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Research Paper Literature

Role of Materials in English Language Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

The word material may be defined as the substance of which a thing is made or composed. As far as the English language teaching is concerned, here material means the available resources used for the teaching and learning of the English language. In other words, materials refer to anything that is used to facilitate the learning of a language and increase the learners' knowledge and experience of the language. Materials could be textbooks, paper, handouts, charts, audio-visual equipments (hardware and software for cassette band video), laboratories, computers, reprographic facilities, teaching aids of various kinds and so on are some of the examples of materials use for English language teaching. They influence the content and the procedures of learning. The choice of deductive vs inductive learning, the role of memorization, the use of creativity and problem solving, production vs reception, and the order in which materials are presented are all influenced by the materials.It is important to note that in many cases students are at the centre of instruction but students and teachers rely on materials, and materials become the centre of instruction. Since many teachers are busy and do not have the time or inclination to prepare extra materials, textbooks and other commercially produced materials are very important in language instruction.This paper tries to find out the major roles of materials in English language teaching and learning. The focus is also on the authenticity and types of instructional materials which influence the learners' ideas and activities in order to meet the future needs andgive teachers rationales for what they do.

Keywords : Role of materials, authentic materials, designing authentic materials, future demands.

Effective Roles of Materials

Materials play significant roles in English language teaching and learning.Design and choice of materials will be particularly affected by resource availability, as well the capacity to teach effectively across a range of language skills. Technology such as slides, video and audio tape recorders, video cameras, and computers support instruction/learning. Evaluations (tests etc.) can be used to assign grades, check learning, give feedback to students, and improve instruction by giving feedback to the teacher. Some important roles that materials play in language teaching are listed hereunder:

Instructional Materials for Language Classroom

"Instructional materials are used in language teaching for transference of knowledge. Instructional materials are added devices or supplementary materials which help the teacher to make his presentation concrete, effective, interesting, meaningful, and inspirational. These materials are those devices which help the learners in the assimilation and retention of ideas" (Dash, 2003: 123).

A teacher uses instructional material to aid in the learning of subject matter for a class. There are many forms of instructional materials like power point presentation, books, articles, materials for project development, etc. But textbook is the only important source of information and knowledge available to the teacher as well as to the learner. Therefore, this instructional material should be designed according to the needs of the learner. The activities should be woven around the environment of the learner so that the second language learning should not be a burden. The emphases, at present, are on the development of the skills but teaching of language is to be structured and graded by the experts.

Hutchinson and Torres make the following advantages and disadvantages of textbooks in a language classroom:

Advantages:

- Textbooks help learners to understand a systematic and planned syllabus in a given language programme.
- The use of textbooks ensures the students to receive similar content in different classes and can be tested in the same way to achieve the specified objectives.
- Textbooks help in maintaining quality of teaching and learning process. Well-developed textbooks based on sound learning principles expose learners to materials that have been tried and trusted.
- They provide a variety of learning resources like workbooks, CDs and cassettes, videos, CD-ROM, and teaching guides. Both teachers and learners can be benefited from these resources.
- They help teachers to save time and enable them to devote maximum time to teaching rather than materials production.
- Textbooks help teachers to generate accurate language input of their own if their first language is not English.
- Teachers who are not fully trained and have limited experience can get initial training from the textbooks.
- Textbooks are visually appealing. Commercial textbooks usually have high standards of design and production and hence are appealing to learners and teachers.

Disadvantages:

- Commercial textbooks may contain inauthentic language. All aspects of a textbook tend to incorporate teaching points but sometimes they do not represent the real use of language.
- Textbooks sometimes fail to represent real issues and focus on controversial topics. In this way they are not acceptable in many different contexts.
- They may not reflect students' needs. Since textbooks are often written for global markets, they often do not reflect the interests and needs of the students and hence may require adaptation.
- They can reduce the role of teachers if considered as the primary source of teaching. In this way textbooks deskill teachers.
- Commercial textbooks represent a financial burden for

students in many parts of the world (Hutchinson & Torres, 1983: 316).

Textbooks nevertheless remain a continuous issue for many teachers and researchers (Hutchinson & Torres), for example, claims that textbooks reduce the teachers role to one of managing or overseeing planned events.

There is a need for more research into the dynamics of textbook use. Appropriate textbooks, for example, may actively assist inexperienced teachers to come to terms with content and ways of tackling this with different learners.

Types of Instructional Materials

According to N.Dash, instructional materials can be classified into five different ways:

a) Projected and non projected materials: Projected instructional materials are films and slides. These are the aids where a bright light is passed through a transparent picture by means of a lens and an enlarged picture is thrown or projected on the screen or the white wall. Non-projected materials are pictures and charts. They do not require projector, projection screen or electricity. Such materials can simply be shown.
b) Audio, visual, and Audio-Visual materials: Audio materials are Radio, Tape-recorder, Record-player, etc. These aids appeal to the sense of hearing. These are the aids by means of which students can hear something—some speech, a song, an event, a sound, a narration, a story or a recitation. Visual materials are: Models, Pictures cut-outs, etc. These are the aids in which students can see something—some picture, a chart, a graph, an object, some specimen or a model. Audio-Visual materials are TV, Sound Film Strips, etc. These are the aids which appeal to both eye and the ear. These aids help students to see and hear something and they present both the sound and the vision as in case of television.
c) Hardware and Software materials: Hardware materials include computer, Epidiascope, film projector, overhead projector, etc. Software materials include Books, Magazines, Newspapers, Educational Games, Flash cards, etc. These are electro-mechanical equipments which can be used for effective instructions and help teachers to deal with more students with less expenditure. Software refers to the programmes which hardware technology produces. Software technology utilizes the principles of psychology.
d) Big media and little materials: Big media means VCR, TV, Computer, and little media means Radio, Audio cassettes etc.
e) Two-Dimensional materials mean printed materials, chalk board, bulletin board, flannel board etc. and Three-Dimensional materials mean static model, dynamic model, working model, sectional model, specimen of various kinds etc. (Dash, 2003: 123).

These are the materials which stimulate students' interest towards the learning tasks, imagination of events, the power of observation and motivation for further knowledge. They help to reduce meaningless and excessive verbalism on part of the teacher and relate abstract concepts with concrete experiences. Use of instructional aids leads to introducing varieties in the teaching-learning process, makes it joyful and thus, breaks up the monotony of the classroom instruction.

The Use of Authentic Materials

The English language presented in the classroom should be authentic, not produced for instructional purposes. Generally, what this means are materials which involve language naturally occurring as communication in native-speaker contexts of use, or rather those selected contexts where Standard English is the norm: real news paper reports, for example, real magazine articles, real advertisements, cooking recipes, horoscopes, etc. Most of the teachers throughout the world agree that authentic texts or materials are beneficial to the language learning process.

"Authentic materials are appropriate in terms of goals, objectives, learner needs and interest and natural in terms of real life and meaningful communication" (Rogers, 1997: 467).

"Authentic texts are texts that are not written for language teaching purposes. They are significant and increase students' motivation for learning, make the learner be exposed to the real language" (Jordan, 1980: 113).

In the words of Grellet "Authenticity means that nothing of the original text is changed and also that its presentation and layout are retained". (Grellet, 1981: 8) Grellet is also concerned about the nature of what is done with this authentic material and endorses the need to operate on texts in ways which reflect their normal communicative value---"Exercises must be meaningful and correspond as often as possible to what one is expected to do with the text" (Grellet, 1981: 9).

Authentic materials enable learners to interact with the real language and content rather than the form. Learners feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. Considering this, it may not be wrong to say that at any level authentic materials should be used to complete the gap between the competency and performance of the language learners, which is a common problem among the nonnative speakers. This requires the language patterns being put into practice in real life situations. Since learning about a culture is not accepting it and the role of the culture in the materials is just to create learner interest towards the target language, there should be a variety of culture in the materials, not a specific one.

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