

Selecting and Developing Teaching/Learning Materials in EFL classes

Assoc. Prof. PhD Marsela HARIZAJ
University of Vlora, "Ismail Qemali", Albania
Department of Foreign Languages
E-mail: marselaharizaj@yahoo.com

Assoc. Prof. PhD Veneranda HAJRULLA
University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali", Albania
Department of Foreign Languages
E-mail: venerandahajrulla@yahoo.com

Abstract

*Materials' development in EFL classes is a continuous concern of teachers. Teaching components include explanation, questioning and feedback. However, without a good textbook and suitable teaching material, even an experienced teacher will not have a great success. "Materials should teach students to learn, they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction / learning, and they should give teachers rationales for what they do."*¹

Language teaching has important elements like students, methods, strategies and techniques. Why are teaching materials important in EFL classes? What is the role of materials in language learning? What is a good English textbook? How can we select materials according to student's age and language level? Can teachers and novice ones manage their time to use supplementary materials?

It is true that the text is the base of teaching / learning processes, but in some cases, teachers should differentiate materials and activities for the sake of learning. If your students feel bored, not motivated, creating interactive activities based on additional materials will lower the barriers of learning. Curriculum is adapted to student's goals in centered classes. It is the teacher's concern to monitor the learning process and to adapt materials, textbook, activities and methodology to student's needs if they are not. With materials it is understood every teaching/learning sources used in class like textbooks, audio visual, ITC. In this paper, we will consider some important elements in how, what and why to choose materials concerning effective teaching/learning in EFL context.

¹ R. L. Allwright, "What do we want teaching materials for?" in *Currents in language teaching*, eds. R. Rossner and R. Bolitho (Oxford University Press, 1990).

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Introduction

Language learning and teaching is a long process, which involves students in acquiring, comprehension and usage of language. As such, many components are combined together and are very important ingredients. To be a good language speaker there is a need to use strategies of learning effectively. Besides this, there are other components that affect learners like: teachers, methodology, materials. As it is stated by Richards,²

The notion of teaching methods has had a long history in language teaching, as is witnessed by the rise and fall of a variety of methods throughout the recent history of language teaching.

Therefore, the teaching materials to serve better to the purpose of learning support methods. For these reasons, let us have a look at language materials used in the classroom. Fostering students' interaction is not a simple matter.

Learner's ability to acquire language differs from a learner to another. In a language classroom, there are different students that use different strategies in learning and have different learning styles. *What to do in in this case? How can we select and adopt materials in our own classroom?* This is the first issue that it is dealt.

Materials in the foreign language classroom

There are different perceptions about the word "*materials*" in a language classroom. As teachers, we understand that materials include all written, visual content used in the language class, including the textbook. Being a textbook or other material, they serve for different purposes. Textbook is the core of the process, but beside this, there are other "additional materials" that we can use in the class.

Authentic materials include written and visual ones like:

- *Magazines,*
- *Books,*
- *Pamphlets,*
- *Brochures,*
- *Advertisements,*

² Jack C. Richards and Willy A. Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching An Anthology of Current Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5.

- *Magazines,*
- *Newspapers,*
- *Instructions,*
- *Videos,*
- *Films,*
- *Songs,*
- *Music,*
- *Documentaries, est.*

Although teachers may use and find materials, it is very important to know *why* and *how* to use them. We can find them easily in internet, libraries, or even asking colleagues. The way teachers use materials in the language classroom depends on the reasons, the stage and learner's need. Some teachers may use them as an additional teaching resource, while some others may use them since at the beginning. The materials are used to help learners acquire the basic skills as an *example*: the use of a song to teach grammar issues. Materials may be used to teach cultural content as an *example*: a documentary about UK or USA.

Materials expose students to authentic language as an *example* a historical documentary spoken by authentic English speaker (a native one). The usage of additional materials help teachers to varie language content and strategies. If we have a look at the Curriculum of foreign language teaching, we will see that among the components of language learning and teaching, materials and textbook are given great importance.

Teachers are aware that learners should use the language to master communicative competence. As it is stated in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*³ "Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures." This means that all the language materials used in the language classroom should be exploitable. Language has three points of view: structural, functional and interactive. Thus, it is very important while selecting the materials, because language is learned in the context, thus the materials should contain language that fulfills the three points, otherwise it does not make sense.

³ Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* Language Policy Unit (Strasbourg: Cambridge University Press), 168, www.coe.int/lang-CEFR.

*Materials, therefore, need to be authentic-like, that is, 'authentic, in the sense that the language is not artificially constrained, and is, at the same time, amenable to exploitation for language teaching purposes.'*⁴

Once we select the materials that we want to use, or once we have the English textbook and we want extra interactive activities, we can adopt the first or the second for our own teaching / learning purposes. We may suggest here some kind of activities, which will help learners acquire language.

❖ Materials adoption

Newspapers

If we want authentic language exploration, we can take as an example of authentic material a newspaper. Usually newspapers deals with issues like environment, pollution or climate changes. In such a case, we can take an extract on the following issues and create some activities for our own students.

Level B1

➤ Activity 1

Work in pairs. Write about the climate changes according to your point of view. Have a look at the text. What else would you add to this article?

➤ Activity 2

Individual

Write an essay about climate changes in the recent years.

Instructions for the essay:

Take in consideration:-food-temperature-Air pollution-Health problems, add others.

Foreign language Textbook

Textbooks are not a new concern in foreign or English language teaching. "Concern whether pre-prepared materials can meet individual learner needs is part of the dilemma teacher's face in trying to implement learner-centered language programs in a group setting."⁵ In the Albanian educational system, the Ministry of Education approves foreign language textbooks used in schools. This means that teachers should use these books in language classes. However, this does not mean that all the textbooks are the same and offer the same possibility for communicative activities. For this reason, enhancing student's ability to communicate, the teacher should use or even adopt the textbook to be communicative.

⁴ I. Mac William, "Video and language comprehension," *ELT Journal* 40(2), reprinted in *Currents of change in English language teaching*, eds. Rossner and R. Bolitho (1986), 160.

⁵ Richards and Renandya, *Methodology in Language Teaching*, 81.

It remains to the teacher to create, activities that make students exploit and use the language. From the experience, we have noticed that a good textbook should contain interesting topics for discussion, should motivate and should be always interesting. Other points to be given to a good textbook are if it has clear instructions for exercises, activities, in order to make it understandable. In other words, Textbook should support learning. “An approved textbook may easily become the curriculum in the classroom, yet fail to incorporate significant features of the policy or goals that it is supposed to address.”⁶

It is very important for the learner to be motivated and engage himself / herself in interaction. Thus, it remains to the teacher to make students be actively involved in class. To reinforce this opinion we can mention what Prabhu states about this process:

*if the teacher engages in classroom activity with a sense of intellectual excitement, there is at least a fair probability that learners will begin to participate in the excitement and to perceive classroom lessons mainly as learning events as experiences of growth for themselves.*⁷

As in the case of the newspaper even in a Textbook we can have some changes and adoption. To illustrate this let us bring as an example the *English textbook On Screen*⁸ level B1+.Module 2 pg.35 the reading part *My storm - chasing adventure*. There is given the reading part and the reading exercise is a multiple-choice exercise. We can design other types of exercises for the reading comprehension and the writing skill.

Example

➤ Activity 1

Individual

-Read the story again. What would you do if you were the main character? Would you change anything from that journey?

-Find a synonym for the underlined words. (the teacher has underlined the words that are important to understand the text)

-Find another ending for the story. Continue it with your own words.

➤ Activity 2

Work in pairs

-Rewrite the story in the form of a dialogue including more characters.

Individual

⁶ M. G. Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (London: Cassell, 1991), 70.

⁷ N. S. Prabhu, “The dynamics of the language lesson,” *TESOL Quarterly* 26/2 (1992), 239.

⁸ Virginia Evans and Jenny Dooley, *On Screen, student's book* (Express publishing, 2014), 35.

-Write your imaginative adventure story. (Up to 150 words). Topic: free choice.

Individual writing will help students practice structure, language, be independent in thinking, while working in pairs help students build cooperative learning, share ideas and learn from each other. The activities must be adapted always to student's language level.

Like the activities mentioned above, teachers may use other types like: guessing games with A1, A2 level, where you can prepare flash cards, write words on it or grammar items, divide pupils in groups and give the proper time to develop the activity. Other types of interactive activities are scrambled words or sentences, quizzes and so on.

Audiovisuals

Drama or movie usage

This is another type of interactive activity. Either you can choose written or visual drama and prepare exercises on them. Let students comprehend even using subtitles to act out. Movies, dramas, cartoons contain authentic language usage, for this reason they are very good to be used in the language classroom. They might be used even for comprehending grammar items, even to exploit the meaning of the words in the context. Examples of some movies or cartoons to be used with different levels. *Game Shakers 12-14, Sponge Bob-10-12, Ben Ten, Avatar 10-12* est.

Example of the activities involved in using audiovisuals as materials in a language class:

Course: English Language Teaching Methods

Degree programme: Master in English

No. of students: 38

This course aims to provide students of Master in English with knowledge about the development of teaching methodologies available for English language teaching. They are going to become teachers for this reason this course will also provide different frameworks for developing lesson plans to prepare students for their own teaching practice at the end of the studies. As a practice they implement in seminars simulations of English classes from theory to practice. As part of teaching, novice teachers use even audiovisuals as a teaching practice. They learn how to use an audiovisual material adopting it for different language levels and write a lesson plan and create activities from those mentioned above.

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Below there are given two examples practiced in this course.

➤ The first Practical activity:

Students are required to watch a movie: Cinderella. After watching they should write a lesson plan upon it. They should create and design activities based on the story. Activities include reading and writing exercises. Students have 15-20 minutes to perform a simulation class choosing 5 students to be their pupils. The lesson plan is designed for students of the 6th Grade, level A2. After performing the rest of the class gives opinions about this process. They are satisfied so they are going to use such an example for a real class.

➤ The second practical activity

Students have different pieces of authentic materials from the textbook of British history Mc Dowall , David. An Illustrated History of Britain. Students are divided in groups of 4 students each group. Working for 15 minutes they are required to design one exercise for each of the skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening. After that, each of the groups performed by reading the exercises. Each group based on the material given designed exercises for language students Grade 12, level B2. The types of exercises included: 1. True or false. 2. Critical thinking questions. 3. General comprehension. 4. Listen and fill in gap. 5. Write your own story.

The aim of this kind of activities is to make students proficient in teaching English classes by using the most useful techniques combined with language materials and especially audiovisuals materials which are a very good source and may be exploitable to any teacher who wants to use variety in a language classroom.

Conclusion

In student-centered classes, teaching and learning takes place on both plans: instruction and practice. Teachers may use the already given material-textbook, or other additional materials, like those mentioned previously, to adopt them for teaching/learning purposes. Materials should be chosen carefully and should be suitable to language level and age of learners. Students at the same time practice grammar patterns and the meaning of the new words in the context. All the elements of the process should be combined together to produce effective learning. Authentic language usage enhances motivation and interaction. Try always to choose interesting topics and differentiate strategies and activities. Using visual media student's language comprehension, acquisition and interaction is reinforced.

According to Wright⁹ “*We teach with, rather than through, materials, thus being free to improvise and adapt in response to learner feedback.*” Other benefits of using authentic materials are the cultural information provided. They will help learners to comprehend better and to learn new things.

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