Article

Bilingual Teachers' Contextualization in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Australian Schools

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Abstract: This research focuses on the practice of contextualization in teaching Chinese as a foreign language among a cohort of bilingual language teacher-researchers. It aims to extend the prevalent emphasis in the current literature that acknowledges the role of context in language education; however, these research studies primarily give voice to linguistic contexts or relegates context into a static physical space such as 'environment'. This research is grounded in a social constructionism perspective whereby context is regarded as a dynamic relation-building process, or more accurately, a contextualizing process, enabled through various sociocultural activities. The data reveal that the teacher-researchers employed various forms of contextualization in teaching and linked these to particular teaching content through identifiable, purposeful activities, resulting in a variety of students' responses. This research provides an evidence-based understanding of contextualization in CFL teaching for a more sustainable second language education.

Keywords: context; contextualization; contextuality; social constructionism; Chinese as a foreign language

1. Introduction

Etymologically, the concept of context can be sourced to its Latin origin as texere/textere, referring to a weaving process or 'to weave' [1]. The significance of context in language learning and teaching has had many proponents over time [2–5]. It provides important reference points for meaning making in language learning. Its relationship with content is crucial as it gives meaning to content [2]. Creating context can provide stimuli and helps to hook the new learning content with the learned or known [4]. Neuroscience has confirmed that "the incorporation of context in teaching facilitates the efficient functioning of the brain by acknowledging the spheres of our realities" [5] (p. 19). Creating context in a language lesson not only makes the learning interesting and/or motivates the learners, it can also activate the area of the brain that relates to learners' experiences. That is, the use of context has advantages beyond an interesting or motivating lesson 'starter' in that it "provides avenues for storing information to be held in long-term memory" [5] (p. 20). From this aspect, it facilitates the achievement of the sustainability of learning.

It needs to be acknowledged that it is the process of 'contextualization' rather than 'static context' that provides relevance for new learning content, and a hook for linking to past learning and possibilities for that in the future. Language without contextualization can appear as a jumbled collection of words in a list without any relevance or reference point for understanding. To have students activate their learning by providing a dynamic context for the lesson content provides a soft landing for students in terms of meaning making and their understanding. However, studies focusing on how to create foreign language learning lessons embracing context as a dynamic, purposeful strategy is less researched, and arguably very rare with specific reference to Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) teaching and learning.

The significance of this research is couched in efforts to support successful CFL teaching and learning, by foregrounding the importance of context in lesson designs. It provides

evidence of actual CFL teaching where contextualization was a dynamic strategy implemented to assist with meaning making, understanding and memorization for young students learning the Chinese language. In direct opposition to universal methods of CFL based on textbooks, the approach investigated in this research demonstrates a pedagogy of contextualization and localization as the needs of local students, their home, school and communities, were encapsulated in the dynamic contexts created in the CFL classrooms.

2. Literature Review

A search of empirical studies revealed a tendency for context to be 'treated' as a taken-for-granted equivalent to 'background', or a decorative substitute for 'location', 'environment' and 'circumstance'. The consequence of such a conceptual understanding is that context is understood as most frequently located within, and pertaining to, a description of the physical setting in second language teaching research [6–9]. 'Context-titled' studies often include a description of a static background separate from the centered event or learning content with only occasional reference to the political and/or cultural domain. For example, Rosa's [10] study on language ideology revealed changes under different communicative or socio-political contexts could be identified and Yang's [11] research on the influence of educational reform context on teachers. In these studies, the concept of context was not examined beyond a very general account of the location where the research was conducted. Likewise, in the field of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), there is 'context'-related research [12–14]. However, and similar to the issue noted above, 'context' itself was rarely studied as the research focus in a second language education, and the role context plays with reference to its practical application is rarely investigated.

Analogous to the anthropological domain of context, exploration into linguistic-focused context has been conducted, albeit moderately. For example, Liontas' [15] application of context in the construction of idiomatic meaning, focused on discursive context to enhance students' understanding of idioms in foreign language learning. The researcher compared zero context against full context task designs [15]. Similarly, Li [16] conducted a study on linguistic context in relation to Chinese idiom learning. Both studies concluded that the linguistic context had a positive impact on idiom learning. These studies foreground teachers' pedagogical use of linguistic context as sustaining language learning; however, they denote context as 'surrounding text', without delving into its anthropological dimension nor its dynamic function.

The contribution of this research is its intention to transcend the static view of context as a physical space or environment where activities occur [17–19] and to also surpass the linguistic text-context domain. It critiques the limited view of context "as an immutable given or barely described at all" [20] (p. 164). This research concretizes the constructionist view of context as a dynamic process of making connections and relevance between context and a text, an object or an experience. Based on an assumption that language teachers do construct or create dynamic contexts or contextualize their teaching to facilitate students' language learning, this research asks: How do CFL Chinese background teachers design classroom activities in terms of contextualizing the teaching content to achieve pedagogical purposes? It seeks to identify the teachers' forms of contextualization and activities designed to achieve contextualization for learning. It attempts to contribute to the current research gap in this area and provide insight into the application of context for CFL pedagogy at both practical and theoretical levels.

3. Social Constructionist Perspective of 'Context'—Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in a social constructionist framework. Under this framework, context has: a scope ranging from the linguistic to anthropological domains; a nature comprising relativity and/or contextuality; and is a dynamic relation building or contextualization process. This process is embedded in socio-cultural activities and enabled by participants' agency.

3.1. Context from Linguistics to Anthropology

Constructionism enables context to be viewed in linguistic terms in addition to its anthropological domain. From a modern linguistic standpoint, context vs 'text' can be defined as "the parts which immediately precede or follow a particular passage or text and determine its meaning" [17] (p. 442). It "initially denoted the act of composition, of bringing together parts of language into meaningful utterances or written texts" [17] (p. 442). Constructionist theorists have an extended notion of context which includes its anthropological domain. That is, context contains a textual as well as a real-world dimension—"a concrete external situation" [18] (p. 474). Context, then, notably expands from the "internal contextualizing" or "mental framework" within the semiology system by not only embracing linguistic and non-linguistic 'symbols', but also including activities and the external situation where people are engaged with making meaning from a linguistic text [17] (p. 439). "The object" [21] or "the phenomenon of embeddedness of meaning" is "a core element in almost every explanation" of context (such as surrounding, environment, system, niche) [18] (p. 475).

Constructionism views the role of context in meaning making as indispensable [18,21]. Van Oers [18] argues that "meaning derives from situations" (p. 477) and context stands as "the concrete or ideal field of a sign-meaning unit" and "supports the specification of meanings at a given moment in time" [18] (p. 475). Likewise, Malpas [21] (p. 411) argues that "the elucidation of meaning always depends on making a connection to a broader contextual setting". Further, from a linguistics and a philosophy of language perspective, Malpas [21] (p. 403) points out that "an understanding of context is essential for any attempt to elucidate the structure and possibility of meaning." That is, "the meaning of an expression is wholly determined by the context in which the expression occurs" [21] (p. 407). Using the notion of context itself as an example, elucidation of the concept and/or other associate concepts, there should be involvement of the elaboration of a wider conceptual context from where context stands.

3.2. Contextuality and Relativity

Constructionism also characterizes context as having a component of relativity. In other words, there is no definite context, but only contextuality. Context can be defined in terms of its connection to its center—the text or the object it facilitates for meaning making—as around these particular texts or objects there could be multiple contexts, close or distant. Which context is selected for connection or relevance or how this connection or relevance is established is not pre-determined [21]. The object or phenomena can be connected with multiple contexts, but may also be logically connected closely to one and distant from another. The relativity nature of context influences the indetermined meaning, as Malpas [21] argues that "meaning is a function of the relating of elements rather than being already intrinsic to any single such element" (p. 418). In essence, the phenomena or objects are illuminated by their appeal to their surroundings and the ways "these surroundings themselves are selected and interpreted" informs the relativity of the context [17] (p. 439). A context–object interacting determiner has 'relevance' or 'appropriateness' when connections or disconnections are made based on this meaning conforming 'line' between object and outer contexts. Using related factors such as connection and relevance as keys to observe language teaching may assist in revealing the impact of context on teaching practice. In sum, when implementing a constructionism viewpoint, there is no fixed context–object/text relationship. The definition of context can be approached as approximations rather than precisely described.

3.3. Contextualization—The Agency of the Context

The role of human agency has been cited by social constructionist researchers when discussing context and meaning making. For example, Dilley [17] maintains that the construction of contexts is intimately connected with "how we as the agent conceive of knowledge, and this fact must therefore have consequences for how we conceive of what

contexts might or might not be appropriate" (p. 441). Dilley's [17] contextualizing or articulating connections and disconnections in meaning making is closely "relevant to a specific agent that is socially and historically situated, and to a particular purpose" [17] (p. 454). Comparably, Malpas [21] points out that contextualization "depends on the capacity of the person involved to situate the object in question within an appropriate context" (p. 404). That is, the connection between an object and the context depends on the knowledge and experiences of the agent. In language teaching, the connections deployed to understand the meaning of a linguistic symbol is largely dependent on the teachers' logical or subjective thinking. The context created can therefore be described as "the situation as interpreted by the person involved" [18] (p. 478) and, consequently, different people lead to different contexts and actions, hence, different particular meanings.

3.4. Contextualization through Socio-Cultural Activities

In consonance with social constructionism, contextualization is realized through sociocultural activities. That is, contextualization is "an intellectual activity by itself, embedded in a current sociocultural activity" [18] (p. 482). Activities or interactions undertaken have the potential to be ubiquitous ranging from "cultural, social, political" to "ritual and religious, economic or ecological" aspects of human life "against which any particular piece of social action was set". It is "sufficiently elastic" and can be "stretched in numerous directions for diverse purposes" [17] (p. 449).

In summary, the theorization of context from the perspective of constructionism has informed this research whereby context is perceived as a dynamic creation rather than a static, 'given' condition. Acknowledging the contribution of human agency enables the capture of the dynamic relations between context and text/object/phenomenon, and between contexts. To examine language teaching through this lens facilitates the comprehension of how language teachers activate their own and/or their students' agency: to create sociocultural activities; to make connections and/or relevant disconnections on their knowledge and experience; and to give form to interpretations of meaning in language teaching. Specifically, this approach has informed this research as to: how did the teachers make use of context, or positively contextualize teaching to activate language learning to achieve sustainable language education endeavors?

4. Methodology

Design: This research is one arm of a longitudinal case study of a Research-oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) program in an Australian university. This is a structured research education program equipping the participants with research and pedagogical training to undertake the teaching of CFL in local Australian schools. The University provided ethics approval (H11038) for all aspects of the longitudinal case study.

Whilst the longitudinal study sought to track the strategies, capabilities and skills implemented by the teacher-researchers in their daily CFL teaching, this research sought to investigate one of the overarching tenants of the ROSETE Program, that is, the importance of contextualizing teaching in response to knowing and addressing the local learners' needs.

Data collection: The longitudinal study collected data through observations, documentation study (research theses) and interviews. The research informing this paper focused on answering one sub-question from the larger study: How do CFL Chinese background teachers design classroom activities in terms of contextualizing the teaching content to achieve pedagogical purposes? To this end, the dataset applicable to this paper are reflexive journal entries recorded in the evidentiary chapters of the theses written by the teacher-researchers. In order to refine the overall longitudinal dataset, thirty theses produced by the ROSETE teacher-researchers were located through the University's publicly available thesis database and subjected to an initial screening for the key words "Chinese language teaching" in the thesis title and/or abstract. This data reduction exercise resulted in ten theses being identified as the eligible dataset for this research (Excluded from the

results of the key word search were those theses that focused on teacher identity and/or professional development).

Data analysis: Theoretically informed thematic analysis (TA) and content analysis (CA) were employed in the data analysis process [22,23]. By 'theoretically informed', [23], it is assumed that researchers are "unlikely to be working from the naive perspective" [23] (p. 1278). It can be argued that they are always informed or subconsciously influenced by some existing theories when coding and analyzing the data. In this research, as part of the first round of thematic analysis, the data were open-coded and categorized within a constructionism framework of context. The textual content of each reflexive journal entry was processed and themes emerged around the 'forms of contextualization' and 'contextualizing activities' (see Appendix A). Based on the first-round themes, content analysis was adopted and the frequencies of the 'forms of contextualization' and 'contextualizing activities' were explored using descriptive statics. In each contextualizing episode, students' responses (such as smiling, nodding, exclamation and clapping) corresponding to a specific contextualization form were also recorded based on frequency. The correlation between a particular category of contextualizing teaching and students' response was also examined through applying the Spearman's correlation coefficient.

5. Findings and Analysis

Data analysis revealed 207 valid contextualizing episodes. These episodes were identified in various forms including connections made to learners' first language, visual and musical aids, body language and real-world objects. These forms of contextualization were designed to facilitate the learners' meaning making and were accompanied by 'contextualizing activities' (contextualizing actions) (see Appendix A). Implementing the contextualizing actions or activities included strategies such as teachers' explanation, learning-by-doing games and competitions, traditional cultural activities and students' experiential recall. It was found that the frequencies of different types/forms of contextualization and the contextualization actions the teachers used varied as did the frequencies of students' in-class responses to these.

5.1. Contextualizing Forms

Gesture is one form of contextualization that the teacher-researchers applied in their teaching practices. To support students' learning, teachers enacted gestures or body movements to indicate the change in the tonal pronunciation of Chinese, character meaning or the written order of strokes in each character. Another form identified was the use of images. The teacher-researchers utilized pictures, drawings or photos to illustrate and invigorate the content and to provide examples for students to have deeper impressions and interest in order to enhance comprehension. The use of video was another contextualization form implemented by the teacher-researchers to animate their lessons and engage students. The teacher-researchers also deconstructed Hanzì as another contextualization form whereby Chinese characters were dismantled into parts and these components were actively linked to images and etymology. As an additional contextualizing form, real objects were brought into class for demonstration or presented as classroom decorations. Students were reported to be more engaged in the atmosphere created by introducing real objects. In contrast to the above-mentioned visual forms, the teacher-researchers also contextualized their teaching across audio forms. A frequent audio contextualization was translanguaging for learning Chinese pronunciation. Utilizing the students' first language (L1) of English was identified in the data, when teacher-researchers were actively comparing or imitating the Chinese pronunciation with similar pronunciation in the students' mother tongue. Teacher-researchers also chose music or songs to connect to their teaching by using a strong rhythm, musical instruments or recorded songs to boost students' content learning. The contextualizing forms in Table 1 below provide textual examples as evidence extracted from the research data.

Table 1. Examples of contextualized forms in CFL teaching and learning.

Contextualizing Forms (Keywords)	Examples
Gesture	The teacher asked students to follow her hand gesture while pronouncing Chinese characters with different tones/the teacher used her hand to draw a line for students to imitate the change of tones.
Pictures	The teacher showed students a picture of a Chinese writing brush to raise students' interest/the teacher showed students the picture of a dragon and discussed the features of a Chinese dragon.
Video	The teacher showed students a video to introduce Chinese chopsticks.
Deconstructing characters	The teacher taught the students the character 'bi' (caligraphy brush) with a picture of bamboo leaves. Then, the teacher compared bamboo leaves with radical 'zhu' (bamboo) and told the students that ancient Chinese pens were made of bamboo.
Real object/surrounding	The teacher presented the students with Chinese mooncakes to explain the cultural meaning of round-shaped items in China/the teacher provided colorful chopsticks to the students. All students compare the designs of their chopsticks with others.
Bringing L1 pronunciation to compare	The teacher taught the students that the pronunciation of 'yeah' in English is similar to 'yé' in Chinese/the teacher used the pronunciation of "bed" for students to imitate the vowel e in Chinese.
Music/songs	Students listened to a song played by the teacher and noted down specific Chinese characters according to the hint from the lyrics/a teacher played the ukulele during his teaching to attract students' attention in the classroom.

These forms of contextualization are representations of the dynamic connections and interactions constructed in the teaching process, linking directly to the teaching content. That is, different teaching and learning content lend themselves more advantageously to specific forms of contextualization.

5.2. Contextualizing Activities

Data revealed that the contextualization of teaching and learning occurred across a range of the planned/designed activities. One of the distinct categories identified was that of the teacher-researcher's explanation. In this theme of contextualizing activity, the teacher-researchers used their understanding or interpretation to justify or localize certain content. Although their explanations were not always precise and correct, examples of subjective explanations appeared to be very well received by the students.

Learning by doing was another category of contextualizing content identified in the data when teachers actively reinforced students' learning through practice. The teacher-researchers also organized unique experiences for the students via games and/or competitive activities, aiming to retain or revise the teaching content. The use of traditional cultural activities was another category when teacher-researchers actively combined cultural content with students' interests to support their focus and motivation to study the planned teaching content. The final category revealed in the data was the students' experiential recall. In this contextualizing activity, teacher-researchers actively (albeit accidentally on some occasions) created opportunities for students to recall their former knowledge or life experience to comprehend complicated content, thereby making learning content more accessible for students to accept and compare to their localized life experiences. Examples from the data across each category identified above are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Contextualization through teaching and learning activities.

Contextualizing Activities	Examples
Teachers' explanation	The teacher tried to explain the water radical in character "ao" by saying that Australia is a country surrounded by water.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Contextualizing Activities	Examples
Learning by doing	The teacher asked students to find the pinyin and character for the word "book" with their new Chinese dictionaries. All the students finished quickly and raised their hands to pronounce the word "book" in Chinese.
Games and competitions	The teacher separated students into groups to do the word guessing competition/the teacher organized a role-playing game and invited students to start a conversation as the guest in a shop.
Traditional culture activity	The teacher demonstrated how to use the Chinese calligraphy brush. All the students focused on her writing/the teacher explained that Chinese Calligraphy records the meaning through the pictorial form.
Students' experiential recall	During the lesson, a student asked the teacher how to say "lizard" in Chinese because he had one as a pet at home. The teacher spontaneously added "xī yì" on the whiteboard and pronounced it for his reference.

These data excerpts provide a sample of the contextualizing content initiated by the teacher-researchers in support of student CFL learning, exemplifying how both can exert agency and interpretation to make meaningful connections with the lesson content.

All data were analyzed as per the aforementioned processes and the full categorized datasets were further examined to present descriptive statistics representing the findings related to the applied contextualizing teaching strategies as recorded in the reflection journals. The Spearman correlation test was also used to analyze the potential correlation between categorized contextualizing forms and content/activities and the students' responses to them.

5.3. Frequencies of Contextualization Forms

The frequencies of contextualizing forms are provided in Figure 1 and Table 3 below.
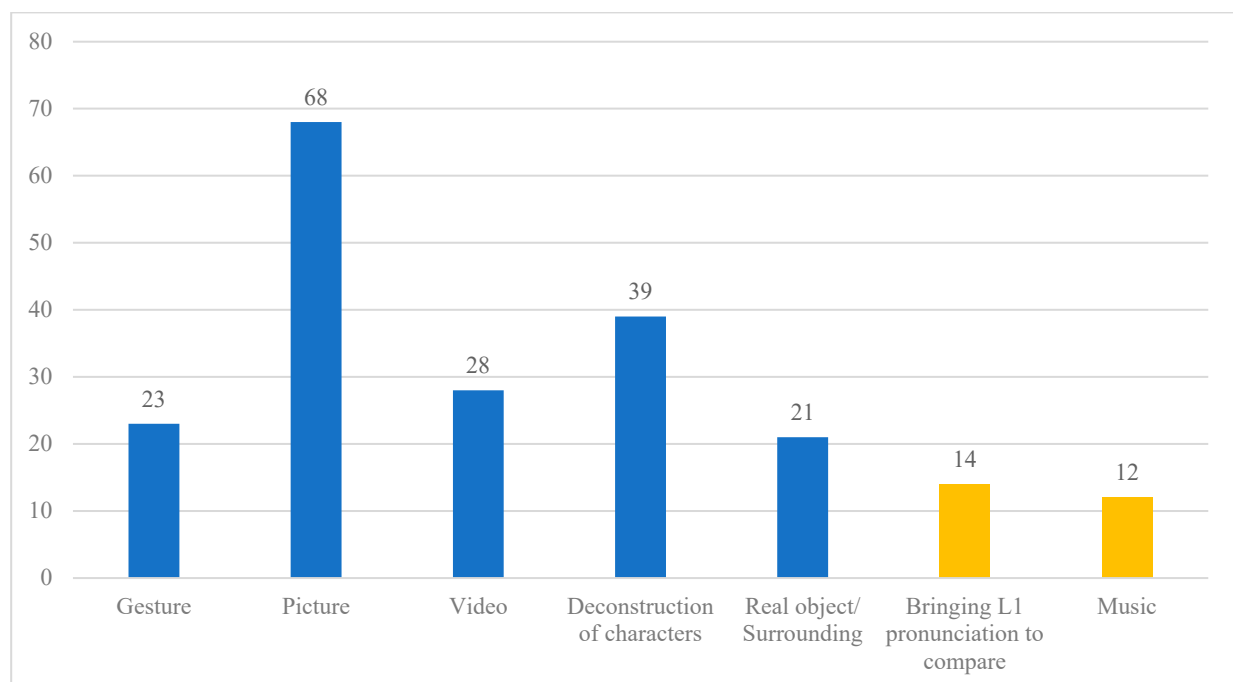

Figure 1. Frequencies of contextualizing forms.

Across the 207 data scenarios, contextualizing forms were identified and categorized into audio and visual forms a total of 205 times. Among all the contextualizing forms data, pictures show the highest frequency (68/33.1%). This finding reveals that in the case of CFL teaching, these teacher-researchers preferred the use of visual methods to trigger

students' interests and attention when presenting certain learning content. These data also indicate that contextualizing through the deconstruction of characters (39/19%) is a popular teaching strategy, which may indicate the current situation that CFL teaching with beginning school learners draws on the written form of the language. The remaining three categories indicate consistent and moderate frequencies, which signposts the direct and efficient use of gesture (23/11.1%), video (28/13.6%) and real objects (21/10.2%) can be of practical significance to CFL teachers.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of contextualizing forms.

Type	**Visual**					**Audio**	
Form	Gesture	Picture	Video	Deconstruction of characters	Real object/surrounding	Bringing L1 pronunciation to compare	Music
Frequency	23	68	28	39	21	14	12
Percentage	11.1%	33.1%	13.6%	19.0%	10.2%	7.0%	6.0%
Total Visual	179 (87%)					Total Audio	26 (13%)

Compared to visual contextualizing (179/87%), audio contextualizing forms were less preferred by the teacher-researchers in this research study (26/13%). Among the observed audio contextualizing forms, bringing L1 English to assist with pronunciation (14/7%) was implemented slightly more often than music (12/6%). This may be due to the ease of practicality in combining the pronunciation with language teaching content, while the connection between the music ambiance and teaching content needs stronger agency to be justified. This connection may also be more difficult to present in terms of the resources needed and therefore may involve a comparatively longer teaching time.

5.4. Frequencies of Contextualization Activities

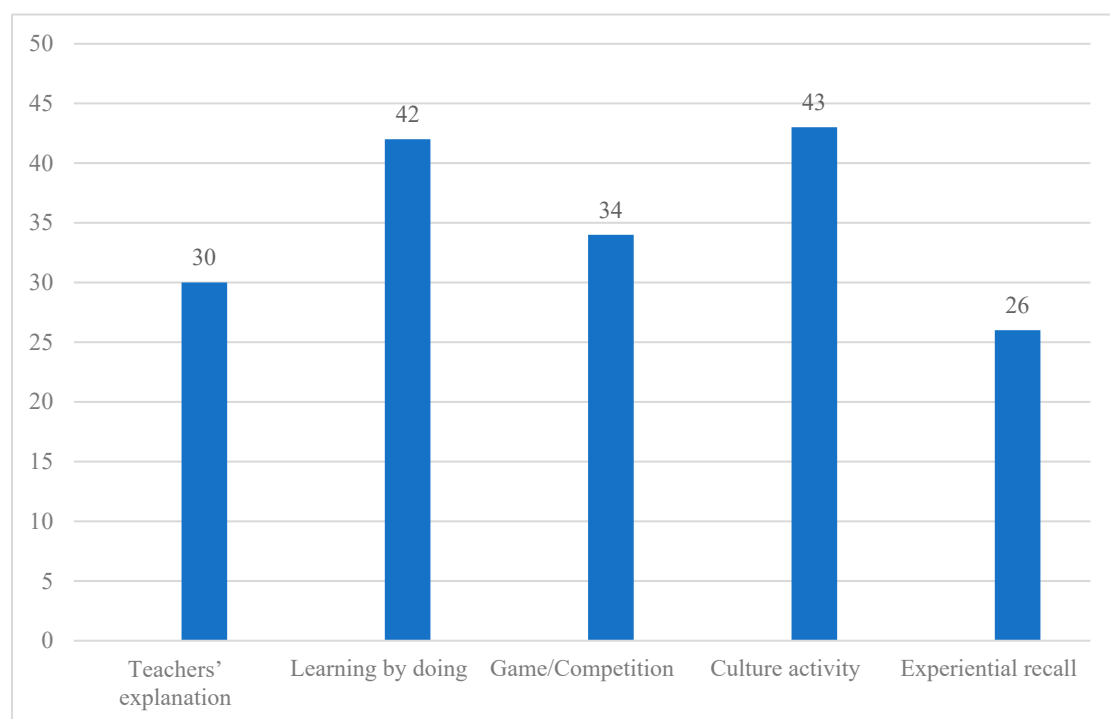The frequencies of contextualizing content and activities are provided in Figure 2 and Table 4 below.

Figure 2. Frequencies of contextualizing activities.

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of contextualizing content/activities.

Content	Teachers' Explanation	Learning by Doing	Game/ Competition	Cultural Activity	Experiential Recall
Frequency	30	42	34	43	26
Percentage	17.1%	24.0%	19.4%	24.6%	14.9%
Total Contents	175 (100%)				

From the 207 data excerpts analyzed, 175 contextualizing activities were identified as being implemented by the teacher-researchers to convey different learning experiences to the students. From across the five themes identified, culture (43/24.6%) and learning by doing (42/24%) were the most popular activities implemented by the CFL teacher-researchers. This finding indicates that they developed the context for teaching from various social-cultural activities to explain or deliver teaching content. It also indicates the necessity for CFL teachers to localize and internalize complex content through various activities when teaching local students in a foreign county. Culture can be regarded as knowledge specifically based on national conventions, which demands contextualizing as a 'localizing' process before it can be understood and accepted by students with different cultural backgrounds. Through such activities, students as participants can fully engage in a context-based cultural learning experience. With regards to learning by doing (42/24%) and activity-based (games/competitions) content (34/19.4%), their relatively high frequency may be due to the teacher-researchers' training received in Australia. Compared to the conventional lecture-based teaching in China, CFL teachers need to use various contextualizing activities to adapt to the action-based Australian classroom. With the remaining two contextualizing activities, the connection between students' former experience (experiential recall 26/14.9%) and teacher explanation (30/17.1%), it could be argued that these two contextualizing categories are relatively more demanding for CFL teachers to be fully aware of their students' backgrounds in order to make connections with them. This is particularly the case for these teacher-researchers who were not the students 'ongoing/full time' CFL teachers. This may explain the lower frequency in use by these research participants.

5.5. Correlation between Contextualizing and Students' Responses

The correlation data gathered are frequency-based discrete variables. They do not conform to normal distribution to be analyzed in conventional correlation coefficients such as the Pearson correlation. The Spearman correlation was applied to reveal the potential correlation between the frequency of teachers' contextualizing practices and students' reactions under the variables of the context created. Furthermore, the Spearman correlation analysis with nonparametric indicators shows lesser requirements on the normal distribution and the volume of the original dataset. Therefore, its applicability was considered suitable to analyze the discrete categorical data in this study.

The results of Spearman correlation analyses are listed below in Tables 5–7.

Table 5. Visual: Spearman's rho correlations.

	Student Response	Visual (Total)	Gesture	Picture	Video	Deconstruction of Characters	Real Object/ Surrounding
Correlation Coefficient (Student response)	1.000	0.060	0.131	0.014	0.106	−0.241 **	0.101
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.488	0.129	0.869	0.220	0.005	0.241
N	136	136	136	136	136	136	136

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6. Audio: Spearman's rho correlations.

	Student Response	Audio (Total)	Bringing L1 Pronunciation to Compare	Music
Correlation Coefficient (Student response)	1.000	−0.118	−0.508 **	0.515 **
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.574	0.009	0.008
N	25	25	25	25

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7. Content/activities: Spearman's rho correlations.

	Student Responses	Activities (Total)	Teachers' Explanation	Learn by Doing	Game/ Competition	Culture Activity	Experiential Recall
Correlation Coefficient (Student response)	1.000	0.057	−0.082	−0.008	0.180 *	0.065	−0.112
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.519	0.358	0.931	0.041106308	0.464	0.205
N	129	129	129	129	129	129	129

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the Spearman's rho Correlations listed above, four types of correlation relationships are proved reliable, and their significance values are all within the usually required significance level of 0.05. Among the visual contextualizing categories (Table 5), contextualizing with the deconstruction of Chinese characters negatively correlates to the students' responses (−0.241 **). The mismatch between the teacher's subjectivity and students' understanding of these 'subjective' connections could explain this negative correlation. Teachers use their agency and subjectivity to connect Chinese character parts with particular object forms, shapes and images for students to remember, which may need further clarification for students to understand, that is, a mismatch in understanding was generated.

The results of this research sound a warning for implementing audio contextualizing such as utilizing L1 pronunciation to compare Chinese pronunciation for beginning learners. Table 6 indicates this contextualizing form had a negative correlation with the students' response (−0.508 **). This negative teaching effect can be explained by the mismatch between the teacher's established connection between an unknown Chinese word and an English word with a very different image. A further negative influence is that subjectively connecting the target language pronunciation and students' L1 pronunciation with nuances and differences could produce flawed pronunciation habits among students, which may be hard to rectify in future teaching.

The results in Table 6 also indicate that music and songs are very positive contextualizing strategies to connect with Australian students in primary schools (0.515 **). Adding musical elements to CFL teaching has the potential to create a relaxed and entertaining ambience, which could be very helpful in establishing a direct connection between foreign language teachers and local students.

The results reported in Table 7 also illustrate that contextualizing through games or competitive activities can positively correlate to students' responses (0.180 *). This correlation can be explained by the role of the teacher as organizer in these activities. That is, when teachers actively create and organize socio-cultural activities a stronger rapport between teacher and students is a possible outcome. Under this activity-based contextualization, planned content can be actively delivered to students, supporting their meaningful language learning.

In addition to examining how contextualizing can be realized by teachers in practice, the data analysis also investigated the direction of agency between teachers and students in a CFL classroom with contextualized forms and content to engage learning. The following section provides the basic statistics and several examples to reveal how teachers and

students use their agency to shape contextualizing actions in teaching and learning as socio-cultural activities.

5.6. Teachers and Students' Agency through Contextualization

The interactions and actions of the teacher-researcher and students were analyzed to determine if there was a dominant agent across the 207 data excerpts. The initial finding was that the agency of the teacher-researchers was centered in 142 (69%) of the recorded teaching and learning episodes, whereas students were actively interacting for 65 (31%) of recorded lessons. Across these 65 scenarios, the actions of the students in class usually outweighed the teacher-researchers' guidance or instructions. In these instances, data revealed that students took a major lead in the direction of the lesson or the explanation of certain teaching content. Students in these cases showed strong interest in the teaching content, actively participated in classroom activities or displayed substantial autonomy in self-learning. Students accomplished contextualization based on their understandings, which in some instances, gave rise to unexpected effects on the teacher and the learning experiences. A data excerpt is provided below to illustrate.

The teacher taught students the new word "Sān míng zhì" which means "sandwich" in English. To the teacher's surprise, one boy recognized "sān" and said, "It is three. The symbol is three lines." Then the teacher asked, "why does "Sān míng zhì" start with the number three?" Another student answered, "Sandwich has three layers, so the sandwich starts with "Sān" (documented in a teacher-researcher's reflective journal).

In this case, the student actively connected the image of a "sandwich" with the shape of the Chinese character "Sān" (san: three). This connection, enabled by the student's agency, was surprising and inspiring for the teacher. It was later shared amongst the students to help them remember the character "Sān". All students could relate to the connection between the sandwich image as a vital context for the new character "Sān".

Comparatively, the other 142 (69%) data cases depicted the teacher-researchers' dominance in the teaching and learning episodes with the students complying with the teachers' directions. In these cases, the teacher-researchers' lessons were hinged on achieving the objectives or targets and they drew on their agency to maintain strong control through guiding the class activities while explaining or delivering the content. Contextualizing based fully on the teacher-researchers' agency did not always result in positive feedback or reactions from the students as indicated in the following data excerpt.

The teacher asked the whole class to play the role of the guest while she acted as the waitress. As the teacher said 'nǐ hǎo', all students kept quiet. The teacher said, 'Guys, the waitress just greeted you. It is your turn to say hello in Chinese'. However, the students still did not say anything. So, the teacher read out the customer's lines for students to repeat. With more practice, the students dared to speak out by themselves (documented in a teacher-researcher's reflective journal).

In this case, the teacher actively assigned the role-play setting to the students based on her own agency. She put students into a waitress-customer conversation and tried to trigger their awareness to respond as the waitress greeted them in Chinese. There was a mismatch between the students' responses and the teacher-researcher's anticipation of their engagement. It can be argued that the connection between the greeting phrases and the role-play setting (as context) needed to be more clearly established based on the students' understanding. The teacher-researcher had to read out the lines and perform multiple practices for students to build the connections and remember the vocabulary within the context of a role-play setting. Therefore, creating context requires teachers to actively combine teaching content with particular objects and/or surroundings.

It can be concluded that contextualizing teaching relies more on a teacher's agency, their guidance and the design of the class activities with appropriate opportunities provided to have students' agency activated. This result indicates that to ensure students' understanding, the connection between context and teaching content should not just be

based on the teachers' interpretation but also needs to be acceptable to the students in terms of their background knowledge, experiences and capacity for new CFL learning.

6. Discussion

As indicated in the literature reviewed, context has often been explored from linguistic perspectives and whilst context-related research foregrounding its dynamic dimensions has been undertaken, this focus is scant in comparison. For example, the studies by Liontas [15], Yu [14] and Li [16] investigated the impact of linguistic contexts on students' learning and understanding of idioms, without any consideration to the anthropological aspects of 'context'. Other CFL studies [12–14] situated context as a 'pre-existing' background, environment or physical space—as a static entity, in second language education. Further, a review of CFL teaching and learning by Gong et al.'s [24] reported a substantial tendency for CFL teachers to rely on rote learning strategies in daily practice. Context in these studies is relegated to a descriptive reality independent from the 'texts' involved. In contrast, this research is advanced through a constructionism lens enabling an examination of the anthropological and dynamic domains of 'context' in CFL teaching.

The findings from this research established that the teachers not only taught the Chinese language at a textual level, but more importantly created contexts and made connections with the "external situation" [18] (p. 475) for local students. Drawing upon the conceptualization of socio-constructivist researchers including Dilley [17], Engeström [19] Malpas [21] and Van Oers [18], this research identified the contextuality that teachers and students employed, tracking the process of how they chose and connected 'context' and/or 'environment' to CFL teaching and learning. Real-world objects, cultural artefacts and social semiotic signs such as gestures, visuals (video and pictures) and music were observed as the 'contexts' these teacher-researchers incorporated into their CFL teaching. The findings also indicated that the frequency of connection across the range of contexts was varied. For example, visual connections were demonstrated to be a highly valued form of contextualization to engage students cognitively. Linking music and/or songs to language teaching created a relaxed and entertaining ambience and achieved emotional engagement. As reported in the findings, contextualization in teaching was enacted across various socio-cultural activities and strategies ranging from teacher-centered explanations to learning by doing, games and competitions, traditional cultural activities and students' experiential recall. These teacher-researchers stretched the activities in numerous directions with subsequent variations in students' responses and engagement.

Actualizing constructionism as the theoretical framework, this research also identified the relative nature of contextualization in practice. It supports Malpas [21] and Dilley's [17] arguments that there is no single context. The teacher-researchers and students in this research were from diverse historical, cultural and social backgrounds, knowledge bases and experiences. The type of contextualization and designed activities incorporated into CFL teaching and the students' responses reflect their specific socially and historically situated agency. The construction of context is a personal connection based on how teachers and students, as agents, logically or subjectively conceive of the knowledge or what contexts are relevant, appropriate and able to be connected to assist CFL teaching and learning. This research also determined that the subjectivity between the teachers' and students' contextualization sometimes generated mismatched understandings in CFL meaning making.

7. Conclusions

This study has examined the application of contextualization in CFL teaching implemented by a cohort of Chinese language teacher-researchers. Contextualization in teaching was identified in various forms that linked to teaching content through identifiable, purposeful activities. Visual connection was the most frequently implemented form used to contextualize the learning. Contextualization through music, games and

competitive activities received more active responses from students and triggered engaged learning agency.

8. Limitations

This research has drawn on one source of data—the teacher-researchers' reflections and recollections recorded in their thesis. Whilst this has supported the intentions of this study, future studies could make use of additional data such as classroom observations in order to capture additional primary evidence on the practice of contextualizing teaching.

In terms of the statistical analysis, the frequency-based categorical data analyzed in this study did not conform with the normal distribution and continuous data required for the most common data correlation analysis methods. This could be addressed in future studies by collecting more context-related cases to build up a larger dataset.

Appendix A

An example of coding for frequency.

The following provides a demonstration of the coding process of a data excerpt.

Data Excerpt: " . . . I showed the students pictures of tea. Some *kids already called out 'chá'*. I was quite surprised and asked them how they knew that. *One student told me* they usually went to a beverage shop and the name of that shop was called 'Cha time'. *Immediately, a lot of students said: yeah! I know that shop! Then two other students (Filipinos) called out*: In our country, we also call tea 'chá'. So I invited them to say the word 'chá' first, and the rest of the students quickly imitated them and were able to use the correct pronunciation. (**Document 12**).

Table A1. Frequencies of contextualizing content/activities.

Data	Frequency of Action	Category of Action	Agency Lead
I showed the students pictures of tea	1	Contextualizing form: visual	Teacher
One student told me they usually went to a beverage shop and the name of that shop was call 'cha time'	1	Contextualizing content/activities: experiential recall	Students
Two other students (Filipinos) called out: in our country, we also call tea 'chá'	1	Contextualizing content/activities: traditional culture activity	Students
I invited them to say the word 'chá'	1	Contextualizing content/activities: learning by doing	Teacher
Kids already called out 'chá'/ One student told me . . . / Immediately, a lot of students said: yeah!/ Then two other students (Filipinos) called out/ . . . rest of the students quickly imitated	5	Reported students' response in class (relating to the context created)	N/A

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