



## TEXTBOOK MATERIALS AND THEIR SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION IN THE CLASSROOM: IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Assist. Prof. Dr. Fatima Dar  
School of Education  
Beaconhouse National University  
Lahore, PAKISTAN  
[fatimadar@yahoo.com](mailto:fatimadar@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

Selection of materials for classroom use is a challenging task for English language teachers as they provide a strong platform through which students learn English language. Presentation of developmentally appropriate, relevant and engaging materials is, therefore, the prime responsibility of the material developers and the teachers. Selection of the right materials makes teaching and learning a worthwhile activity and creates a classroom environment which is efficient, effective and meaningful.

This paper will offer a critique of how textbooks for teaching English are prepared, prescribed and taught in both the private and public schools of Pakistan. It will also discuss the appropriacy of these materials vis-à-vis linguistic suitability, cultural aptness and interest level of students across primary level. The paper will suggest important elements which must be kept in mind while designing and prescribing textbook materials for primary schools. The paper will also provide guidelines to teachers of how to effectively teach textbook materials in classrooms.

**Key Words:** Textbook Materials, Classroom, Implications, Language Development.

### INTRODUCTION

Selection of materials for classroom use is a challenging task for a language teacher as it provides a platform through which students learn English language. Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) outline the same and reiterate that materials play a crucial role in exposing learners to the language. Moreover, they provide students a lens through which students develop awareness about local and global events, a familiarity with various genres of literature, a consciousness of the present and the past and discernment about the future. They are thus a gateway to understand the world around them.

Presentation of developmentally appropriate, relevant and engaging materials is, therefore, the prime responsibility of the material developers and the teachers. Kitao & Kitao (1997) emphasize the same and claim that materials are the center of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom. Selection of the right materials makes teaching and learning a worthwhile activity and creates a classroom environment which is efficient, effective and meaningful. On the contrary, if materials present out of context situations to which learners cannot relate to, are uninteresting and complicated, then teaching and learning becomes a dull and monotonous activity. The classroom becomes a stolid forum where de-motivation sets in. It is, therefore, a highly desirable initiative to give students a satisfactory experience through the use of age-appropriate and linguistically viable materials which adequately arouse and maintain their interest in the classrooms.

### CAREFUL CHOICE OF MATERIALS

Keeping the learners motivated through materials is a crucial factor in the overall achievement of curricular goals and attainment of education. According to Small (1997), developing life-long learners who are intrinsically motivated, display intellectual curiosity, find learning enjoyable, and continue seeking knowledge after their formal instruction has ended has always been a major goal of education. To attain this goal the educational



institutions must work towards an educational philosophy which is learner centered and need focused. In terms of material development, this means that the curricular goals, philosophies and themes, around which materials are carved, are directly at power with the needs and interests of the learners as well as the current local and global contexts. The material developers carefully write, select and frame materials in the light of the linguistic and intellectual demands of various age and grade levels. This ensures enlivened classrooms where students actively pursue knowledge as it meets their overall interest and linguistic requirements.

In order to ensure positive and solid engagements with materials it is also important that the selected materials are initially analyzed and pre-tested before they are put to larger use. Consequently, the materials are revised or adapted in the light of the feedback received and then finally circulated in schools to be used. The teachers, then, must report on the success or failure of these materials for further revision or adaptation. Continuous feedback system from teachers and students is a major source to ensure the sustainability and likability of materials. Teachers and students are the best spokespersons on the quality of materials and their opinions and judgments must be given ample weight. Keeping the motivation levels of teachers and students high is quite a challenging task and go a long way in making the teaching and learning a desirable endeavor.

### **TEACHERS AS MATERIAL DEVELOPERS**

In the whole process of material writing and selection the teachers should take up a key role as they are the best judges to report on learners' needs and interests. Tomlinson (1998) is of the same view and confirms that teachers understand their own learners best and are suited well to be material developers. He goes on to argue that all teachers need grounding in materials writing. Unfortunately, in most schools teachers are handed down the textbooks to teach. They exercise little power in changing or adapting materials. They are strictly made to follow the given syllabus. Teaching and learning become a cumbersome and monotonous task. Teachers are loath to own and teach materials which they know will not make any sense to the learners. Learners at the same time find it difficult to keep pace with learning that does not ignite any interest. The result is a steep fall in the motivational levels of both the teacher and the taught. One solution to this problem is the initiation for teachers to become material developers as being insiders they would graphically and most candidly present the linguistic, psychological and intellectual demands of learners at various levels. Schools must invest in this kind of professional development of teachers to maintain high motivation levels in teachers and learners.

### **LOCAL AND GLOBAL MATERIALS**

Another factor that hugely affects learners' response towards materials is the content they present. If the content of the materials is heavily laden with foreign substance, which learners don't relate to well, the interest level automatically falls down. Le (2005) shares the same opinion and claims that although English teaching materials come from many places, the dominant sources are countries where English is a native or an official second language. Materials from these English-speaking countries do not reflect the learning styles or cultural values of the EFL students who use them, and, as a result, the students' motivation suffers and they become reluctant to interact in class and share opinions. Moreover, in majority of the contexts, teachers are just implementers and exercise no power in either adapting or presenting localized materials. In such circumstances, learning again becomes a meaningless activity where teachers and learners are cogs in a machine, operated mindlessly by a highly structured school administration.

If those materials that contain out of context content are replaced with localized matter, most of the problem stands resolved. Localized matter presents culture which learners identify and easily relate to. This encourages more learner participation in class which results in language learning. Brown (1994) is of the same view and opines that localizing materials is based on the idea that relevant contexts naturally encourage students to show interest, which allows the teacher to deliver more effective lessons. When the material is meaningful, students are more participatory and successful at learning a language. Similarly, Dat (2003) supports using localized English teaching materials because they present students with real-life and culturally familiar language contexts.



Although research evidence reveals that local materials are vital for meaningful learning, it also states that a good blend of global materials is necessary to get a wholesome view of language. Language is learnt well when it is presented within the culture which it showcases. According to Alptekin (2002, 58):

“ Learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers.”

It is important, therefore, to teach materials which are both foreign and local. It gives students a broader canvas to experiment with language. Le (2005) is of the same view and states that students should also be exposed to materials that focus on the cultures of English-speaking countries. This allows students to compare and contrast their culture with other global cultures, thereby expanding their background knowledge and developing their identity.

### **AUTHENTIC MATERIALS**

Evidence also reveals that that the practice of authentic materials in the classroom facilitate language learning as learners are exposed to naturally occurring language experiences. Authentic materials are therefore those materials or texts that present language in real life contexts. Harmer (1991), cited in Matsuta (n.d., para. 1) defines authentic texts as materials which are designed for native speakers; they are real texts; designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language. Such texts when taught to EFL students serve a dual purpose: it makes learners see language in real life situation. Also, it exposes them to the culture and the community of the English speaking world, thus bringing in the global element in language learning. As claimed by Philips and Shettlesworth 1978; Clarke 1989; Peacock 1997, cited in Richards, 2001 such kind of language exposure has a positive effect on learner motivation, provides authentic cultural information, answers the learners' needs well and supports a more creative approach to teaching.

It should, however, be noted that authentic materials need to be carefully used in the classrooms. Learners with little exposure to English language might find them too daunting. Such learners might adopt a fearful approach towards language learning as they might find such materials well beyond their reach. Guariento & Morley (2001) note that at lower levels, the use of authentic materials may cause students to feel demotivated and frustrated since they lack many lexical items and structures used in the target language. However, authentic materials are useful for those learners who already have a fair idea about English language and who can meaningfully interpret the cultural and linguistic nuances of it. For them the use of authentic materials is a pleasant experience in the classroom as they can easily interact with the real language.

Another important factor in the use of such materials is the role of the teacher. The teacher has to constantly provide all the pedagogical support to the learners for the successful interpretation of authentic materials. This may also lessen the gap between the ability levels of learners as learners with low ability levels can also meaningfully interact with such materials given the proper support of the teacher. Kilickaya (2004) is of the view that learners feel better with authentic materials as long as we, as teachers, provide them with pedagogical support.

### **MATERIAL ADAPTATION**

Another successful approach towards materials development is the adaptation of those materials that in their original form might pose difficulty for students. Schumaker & Lens (2003) state that when instructional materials present a barrier to student learning, teachers often adapt the materials to allow students greater access to the information to be taught. They go on to claim that such adaptations may involve changing the content of the materials (the nature or amount of information to be learned) or changing the format of the materials (the way information is presented to the learner). The overall goal, therefore, is to make materials accessible, enjoyable and comprehensible to learners. Again adaptations require the skill of the teacher who can bring careful changes and watchful manipulations in the text for contextual suitability.



Materials that mostly qualify for adaptations are of global nature. Global materials, which are incompatible in content and format, can safely be redeveloped by teachers to suit the linguistic, contextual and interest level of learners. Nguyen (2005) is of the same opinion and reiterates that the role of teachers as skillful material developers is, therefore, crucial because they can make the best judgment about which foreign cultural elements to localize and which to explain.

#### TEXTBOOK DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF PAKISTAN

In the light of the above references to material development and their repercussions for the academic context, it is worthwhile to consider material development and the selection of teaching resources in schools and colleges in the private and the public sectors of Pakistan.

In the public sector, textbook boards are primarily responsible for material development from grades 1-12. The textbook board constitutes committees of authors and editors for textbook development. The authors strictly follow the national curriculum prescribed by the government for various subject areas and develop lessons and activities on the objectives, benchmarks and themes set by the curriculum. The materials once developed by the authors, are reviewed by the editors and are sent to the Provincial Review Committees and then to the Textbook Review Committees for final approvals. The materials thus go through close scrutiny at various steps before being printed.

As a co-author of Grade 9 English textbook and a member of the Provincial Review Committee, I have the following critique to offer with respect to textbook development in the public sector:

- It is important to conduct a needs survey before formulating textbooks for particular grade levels for appropriate and suitable material development.
- It is very important for all authors and material reviewers to know the linguistic needs and interests of the students for which materials are developed. Tomlinson (1998) also claims that materials writing is at its most effective when it is turned to the needs of a particular group of learners
- It is vital to involve those stakeholders who are directly involved in using and teaching materials. Teachers, teaching at the level for which a textbook is developed, must become part of textbook development committees as they are the best sources to recommend and select appropriate materials.
- The materials chosen must bear relevance to the current and recent global trends, issues and themes. For this the national curriculum also needs constant review so that the themes are set in line with the concurrent global drifts.
- The committees of authors and editors should also be periodically reviewed for better efficiency
- The authors must not plagiarize materials and must quote the relevant sources to avoid embarrassment.
- The materials must have better visual appeal
- Teachers must be adequately trained to use materials in the classrooms.

In the private sector, the case is different as the private schools are solely responsible for material selection. Mostly they rely on foreign sources for material selection. The English texts used in the private English medium schools are mainly produced by foreign publishers. The materials are seldom developed by the schools' curriculum wings and the dependence mainly remains on imported books. The following comments are offered in this regard:

- The materials which are selected must bear relevance to the context and culture in which these materials are used.
- The materials must be adapted to allow students better access. As pointed out by Schumaker et al. (2003) students may have difficulty in acquiring or getting the important information from written materials, storing or remembering the information presented in the materials or expressing the information or demonstrating competence on written tests. For this adaptation of materials offer a better chance for sustained linguistic growth.
- There must be a close blend of local and global materials. It is important to contextualize language and present familiar contexts to students to usher better and meaningful learning.



- Materials must undergo constant evaluations. Commercially produced textbooks must be strictly evaluated by teachers. They must be subjected to pre, while and post evaluation. Only then they should be regarded as suitable for classroom use.
- Teachers must be adequately trained to use and adapt materials in the classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

Materials are that vital funnel through which knowledge is transferred from the teachers to the learners. Such knowledge can only be transferred effectively if the materials are appropriate to the needs of the learners, are contextually appropriate, and linguistically sound. Also, such materials are hugely dependent on the pedagogical skill of the teachers and the manner in which they use manipulative skills to teach them. Materials pose a comprehension and contextual threat to the learners if the teachers and school administration fail to use the skill of judging their appropriacy for classroom use. In such circumstances materials become more of a liability and burden and make teaching and learning an unpleasant experience. Materials, therefore, should be carefully selected, processed, adapted if needed, and judged for successful application in the classroom. This can only happen once the learner is kept at the centre of the education stage and materials are selected and used for enhancement of learner knowledge and skill.

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