TEACHING MATERIALS: ADOPTING AND ADAPTING

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Abstract

Teaching materials are important parts to help teachers achieve better teaching and students' desired learning outcomes. Carefully selecting materials, language teachers can present new knowledge and language items to be taught clearly, purposefully and systematically. As a result, students learn better because appropriate tools enhance their interest and understanding, practice and internalization. This paper aims to provide some suggestions for novice English teachers in selecting teaching materials. Practically, there are two processes to prepare teaching materials: **Adopting** and **adapting**. For adopting materials, any course-books or commercial textbooks can be used. However, using a textbook needs evaluation in order to select the most suitable materials for the course' goals and objectives, students' language proficiency and learning styles. Alternatively or additionally, teachers can use **authentic materials** that involve the real language use such as news, flyers, newsletters, etc. For adapting materials, the adaptation should reflect the concern of the course's objectives as well as learning atmosphere and the student learning achievement. During the material preparation, teachers should evaluate the selected materials. Once the possible problem areas are recognized, teachers must consider the type of format adaptation and determine what activities to be adapted and how to adapt it to get the best of the material used.

Introduction

Teaching materials are important parts to help teachers achieve better teaching and students' desired learning outcomes. Carefully selecting materials, English teachers can present new knowledge and the language items to be taught clearly,

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purposefully and systematically. As a result, students learn better because appropriate tools enhance their interest and understanding, practice and internalization. For experienced English teacher, preparing teaching materials may be easy. However, for newly graduated teachers or novice teachers, particularly those who haven't taken a course on material constructions, may have difficulties in preparing or selecting teaching materials. Some suggestions can be valuable to them. This article, therefore, presents some suggestions for novice English teachers on how to select teaching materials such as textbooks and authentic materials. It also suggests how to adapt the contents and activities of the selected materials to get the best of students' learning outcomes.

Adopting material

A. Using Textbooks

A convenient and easy way to adopt a material is to use an existing textbook. Once assigned to teach a course, new teachers have freedom of material selection and how to teach with their own lesson plans. Novice English Teachers may look for relevant commercial textbooks by publishers or a course book with syllabus designed by previous teachers based on

the curriculum specification. The teachers can simply follow units in the selected textbook and its activities or provide other supplementary materials. They have to primarily familiarize themselves with the textbook and seek further supporting information and clarification about how to use it as classroom teaching material in an accompanying teacher's manual.

Teachers should be able to choose materials that are the best suitable for the students' needs in terms of the course's goals and objectives, their language proficiency and learning styles. Amerian (2014) concludes in his research findings that benefits of a textbook can be derived from its contents - a list of vocabulary, grammatical structures, functions and reading passages, etc. As textbooks are various; no course book can be absolutely ideal for a particular group of learners (Cunningworth, 1995). It is essential for the teachers to know how to evaluate a textbook and select appropriate additional materials to use.

Using textbooks has its own value. Some consider them valid, useful, and labor-saving tools. A textbook provides ready-made teaching texts and learning tasks. A textbook can be a framework that regulates and times the particular course. A textbook is an economic way of

providing learning materials. With a textbook, a learner has focus and can be independent. For novice teachers a textbook means security, guidance, and support. They feel secured as they are ascertained that their teaching is on the right track and is likely to be successful.

However, textbooks have some disadvantages. A textbook has its own themes and framework; it doesn't take students' background knowledge into account and they may not concern student's interest. Textbook questions tend to be low level or fact-based and it has all the answers to all the questions (Harwood, 2010). Thus, the students' critical thinking skill is not well-enhanced. Moreover, Reading level of the textbook is usually too difficult.

As textbooks can have disadvantages, when selecting one, textbook evaluation needs to be taken into account. There are several ways to evaluate a textbook; however, one popular checklist is Miekley's (2005). He suggests what to consider in his textbook evaluation checklist. Teachers have to evaluate the selected one by examining it and answer the following questions. It is not necessary that all the questions have to be answered and that all the answers have to be definitely accurate. These questions

are merely a guidedance.

For content aspect: Is the subject matter presented either topically or functionally in a logical, organized manner? Does the content serve as a window into learning about the target language culture (American, British, etc.)? Are the reading selections authentic pieces of language? Compared to texts for native speakers, does the content contain real-life issues that challenge the reader to think critically about his/her worldview? Are the text selections representative of the variety of literary genres, and do they contain multiple sentence structures?

For Vocabulary and Grammar: Are the grammar rules presented in a logical manner and in increasing order of difficulty? Are the new vocabulary words presented in a variety of ways? Are the new vocabulary words presented at an appropriate rate so that the text is understandable and so that students are able to retain new vocabulary? Are the new vocabulary words repeated in subsequent lessons to reinforce their meaning and use?

Miekly (2005) further suggests consideration regarding *exercises and activities*. Are there interactive and task-based activities that require students to use new vocabulary to communicate? Do

instructions in the textbook tell students to read for comprehension? Are top-down and bottom-up reading strategies used? Are students given sufficient examples to learn top-down techniques for reading comprehension? Do the activities facilitate students' use of grammar rules by creating situations in which these rules are needed? Does the text make comprehension easier by addressing one new concept at a time instead of multiple new concepts? Do the exercises promote critical thinking of the text?

Lastly, for *attractiveness of the text and physical Make-up,* the questions to consider are: Is the cover of the book appealing? Is the visual imagery of high aesthetic quality? Are the illustrations simple enough and close enough to the text that they add to its meaning rather than detracting from it? Is the text interesting enough that students will enjoy?

Teachers can go through a particular textbook that interests them, then think and try to answer the suggested questions for the lessons' focus points. Then the decision on whether to use the particular book can be made. This evaluation checklist can also be adapted to evaluate other materials whenever teachers have to prepare new materials for classroom use.

B. Using authentic materials

In this era of information technology and easy accessibility of abundance of sources both online and local surroundings, it is not necessary for language teachers to stick to only one or two assigned textbooks. Following curriculum specification and the course's goals and objectives, language teachers can utilize various materials other than the traditional textbooks.

Using authentic materials is another option that teachers can easily do. As not all topics and activities in the course book satisfy the teachers or meet the course objectives, teachers can select other more relevant materials they find in their environment. These materials used in the day-to-day life involve the real language use and are strongly recommended by educators and theorists that they are beneficial to language learners.

Then what exactly are authentic materials? Zazulak (2017) notes that an authentic material is any material written in English that was not created for intentional use in the English language classroom. Using this content to teach the English language can make the learning process even more engaging imaginative and motivating for students.

Meanwhile, Martinez (2002) defines

authentic-based materials as the materials which are prepared for native speakers and not designed to be used for teaching purposes. In other words, authentic materials involve language naturally occurring as communication in native-speaker contexts of use: real newspaper reports, for example, real magazine articles, real advertisements, cooking recipes, horoscopes, etc. Nevertheless, authentic materials do not refer to only newspaper and magazine articles, but they can also encompass such things as songs, web pages, radio & TV broadcasts, films, advertisements, product labels, leaflets, product manuals, signs, posters, in other words, anything written in the target language.

Authentic materials are significant since it increases students' motivation for learning, makes the learner be exposed to the 'real' language. Therefore, authentic texts or materials are beneficial to the language learning process as discussed by Case (2012), Richards (2001), and Guariento& Morley (2001). Some of the main advantages of using authentic materials are as follows:

1. Authentic texts have a positive effect on learner motivation.

2. Authentic texts can be up to date and topical

3. Authentic texts provide authentic cultural information.

4. Authentic texts provide exposure to real language.

5. Authentic texts relate more closely to learners' needs.

6. Authentic texts support a more creative approach to teaching.

We can claim that learners are being exposed to real language and they feel that they are learning the 'real' language that is useful and connected to them. Using the authentic materials, the teachers can get all students' attention and participation.

Nevertheless, no matter how useful the authentic materials are, they can be disadvantageous as well. Richards (2001) points out authentic materials often contain difficult language, unneeded vocabulary items and complex language structures, which causes a burden for the teachers in lower-level classes. Case (2012) argues that authentic materials' vocabulary is not graded and there might be language and cultural references that even native speakers from other countries, areas or age groups would not understand. Likewise, Martinez (2002) mentions that authentic materials may be too culturally biased and too many structures are mixed, causing lower levels

have a hard time decoding the texts. Since most teachers always used authentic material unedited, it is important and necessary to be careful when selecting the materials to be used in class, i.e., to consider in accordance with the topic, target language area, skills, time and students' needs and interests, more importantly, the students' language proficiency level.

Adapting materials

As discussed earlier that teachers can use the assigned textbooks or select the most suitable commercial textbook. However, they need to consider the immediate context including the students' language proficiency level in the assigned class and utilize the additional materials to achieve the goals of the course. To serve different student individual, the teachers can simply adapt the materials.

Considerations and evaluation of materials

The teachers' adaptation of materials should reflect the concern of the course's objectives as well as learning atmosphere and the student learning achievement. When teachers think that teaching materials do not completely serve the objectives of the lesson or they may be a

barrier to student learning instead of enhancing it, the teachers need to adapt the materials to get the best of the material use. Furthermore, adaptation allows students greater access to the information to be taught.

More importantly, teachers should bear in mind that the students' linguistic ability is beyond the normal course book assigned for the class. Therefore, the material adaptation is needed to make the task more real and more personal and closer to the students' own experiences. Then the students can actually learn the most efficiently through the i+1 assumption (Krashen, 2009).

Teachers can use the following questions to consider when evaluating and preparing teaching materials:

1. What are the purposes of the course?

2. What is the students' language proficiency?

3. What are the students' learning styles?

4. Will the students know anything about the topic?

5. Will the students be interested in the topic?

6. If not, how can I make it more interesting and bring it to life?

7. How can I introduce the topic?

8. How can I activate the students' background knowledge?

9. What language items in the material can be difficulties for students

10. Is the language difficulty level suitable for the particular group of students?

11. Is the content of the material very abstract, complex, with too much information?

12. Do the activities give students cues about how to think about or study the information?

13. What support will the students need to tackle the task?

14. Is the activity appropriate for the age group?

15. If not, how will I bridge the gap?

16. What's the point of the activity?

17. What will students be learning?

Having assessed and prepared the materials to be used, teachers will have a clear picture about the teaching method and possible techniques.

Determine the Type of Adaptation.

During the material preparation, teachers have evaluated the selected materials and once the possible problem areas are recognized, the type of format adaptation must be considered. Generally, format adaptations can be made by:

1. Altering existing materials - Rewrite, reorganize, add to, or recast, the information, e.g. leave out things deemed inappropriate, irrelevant, unproductive; simplify the language (words and sentence structures); reorder and combine activities. This helps to make the classroom teaching more smooth and cohesive. It also helps the teacher to better fulfill the aims of a unit and the students can access the regular curriculum material independently, e.g., prepare a study guide and audiotape,

2. Mediating existing materials - provide additional instructional support, guidance, and direction to the students in the use of the materials. Alter the instruction to mediate the barriers presented by the materials so that the students can be directly led to interact with the materials in different ways. For example, have students survey the reading material, collaboratively preview the text, and create an outline of the material to use as a study guide.

3. Selecting alternate materials - Select new materials that are more relevant to the needs of students with disabilities or are inherently designed to compensate for learning problems. For example, use an interactive computer program that cues critical ideas, reads text, inserts graphic organizers, defines and illustrates words, presents and reinforces

learning in smaller increments, and provides more opportunities for practice and cumulative review.

Why a material need to be adapted and some suggested adaptation

Teachers may have a different reason to adapt the materials. However, these reasons have a common background. Misirli's research findings (2010) reveals why some materials need to be adapted and suggestions of how to adapt it are also presented.

Not Enough Grammatical Input: Some course books may lack the grammar coverage to meet specific curriculum goals and students who need to prepare for national examinations. Teachers may add some more language exercises with different focus points.

Not Communicative Enough: The course book may lack communicative input to increase communicative performance which may root a huge gap between the overall aim language teaching and the lesson material. Teachers may reduce grammatical explanations, sentence translations and word study exercises. Teachers should create more student interactions in various forms in dealing with the exercises. Group discussions, drama or role-plays can be organized to get the students actively involved.

Not Appropriate Level: The level of the text in some lessons may not suitable for the learners' level. Though the course book was specifically developed and used in certain class, the groups of students who come in each school year may process different language proficiency level. Therefore, it may lower or higher than the aimed challenging level. Teacher can alternate the reading text and adjust exercises to suit students' linguistic and intellectual needs. For instance, teachers can adapt the difficulty level of a reading text by using Readability formulas (readabilityformulas.com). The popular and easy to use formulas are Flesch Reading Ease, The Fog Scale, and SMOG Readability Calculator. Teachers can The selected text or the excerpt can be modified by changing and adding up more vocabulary into the passage. Questions suited each level should also be created to evaluate students' ability to comprehend the text based on different levels. The topic is still the same but the readability level is adjusted to what you require.

Not Appealing to Learning Styles: The activities may not appeal to students of a certain class who may have different ways of learning. In such a case, some of the

learners are easily grasped, while some will be missed obviously. Teachers have to notice and assist the students in need.

Too Long / Too Short: Lesson sessions are time-controlled. This obliges the teachers to manage the time of the in-class activities. Teachers can add extra reading, exercises or activities to suit the remaining time. Teachers can lengthen to give it as additional dimension. For example, a vocabulary activity is extended to draw attention to some syntactic patterning. On the other hand, teachers can omit some parts to make an activity shorter depending on timing.

Not Balanced Skills: The balance of skills may be deficient in quality or there may be too much emphasis on one specific language skill area. Teachers who see the overview of the course book may think the balance of language skills is not satisfactory, they can add any other required skills depending on the goals of the course. Vocabulary activities, for instance, may be added if the learners lack vocabulary comprehension. Listening and speaking skills in a reading lesson can be added to create opportunities for the students to speak and listen. Texts can be modified into a play to practice four skills on the one hand; and to add more variety to classroom teaching on the other.

Inappropriate Methods: The exercises may be too mechanical filled with drills. It may be short of meaningful activities or may be too complicated. Teachers can start the lesson with warm-up activities, by introducing students the information background, aims and objectives of the lesson. Audio-visual aids, realia (pictures, the globe, and a calendar) can be utilized to help students' understanding. Teachers can also delete unnecessary language exercises or detailed grammar explanation in the lesson.

Cultural Content: Culture is crucial and sensitive issue in some English classes particularly class with multi-nationalities. A cultural reference may need to be omitted because of a cultural reflection in a country may be problematic in another. On the other hand, if cultural differences and global situations are to be emphasized, teachers should present it with careful discussion, particularly when asking for students' opinions.

Not Enough Audio-Visual Back-Up: Most schools normally do not provide audio-visual equipment in a classroom. Sometimes they provide low quality ones. Teachers need to be prepared and get ready for alternative presentation. They should try the equipment in advance if they do need it in teaching.

Uninteresting Topics: Some topics in the course book may not be interesting to the learners and they need to be changed to get learners' attention. Teachers can search the other sources such as newspaper, magazine or internet for the more interesting and up-to-date topics.

Adapting textbook with too much contents

Teachers may considerably skip some unimportant items in the textbooks. Alternatively, they may select to do the following:

1. Set textbook exercises or some part of exercises for homework/ scrap the workbook

2. Turn the book activities into communication games, e.g. turn readings into jigsaw readings by getting students to read half of the text. Let each one do exercise and compare their answers. Listening and other kinds of exercises can be done similarly.

3. After students have done a few questions in an exercise, teachers can check their answers without waiting for them to finish it.

4. Select only some questions in an exercise for students to do. Make sure that the selected questions cover all the points they have learned.

5. While teaching, teachers can skip some parts but need to tell the students why, e.g. it is too easy or it is not very practical or useful, etc.

6. Make sure to allot time for each activity properly. Give more time to more important or difficult topics.

Considerations for adapting activities

If teachers want to design their own activities or adapt activities for the best learning result, some considerations listed by teachers in Brazil, North American and in the United States in designing materials can be followed (Graves, 2001). The considerations and justification are presented as well as examples of activities.

1. Activities should draw on what students know (their experience, their current situation) and be relevant to them. The purposes are to draw on what they know before moving to what is new; to validate their experience; and to engage their interest.

Examples**:**

- Students make a list of what they consider when they want to buy a new mobile phone.

- Students describe how to go about finding a mobile phone.

- Write "a mobile phone" on the white

board; make a word map in response to "What does it mean to you?"

- Students describe their mobile phone as a basis for vocabulary.

2. Activities should focus on students' daily life needs.

Examples:

- Brainstorm issues and questions about their actual mobile phone unit.

- Students make a list of what they need in a mobile phone.

- Use various search engines to determine where to find this information.

3. Activities should build students' confidences. So students can feel confident in transferring what learned outside of class.

Examples:

- Sequence the activities from simple to gradually more difficult so they provide enough practice and achievement.

-Narrow the focus of the activity so students can be successful.

This could start from making a list of existing brands, describe each function, and then discuss how to operate it, etc.

4. Activities should allow students to problem-solve, discover, analyze, so that student will have opportunity to engaged and practice using language.

Examples:

- Analyze why mobile phone Advertise-

ments are written the way they are.

- Students figure out in small groups then get together and share.

- Brainstorm questions to ask sales persons.

5. Activities should help students develop specific skills and strategies so that they can transfer skill.

Examples:

- Read for main idea then read for specific information.

- Matching exercises (parts of a sentence, word explanation).

6. Activities should help students develop specific language and skills they need for authentic communication so that students learn and practice vocabulary, grammar, functions that they can use in real situations.

Examples:

- Work on vocabulary so they can access text and be able to speak.

- Work on grammar and four skills before culture.

- Brainstorm questions to ask sales persons prior to role play

7. Activities should integrate the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing because the four skills mutually reinforce each other.

Examples:

- Follow up reading with telephone

activity to answer and; role-play buyer/seller.

- Write an advertisement for their current mobile phone.

8. Activities should enable students to understand cultural context and cultural differences So that they can have more confidence in target culture and understand own culture better.

Examples:

- Discuss how a mobile phone is popular in their community.

- Analyzing the advertisement to see that the way the ad is written tell you about specific   culture.

- Compare local ads with ads published in other countries. Are they different? Discuss why?

9. Activities should enable students to develop social awareness so they can navigate systems in target culture.

Examples:

- Help students to know rights and responsibilities.

- Make sure students understand not only customs/etiquettes with respect to using a mobile phone, but also issues such as hazard that is relevant to using mobile phones.

10. Activities should vary the roles and groupings within the class so that students get different types of practice and responsibilities. With respect to social context, students experience and analyze different social roles.

Examples:

- Students figure out (e.g. why mobile phone ads are written the way they are) in small groups, then get together and share.

- Students present what they know: students become teachers.

- Students role-play buyer/seller

11. Activities should be of various types and purposes to provide adequate practice.

Example:

- Students create own advertisement.

- Students role-play.

12. Activities should employ a variety of materials to engage students and meet different learning needs

Example:

- Visuals (pictures), print, audio, video, objects, realia.

Conclusion

To sum up, choosing appropriate materials and activities helps teacher better manage the class and helps the students learn effectively and achieve the ultimate goals of the course. Teachers have to carefully adopt the most suitable textbook and may use authentic materials with real language use. During material

preparation, a textbook evaluation checklist is recommended and possible format of adaptation needs to be determined. However, the validity of the choice, criteria for selection and contents and activities of adaptation should serve the goals of the course and the students in a particular class.

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