

ADAPTING, DESIGNING, AND EVALUATING EFL RESOURCES: ESTABLISHING CRITERIA

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ABSTRACT

Teaching materials especially EFL learning resources are one of important components in language learning, besides other components such as teachers, learners, teaching methodology, and evaluation system. Teaching materials provide learners to get the language input or information which they need for their learning process. Because teaching materials take a very important role in the learning process, they should be appropriate for the learners. It means that there should be some criteria for effective materials which are used by a certain group of learners. This paper four general considerations for effective materials. In the first place, it is the consideration to the nature of the learner group, that deals with some principles such as: the materials should be appropriate for the learners' level of language development; the materials should challenge learners without frustrating them; and the materials should meet learners' immediate learning needs. This article also suggests that teaching materials should have twin aims: on the one hand they offer information and data about the language being studied, and in particular about the social context and culture within which communication takes place and derives much of its meaning and value.

Keywords: learning resources, material development, design, criteria

Introduction

Candlin and Keobke (1999, p.1) say that teaching materials are also directed on how learners learn, how they could improve, and how they could experience. However, teaching materials often control the teaching the learning process because teachers and learners often rely heavily on the materials. Also, the materials usually determine the content, methods, and learning procedure (Allwright in Kitao, 1999, p.1).

Tomlinson (1998, p. xi) defines teaching materials as 'anything which is used to help to teach language learners'. Tomlinson adds that materials can be in the form of a textbook, a workbook, a cassette a CD-Rom, a video, a photocopied handout, a newspaper, or a paragraph written on a whiteboard. In other words, anything which presents or informs about the language being learned is a teaching material. Because teaching materials take a very important role in the learning process, they should be appropriate for the learners. It means that there should be some criteria for effective materials which are used by a certain group of learners.

Teaching Materials In Ffl

Duppenthaler, Littlewood, and Tomlinson (in Adi, 2002) all agree that teaching materials should fulfil these following criteria: they should achieve impact, they should help the learners to feel at ease and develop

confidence, they should provide learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes, they should be perceived by learners as relevant and useful, they should take into account the learners different learning styles, they should not rely too much on controlled practice.

Besides that, Duppenhaler, Littlewood and Tomlinson adds that the materials should be structured to adapt to the learners' level of ability, as well as provide opportunities for personal relationships among learners and between learners and teacher. In addition, (Lee, 1995) says that another criterion for effective materials is *authenticity* which involves learners using language in a way that can relate to the 'real world' outside the classroom. This view is also supported by Graves (2000, p. 155) who says that the activities in the materials should be as authentic as possible.

Candlin and Edelhoff (in Vale, et.al. : 67) support that teaching materials should have twin aims: on the one hand they offer information and data about the language being studied, and in particular about the social context and culture within which communication takes place and derives much of its meaning and value. Materials need to be authentic to communication and to the world outside the classroom, at the same time, materials have a role to promote learning and language learning in particular. They fulfil this role in the way they offer activities and tasks and exercises which challenge the competence of the learners.

Finally, Vale, Scarino, and McKay (1991 : 69-70) explain that there are four general considerations for effective materials. In the first place, it is the consideration to the *nature of the learner group*, that deals with some principles such as: the materials should

be appropriate for the learners' level of language development; the materials should challenge learners without frustrating them; and the materials should meet learners' immediate learning needs.

The second is the consideration to *the purposes of the materials in relation to the goals and objectives*, that deals with to what extent the materials promote communicative use of the target language; how the materials increase learners' knowledge and understanding of the target language community and culture; and how the materials encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

The third is the *teacher's needs and preferences* consideration, that relates to the issues such as: how the materials can extend the teacher's contribution; and how the materials can exploit rather than constrain the teacher's expertise. And the fourth is the *practicalities and general considerations*, that relates to some criteria like: the materials should be presented in imaginative and appealing way; the materials should be economical in terms of preparation time; and how the materials allow for all learners to be actively involved in its use.

In summary, teaching materials take a very important role in a language learning process because from the materials the learners could get the language input or information that the learners are supplied with. And therefore, teaching materials should be effective and appropriate for the group of learners who use the materials.

Textbooks As Efl Resources

One of the kinds of teaching materials is textbook. Among other teaching materials, textbook is probably the most popular material used in language teaching. In

Indonesian schooling system, nearly all education institutions such as primary, secondary, and higher education use textbook as a teaching material. Some may use one textbook only, while others may take texts and exercises from several different books, adapting and supplementing them with materials they produced by themselves.

In his *Selecting and Developing Teaching/Learning Materials*, Kitao (1999) suggests that effective textbooks must fulfil some criteria, such as: Textbooks should have correct, natural, recent and standard English, The cultural information should be correct and recent; The content should be useful, meaningful and interesting for students; The level of difficulty should be slightly higher than the students' current level of proficiency; Textbooks should have clear and understandable instructional procedures and methods for both teachers and students, and Textbook should support to the learning process, for instance by taking the form of vocabulary lists, exercises, and interesting visual aids.

In her *Designing Language Course : a Guide for Teachers*, Graves (2000: p. 173) states that there are several advantages of using textbook, they are: Textbook provides a syllabus for the course because the authors have made decisions about what will be learned and in what order; It provides security for the students because they have a kind of road map of the course: they know what to expect, they know what is expected of them; It provides a set of visuals, activities, readings, ect., and so saves the teacher time in finding or developing such materials; It provides teachers with a basis for assessing students' learning. Some texts include tests or evaluation tools; It may include supporting materials (e.g., teacher's guide, cassettes, worksheets, video); It

provides consistency within a program across level, if all teachers use the same textbook.

On the other hand, the use of textbooks has several disadvantages. Textbooks are often considered control teaching and learning because in many cases teachers and students rely heavily on textbooks. Textbooks usually determine the component, methods and learning procedure (Allwright in Kitao 1999, p. 1). Consequently, students only learn what is presented in the textbook and the textbook will influence the class and the learning process.

Some other disadvantages of using textbooks are: The content or examples may not be relevant or appropriate to the group we are teaching, The content may be not at the right level, There may be too much focus on one or more aspects of language and not enough focus on others, or it may not include everything we want to include; The sequence is lockstep; The activities, readings, visuals, ect. may be boring; The materials may go out of date, and; The timetable for completing the textbook or parts of it may be unrealistic (Graves 2000: p. 173).

In conclusion, as a teaching material textbook has several roles and dimension in language teaching. It is more than just a teaching materials but it also consists of 'hidden curriculum' because it frequently provides some curriculum components such as procedures for teaching planning, teaching implementation, and evaluation. We can see the curriculum components in textbooks especially in the teachers' guide which provides some practical instruction on how to use the textbook in the classroom.

Evaluating Efl Teaching Materials

Materials evaluation is a process of evaluating the materials in relation to their

objectives, and evaluating the materials in relation to the learners' objectives in using them. Materials evaluation can be a macro-evaluation that seeks to answer how far a program is effective in meeting its goal, and/or in what ways the program can be improved; or a micro-evaluation that is a narrow-focused one on a particular aspect of the curriculum such as a task evaluation. Generally, materials evaluation begins with the description of the contents of the materials, to the collection of information, followed by analyses of the information, and finally providing conclusion and recommendation.

Tomlinson, (1990, p. xi) defines materials evaluation as 'the systemic appraisal of the value of materials in relation to their objectives and to the objectives of the learners in using them'. So materials evaluation can refer to the process of evaluating the materials in relation to their objectives, and evaluating the materials in relation to the learners' objectives in using them. He (1998, p. xii) adds that the evaluation can be 'pre-use' evaluation focusing on predictions of potential value; or it can be 'whilst-use' evaluation focusing on description of what the learners doing while the materials are being used; and also it can be 'post-use' evaluation focusing on analysis of what happened as a result of using the materials.

Ellis (1998) divides materials evaluation into two types: macro-evaluation and micro-evaluation. A macro-evaluation is an evaluation that seeks to answer how far the program or project is effective and efficient in meeting its goal; and/or to answer in what ways the program or project can be improved. While a micro-evaluation or also called task evaluation is a narrow-focused evaluation on a certain specific aspect of the

curriculum or the administration of the program. In the case of teaching materials, we might examine whether a particular task is effective or not (Ellis, 1998, p. 219).

Furthermore, Ellis (1998, p. 222-224) suggests that there are seven dimensions in materials evaluation, especially in the task evaluation that we should consider. The are: approach dimension, purpose, focus, scope, evaluators, timing, and type of information dimension.

1. The approach dimension refers to whether the approach of the task evaluation is evaluating its objectives or it is an evaluation on *how* the task works for language learning.
2. The purpose dimension is a consideration whether the evaluation is directed at improving the task for future use or at encouraging teachers to reflect on the use of the task.
3. The focus dimension deals with whether the evaluation focuses on the effectiveness or the efficiency of the task.
4. The scope dimension deals with whether the task evaluation is in terms of its objectives or it considers the appropriateness of the objectives themselves
5. The evaluators dimension deals with whether the evaluators is an insider or outsider
6. The timing dimensions deals with whether the task evaluation takes place as it is being used or on its completion, and
7. The type of information dimension deals with the kinds of information that will be used to evaluate the task; whether they are test scores, documentary, self-report, or observation.

Meanwhile, in their '*Which materials?: a consumer's and designer's guide*' Breen and Candlin (1987) divide the process of a locally produced materials evaluation into two phases. Phase one consists of some initial questions about the usefulness of materials, specifically in relation to the aims and contents of the materials, the requirements for the learners and the teacher to do, and the function the materials have as a resource. Phase two suggests some criteria for the choice of materials such as whether the materials are appropriate to the learners needs and interests; whether the materials fit the learners' long term goals; and whether the materials are appropriate to the learners' approaches to language learning (Breen and Candlin, 1987, p. 22). In other words, their suggestion about materials evaluation is more concerned with the relationship between the materials and the learners' objectives in using them.

There are three separate issues we need to consider when we are evaluating teaching materials (Littlejohn, 1988). The first is the aspects of *methodology* and *content* of the materials such as the aims of the materials, the selection of the tasks, and the nature of the teaching/learning activities suggested by them. The second issue deals with the *levels* involved in the materials from the description of the content page of the materials, through the explanation of what are required by the users to use the materials, to the conclusion about the underlying *principle* of the materials. The last issue deals with '*action*' involving our decisions about what to do next after completing the evaluation, whether we '*adopt the materials, rejects the materials, adapt the materials, or supplement the materials*' (Littlejohn 1988, p.215).

Therefore, the first issue is about the *aspects* of materials we examine, the second is about the *process* of evaluation, and the third is

about how we can relate our evaluation to out teaching context.

In summary, materials evaluation can be defined as a process of evaluating teaching materials to their objectives, as well as evaluating the materials in relation to the learners' objectives in using them. It can be a macro-evaluation seeking to answer how far a program is effective in meeting its goal, and/or in what ways the program can be improved; or a micro-evaluation that is a narrow-focused one on a particular aspect of the curriculum such as a task evaluation.

Efl Materials Design

In general, designing teaching materials can be following several steps. The first step is identifying teacher's and learner's needs and interests. Identifying needs can be done in several ways such as conducting observation, interview, or giving questionnaire both to teachers and learners who will use the materials. This is supported by Masuhara (1998, p.224) who says that 'identification of teachers' needs and interests will provide useful information for the content, coverage and format for producing teaching materials.' This step deals with some issues such as: whether the materials appropriate for the learners' level of language development; and the whether materials meet learners' immediate learning needs. Graves (2000) also supports that in designing materials the designer should consider should consider the context of the users of the materials such as the students age, number, cultural background, teachers, and parents. Therefore, in this step the designer should collect many needed information about those context of the users.

Secondly, it is the exploration of the area of needs in terms of meanings and functions. So this step is determining the needs and

interests that have been identified in the first step. This step deals with to what extent the materials promote communicative use of the target language, how the materials increase learners' knowledge and understanding of the target language community and culture, and how the materials encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning.

The third is the realisation of the exercises and activities as well as writing instructions for use. This step is especially dealing with the content of the materials such as topics, linguistics skills, function, etc. This step also relates to the issues such as how the materials can extend the teacher's contribution, and how the materials can exploit rather than constrain the teacher's expertise.

And the last step is the physical production involving consideration of layout, type size, visuals, reproduction, length, etc. This step is also called the *practicalities and general considerations*. It relates to some criteria like the materials should be presented in imaginative and appealing way, the materials should be economical in terms of preparation time, and how the materials allow for all learners to be actively involved in its use (Jolly and Bolitho 1998, p. 217-238).

Conclusion

Teaching materials provide learners to get the language input or information which they need for their learning process. Because teaching materials take a very important role in the learning process, they should be appropriate for the learners. Among other teaching materials, textbook is probably the most popular material used in language teaching. In Indonesian schooling system, nearly all education institutions such as primary, secondary, and higher education use textbook as a teaching material.

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