

Materials Development: A Vital Decision

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The COVID-19 pandemic transformed education, highlighting the necessity for varied teaching and learning methods. With the return to in-person classes complemented by online formats, selecting appropriate teaching materials and syllabuses has become more complex. This paper discusses the development and adaptation of teaching materials, the reliability of textbooks, and the factors influencing materials design. It emphasizes the importance of educators' possessing strong pedagogical skills for effective materials development and adaptation.

COVID-19のパンデミックは教育を一変させ、多様な教育・学習方法の必要性を浮き彫りにした。オンライン形式で補完された対面授業が再開される中で、適切な教材やシラバスの選択はますます複雑になっている。本稿では、教材の開発と適応、教科書の信頼性、および教材設計に影響を与える要素について論じ、教材の効果的な開発と適応のために、教育者が強力な教育スキルを持つことの重要性を強調する。

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The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education globally, forcing institutions to continually reassess and adapt their approaches. Among the critical decisions faced by educators is the selection and adaptation of course materials. A plethora of teaching materials is available both online and offline, catering to diverse educational needs. However, effectively engaging learners and ensuring their motivation can be challenging. Often, instructors have limited input in material selection, which is usually determined by committees or course managers. Still, understanding the criteria for selecting, developing, and adapting materials, and possessing the skills to evaluate them objectively, are essential for benefiting learners.

Literature Review

Studies of materials development, as noted by Tomlinson (2012a), are relatively recent, gaining prominence in the 1990s with contributions from researchers like McDonough and Shaw (1993). Earlier debates on the use of textbooks for language learning featured arguments both for and against

them (Allwright, 1981; O'Neil, 1982). However, textbooks have become integral to language learning in recent years. In his framework for language teaching materials, Tomlinson (2012a) categorizes materials based on their primary function in the learning process as *informative*, *instructional*, *experiential*, or *exploratory*. Informative materials such as grammar charts and vocabulary lists provide learners with knowledge about the target language. Instructional materials guide learners in practicing the target language, whereas experiential materials expose learners to real-world use of the target language. Exploratory materials encourage learners to discover the target language for themselves through investigation. The literature on materials development highlights key issues, including the effective use of textbooks, the adaptation of materials to suit diverse learner needs, and the ensurance of authenticity in instructional content. These issues warrant closer examination to understand their implications for language teaching and learning.

Textbooks

Textbooks are a cornerstone of language teaching, but their role generates considerable debate among educators and researchers. Advocates point to several advantages of textbooks. They are cost effective and timesaving, and they provide a structured curriculum with clear learning objectives, allowing learners, teachers, and parents to monitor progress. Textbooks also promote standardized teaching (Tomlinson, 2012b), offering ready-made teaching aids and fostering learner independence (Ur, 1996). They are also adaptable to diverse learning needs and levels (Apple, 1992), and they ensure continuity across lessons, thus creating a consistent learning experience, benefiting large and diverse classrooms.

However, textbooks also face significant criticism. Some educators view them as rigid, limiting flexibility and responsiveness to individual learner needs (Littlejohn, 1998). Critics argue that textbooks can be restrictive because of their authoritative language, which leaves little room for modification or adaptation (Luke et al., 1989). Gabrielatos (2004) adds that their content and methodologies can be unclear and overly prescriptive, and Ur (1996) notes that their homogeneity can stifle creativity. Furthermore, global textbooks, as Tomlinson (2012a)

observes, often fail to meet the diverse needs and interests of learners because of their generic design. For example, textbooks featuring American or Australian English may not align with the cultural and linguistic contexts of Japanese learners, thereby limiting their practical relevance. This lack of localization can disengage learners and promote formulaic teaching that overlooks real-world language use. Instructors may therefore need to adapt these materials by incorporating culturally relevant examples to enhance their effectiveness.

Textbooks provide structure, continuity, and valuable teaching aids; however, they also present challenges in addressing diverse learner needs and fostering creativity. Their effectiveness depends on their thoughtful use as a flexible learning tool rather than a rigid guide (Cunningsworth, 1995). This approach allows educators to adapt and supplement them with context-specific materials, creating meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

Although textbooks have long been a cornerstone of materials development, the rise of AI tools is increasingly challenging their dominance as a primary resource in language teaching. AI enables the creation of personalized learning experiences by analyzing learner data to tailor content to their proficiency levels and learning styles. AI-powered tools can also generate diverse, contextually relevant language exercises. For example, AI-driven platforms such as ChatGPT-4o can generate reading passages and listening texts, and can simulate real-life conversational scenarios, allowing learners to practice speaking and listening skills in a controlled environment (Hirata et al., 2024; Rusmiyanto et al., 2023).

However, critics contend that AI integration in language materials poses challenges. One major concern is that AI-generated content may perpetuate biases embedded in its training data, resulting in culturally insensitive or inappropriate content. Furthermore, overreliance on AI may diminish human interaction, which is essential for developing nuanced language skills and cultural understanding. AI systems also raise concerns about data privacy, the ethical use of learner information, and the broader ethical implications of using AI in education (Hirata et al., 2024, Hockly, 2023)

Adapting Materials

Adapting materials involves modifying content and format to make them more comprehensible and engaging for learners (Dar, 2012). Adaptation is essential for effective materials development. Materi-

als in their original form can often be too dense and thus difficult for learners to comprehend. This is particularly true of global textbooks, as mentioned earlier. However, adapting materials requires the instructors' skill to avoid significant digression or inconsistency with the original concepts. Yan (2007) outlines four principles of adaptation, namely integrating traditional and communicative methods, catering to learner needs, integrating multiple language skills, and meeting teacher preferences.

Materials adaptation should integrate traditional methods with communicative teaching and learning approaches. The English language textbooks used in most schools often emphasize traditional techniques, such as form-focused practice. Although grammar and vocabulary are foundational to language learning, integrating opportunities for communication is equally important. For example, a lesson could introduce vocabulary and grammar structures, followed by group production activities, such as discussions or roleplays to reinforce language use in a communicative context. This approach ensures that learners practice both form and meaning, fostering a holistic learning experience.

Catering to learner needs involves creating a stimulating learning environment by assessing learners' moods and abilities. Teachers can observe engagement levels through body language, facial expressions, and participation. Warm-up activities, such as icebreakers or quick games, are effective for energizing learners and addressing low energy or frustration. By incorporating adjustable difficulty levels and clear learning objectives, teachers can tailor lessons to suit beginner or intermediate learners, maintaining focus and motivation.

Integrating multiple language skills involves blending vocabulary, grammar, listening, and speaking within teaching materials. This approach enables learners to practice these skills within the allotted lesson time. When time permits, collaborative activities, such as pair or group work, can be incorporated before individual presentations, encouraging learners to share their experiences in the target language. Thus, integrating grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking within lessons fosters comprehensive language practice.

Although adapting materials to learners' needs is essential, the third principle emphasizes tailoring them to align with teacher preferences. Modifications can promote active learner participation through discussions on topics relevant to their daily lives, aligning with the teacher's preferred teaching style. Materials should therefore align with teachers' goals of fostering active learning.

Material Authenticity

Material authenticity involves presenting language learning materials in the classroom to reflect real-life situations and promote a communicative approach, preparing learners for authentic language use.

The use of authentic materials, which mirror real-world language use, has sparked debate in materials development. Recent studies (e.g., Gilmore, 2019; Trabelsi, 2023) emphasize the importance of authenticity in English language teaching (ELT) materials. Authentic materials expose learners to real-world language use, enhancing their communicative competence. For example, Gilmore (2019) explains how authentic materials bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-life language use, making lessons more engaging and effective. Although authentic materials are beneficial, they come with challenges, especially for lower level learners. Research indicates that these materials can be overly complex and lead to frustration and demotivation. However, when appropriately scaffolded, they can significantly enhance the learning experience by providing contextually rich and meaningful language practice (Gilmore, 2007). Ensuring that authentic materials are culturally relevant to the learners is crucial. Culturally relevant materials resonate with learners' experiences, enhancing relatability and comprehension. Conversely, culturally inappropriate materials may introduce unfamiliar concepts, contexts, or values, creating a disconnect that hinders comprehension and engagement. For instance, discussing Thanksgiving traditions without contextual explanation in a classroom of Japanese learners may confuse or alienate them, reducing engagement. Trabelsi (2023) advocates adapting authentic materials to align with the learners' cultural contexts, thereby enhancing their relatability and effectiveness.

In the light of these considerations, incorporating authentic materials requires thoughtful integration into the curriculum. According to recent frameworks, materials should be selected and adapted on the basis of learners' needs, cultural backgrounds, and linguistic abilities. This approach helps in creating a more learner-centered environment that promotes active participation and meaningful learning (Gilmore, 2019).

Factors in Designing and Adapting Materials

Researchers have proposed frameworks for materials evaluation, moving beyond simple checklists (Tomlinson, 2012a). Scholars emphasize several framework elements, including contextualizing

language experiences, motivating learners, ensuring meaningful language features, and enabling multidimensional processing (Howard & Major, 2004; Tomlinson, 2008). These elements are essential for developing effective and engaging materials.

Materials should be contextually relevant to learners' environments, reflecting their cultural backgrounds, interests, and prior experiences to foster inclusivity and ensure that materials resonate with learners' lives. For instance, a lesson on environmental conservation could use case studies from the learners' local communities to foster meaningful connections. Moreover, modern frameworks promote a learner-centered approach, enabling learners to personalize their learning. Such projects might include learner content creation, such as a presentation on personal hobbies, to promote active participation and decision-making. Ultimately, integrating contextual relevance with learner-centered strategies fosters an interactive, inclusive, and engaging classroom dynamic.

Furthermore, Tomlinson (2008) highlights the importance of multidimensional processing as a factor in material design and adaptation. Multidimensional processing refers to materials' capacity to engage multiple senses and cognitive processes, deepening learning. For example, a listening activity could combine audio clips with visual aids, such as diagrams or infographics, to help learners connect concepts across modalities. Likewise, roleplay exercises that integrate spoken dialogue and written cues enhance both linguistic and cognitive engagement.

Flexibility is another important factor in designing and adapting materials. Flexibility is essential for meeting diverse learner needs. Teachers should adapt materials to adjust difficulty levels, content, and formats, ensuring accessibility and engagement for all learners. A reading passage, for instance, can be simplified for beginning learners or supplemented with vocabulary aids to enhance comprehension, while providing additional exercises for advanced learners. Using tools like differentiated worksheets or scaffolded tasks, teachers can effectively tailor the learning experience (van Geel, 2023).

Finally, the design and adaptation of materials should prioritize the use of authentic materials. Authentic materials, such as news articles, interviews, or menus, bring realism to the classroom, bridging the gap between learning and real-world applications. However, these materials should be carefully selected and adapted to align with learners' proficiency levels and cultural contexts. For instance, a beginner class might use simplified excerpts from a news article, whereas an advanced class could

analyze the original text through group discussions on its implications (Gilmore, 2007). This approach ensures that authentic materials remain meaningful and accessible.

In summary, designing and adapting materials requires balancing contextual relevance, multidimensional engagement, skill integration, flexibility, and authenticity. These factors coalesce to produce materials that are effective, engaging, and empowering, ultimately enhancing learners' experiences.

Implications

This paper's findings provide key insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers, highlighting the importance of thoughtful materials selection and adaptation. For educators, integrating multiple language skills, reflecting real-life situations, and adapting materials to meet diverse learner needs is essential. These practices enable learners to develop communicative and critical thinking skills, aligning with the goal of preparing them for real-world language use.

Policymakers should prioritize teacher training programs that equip instructors with effective strategies and skills for materials adaptation. These programs should foster skills in integrating cultural relevance and using AI tools to enhance engagement and accessibility.

Curriculum designers should prioritize flexibility and learner-centered activities in materials development. Effective materials should offer opportunities for learners to personalize their learning while balancing instructor guidance and learner independence. Peer-driven activities, such as discussions facilitated by the teacher, encourage learners to pose questions, make connections, and reflect critically on issues like social justice and environmental conservation, fostering active participation and collaboration. This approach fosters autonomy and critical thinking, both essential for language acquisition (Banaruee et al., 2023). Furthermore, shifting from traditional teacher-led instruction to a learner-centered approach—"guide on the side" versus "sage on the stage"—is essential for empowering learners to take ownership of their learning. Instructors should serve as facilitators and guides rather than authoritarian figures to encourage active participation and collaboration among learners (Geel, 2023). By integrating these insights with practical, classroom-tested strategies, educational stakeholders can develop materials that meet institutional objectives while enriching learners' language skills and critical awareness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, selecting appropriate teaching materials is essential because of factors such as evolving environments, institutional requirements, learners' needs and abilities, and cultural considerations. The choice of textbook or language materials significantly impacts classroom dynamics, learners' progress, and teaching effectiveness.

Effective materials development ultimately requires balancing pedagogical expertise and adaptability. By engaging learners in the materials selection process and prioritizing contextual relevance, educators can foster engaging, learner-centered experiences that promote meaningful language use and lifelong learning.

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