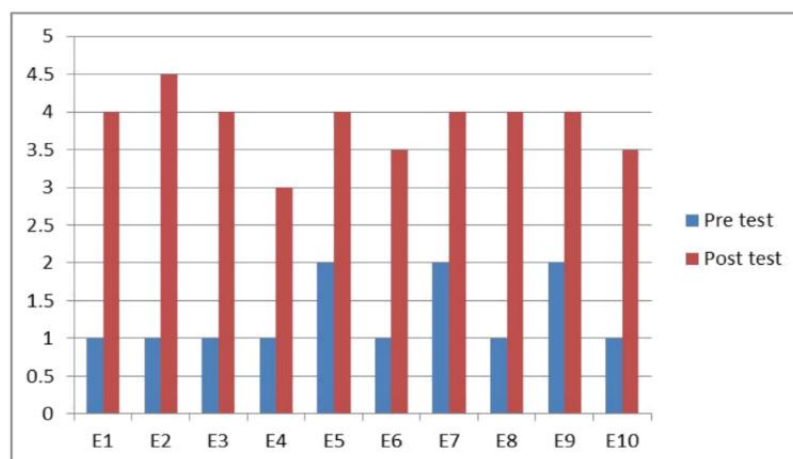


Chart 4.3. Grammar assessment in the pre and post speaking test of the Experimental group

This chart compares the difference in the results of the pre and post speaking tests of the Experimental group. It is clear that this group rose significantly, at least once as high as the results of the pre speaking test. From the post-tests, it is obvious that after being taught with the technique of teaching grammar in context, the Experimental got a higher score for grammar and vocabulary criteria in the PET scale. Nearly all of them got 4 per 5, while the control group made more mistakes for this criterion. E2 is one of the best students. His score increased by 3.5 after the Intensive course for the PET. E4 did not reach the goal as he expected before, but his mark for grammar criteria changed from 1 to 3. E7, E8, and E9 reach the same level after the course, even though they had different backgrounds. As his performance in the class, his grammar competence was better and better.

## VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusion

The results of the post speaking test of the control and experimental groups indicated that the technique of teaching grammar in context has a positive effect on their speaking performance. In addition to improving their grammar competence to help them use grammar properly in each conversation, the writer realized that the

students become more confident to speak and they are no longer afraid of speaking English and they are able to have longer and clearer answers for any question. In addition, their range of vocabulary is also expanded. From the observation of the writer in every lesson, the students are even more excited when they have grammar lessons. In addition, many students said that they did not feel under pressure when they learn grammar with this technique.

The data collected from the questionnaires showed the viewpoint of the students towards the technique of teaching grammar in context. All of the respondents believed that this technique is effective for their speaking performance of the PET and this was proved through the results of the post speaking test in both groups. The speaking score for the PET of the Experimental group improved much compared to the control group.

The data gathered from the pre and post speaking tests demonstrated the differences between the control and experimental groups. These groups seemed to have the same level at the beginning, but different results at the end.

## 5.2. Recommendations

The teacher can apply the technique of teaching grammar in context for the PET classes. Besides, practice is crucial in developing speaking skills. Furthermore, during teaching speaking skills, teachers should give the students tests regularly to help them know their level so that the students can set their goals and have plans for their learning.

Firstly, it is vital to let teachers know their expectations, difficulties, and target. Secondly, the students need to participate in all activities in classes actively. Finally, self – study at home is always important.

In the future, further studies for this topic should expand the sample size with a larger number of students to have more conclusive findings. In addition, further researches should be done with a longer time to bring more knowledge to the students. Besides, more and more new techniques will be experimented to find out the effects. This will help both teachers and students have more different techniques to apply in order to deal with the problems of the students and improve their speaking skills.

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