

## Adapting Tasks for Achieving Learning Objectives

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### Abstract

The need for teachers in regards to finding the suitable materials to enhance language learning and acquisition is a constant in the ESL classroom since they are the key elements of lesson development. Therefore, as teachers, we must focus our attention, not only on the contents but in materials design parting from the researching on materials development field to the methodology of language teaching. Thus, teachers are asked to create their materials based on the deep knowledge they have of their students as a whole. This article attempts to show a brief framework of the materials development field, guidance of materials design, and an instance of how teachers can apply this framework in classroom tasks.

**Keywords:** materials, materials design, materials development, materials adaptation, learning, teaching, language.

### Introduction

The field of language teaching has considerably evolved from time on time with the emergence of different theories in regards, not only of learning but language learning and acquisition. What it was valuable and relevant in the past, it is not well-seen currently. Likewise, what it was indispensable now can be optional. New

trends in developing materials have appeared opening a variety of options from what the teachers can choose in order to enhance language learning.

Although there is an ocean of materials to choose from, not all seem to be suitable for language learning. Whilst planning the lessons, the teachers must consider different factors before including materials that students can work out for the best.

Materials development appeared as a great opportunity for teachers who constantly look for many ways to potentiate students' language skills in the classroom and who look to deliver comprehensible input.

Therefore, a video, a set of pictures, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, all kind of objects, websites, books, etc., can be used in the classroom by adapting them in accordance with the teaching purposes, the characteristics of the students and the social context in which teaching process is carried out. The main characteristic that they might have is to provide language input and motivation, so it fulfills the principle of achieving impact.

### **1 Teaching materials development**

As Tomlinson (1998) points out, materials development allows the teachers to "...realize that they are also materials developers... and they are ultimately responsible for the materials that their learners use." The teacher is not only responsible for what she uses into the classroom for students to learn, but equally responsible for designing, analyzing and evaluating the impact of it.

To start analyzing teaching materials as well as its importance, it is mandatory to have a clear concept. Materials are defined as "... anything which is used by

teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language... they can be anything which is deliberately used to increase the learners' knowledge and/or experience of the language." (Tomlinson, 1988). We can agree that any resource we can think of can become a teaching material if it is shaped to achieve learning in students.

A teacher might wonder about the importance of materials and their role in learning. It is a fact that "... instructional materials generally serve as the basis of much of the language input that language receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom." (Richards, 2001). As a result, when the teachers are conscious of materials as the basis, they become constant designers, taking care of what they introduce into the lesson.

The teachers should consider their learning objectives. In accordance with this, they can decide what kind of materials to use and what they attempt to get from students.

## **1.2 What materials should achieve**

During planning the lesson, the teachers most focus on the outcomes they want to achieve when finishing a period. Aspects such as learners' characteristics and knowledge of the teaching context can be decisive for selecting, designing and adapting teaching materials. Tomlinson, (1998) states key aspects that cannot be overlooked when analyzing and evaluating them.

The first aspect is that materials should achieve impact. What we use in the classroom should engage students with the content and increase their motivation. Doing this, students pay attention to what they do and awaken curiosity and

pleasure to learn. Secondly, materials should help learners to feel at ease, that is, to simplify learning and to turn this into a grateful experience rather than a frustrating one. It permits the learner to lower the affective filter, increasing the possibilities to become autonomous.

Moreover, materials must be facilitators to develop learners' confidence and expose learners to authentic use. In this is mandatory that the teachers design the tasks challenging but achievable. Learners become more interested in tasks where they can apply their knowledge and, see their progress. Authenticity lets them build language for real life.

### **1.3 Different types of teaching materials**

To consider students' characteristics and the teaching context is crucial to start planning and, analyzing and evaluating possible materials to use. Through students' diagnostic and stating clear learning objectives, the teacher can trace the path from where students are to what students must be at the end. We can choose the type of material that is more suitable in accordance with these elements.

According to Tomlinson (1998), materials can be classified into four different categories: informative, instructional, experimental, eliciting and exploratory. Each one has a purpose and a route to achieve certain knowledge about the language as well as communication. These four types of materials can be used individually or in an integrated lesson.

When planning the lesson, a teacher can face an ocean of materials where he can choose in accordance with the learning objectives and students' characteristics. A teacher might find useful materials but, when applying them, he probably faces difficulties and needs for changing something. This is normal due to every task is situated to respond to the needs of different teachers in different scenarios.

This does not mean that the teacher must design his own materials but modify the existing ones to match his teaching context. The Materials Development field has been purposed processes to consider materials and decide whether they are functional or not; if they fulfill the teacher and the students' needs. These processes are called materials analysis and materials evaluation.

#### **1.4 Analyzing materials**

The process of materials analysis helps us to describe what is there. That is, to examine every single part of materials in order to identify their main purpose and needed skills. It is a focused process and needs the teachers' attention to carefully examine its parts. According to Littlejohn (2011), there are two aspects in which teachers must focus on materials publication and design.

The first allows the teacher to obtain a general view of materials such as continuity, route, access, published form of the materials, etc. In regards to the second, it asks the teachers to look the inside and consider aspects such as aims, selection, sequencing, types of teaching and learning materials, etc.

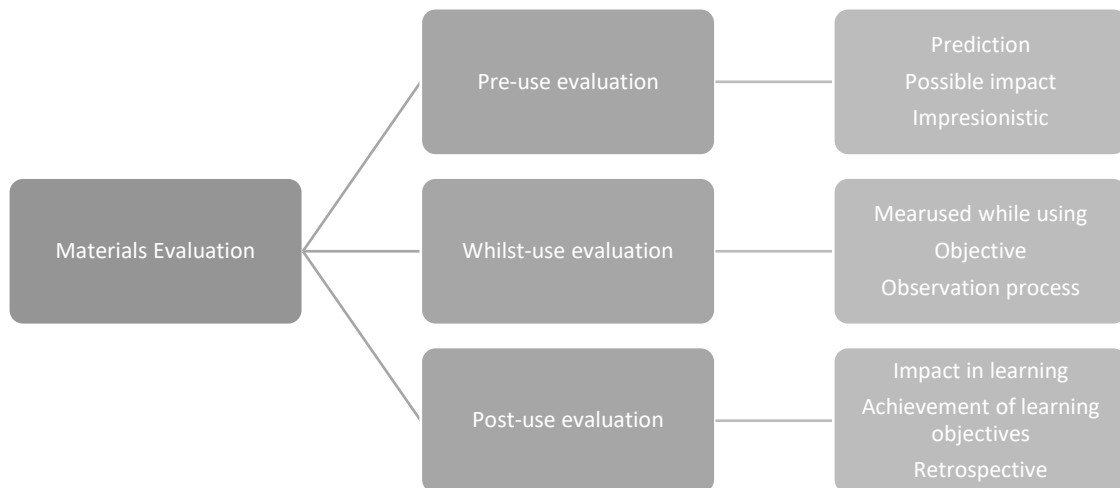
The teachers can develop from different levels, as Littlejohn (2011) points out, which lets teacher move from subjective to objective descriptions. These levels are divided into three sections: “What is there”, “What is required of users”, and “What is implied”. The first refers to the way in which materials are presented, to say what it includes and what is missing there. The second is for a subjective description of tasks and learners’ needed skills. The third one requires the teachers to analyze activities and divide them into tasks it asks students to carry out.

### **1.5 Evaluating Materials**

Evaluating materials permits teachers “to measure the value (or potential value) of a set of learning materials.” (Tomlinson, 2003). Therefore, when evaluating materials, the teachers most consider materials engagement, credibility, validity, reliability, degree of motivation, term in learning, preparation, delivery, assessment, flexibility, and teachers’ development encouragement. (Tomlinson, 2003).

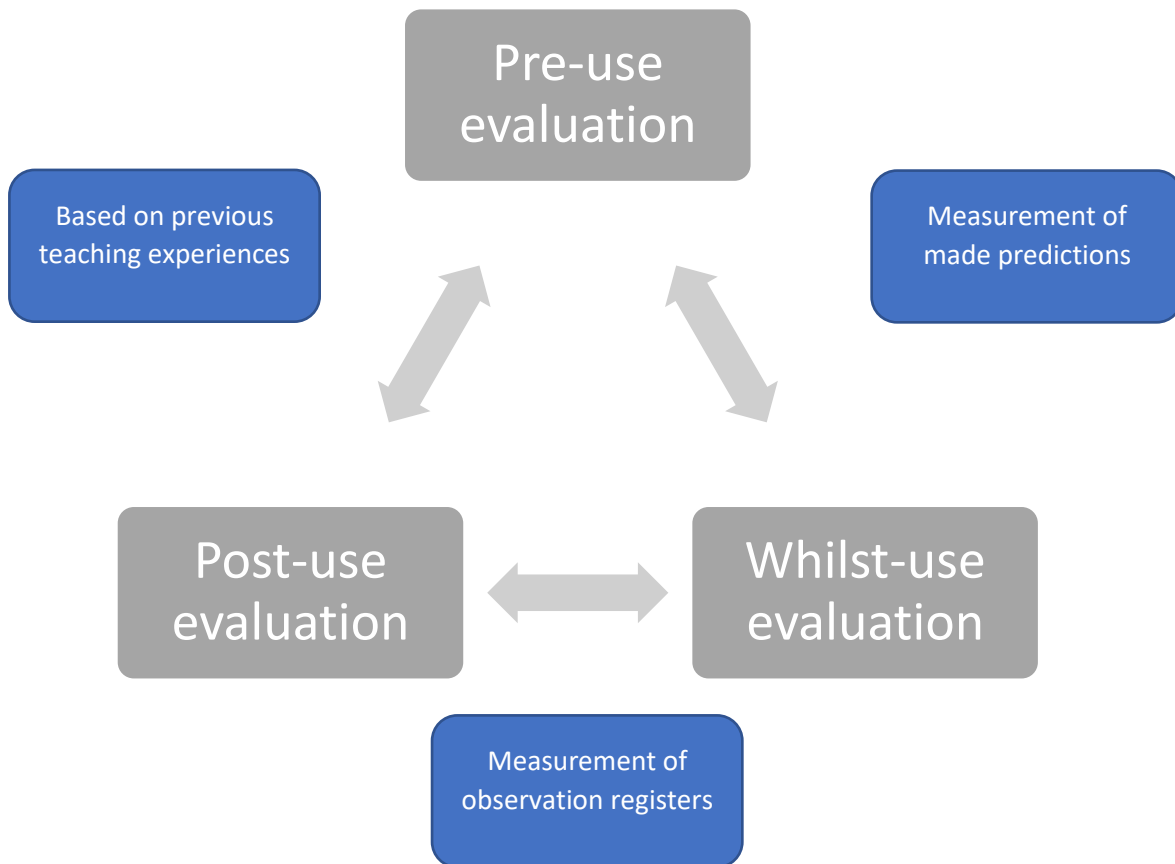
The teachers can divide this process into three phases: pre-use evaluation, whilst-use evaluation, and post-use evaluation. Pre-use evaluation is carried out with the purpose of seeing the potential use of materials. As this phase tends to be impressionistic, the second and third phases can be useful for objective measurement. The whilst-use evaluation occurs simultaneously with teaching. It focuses on observation rather than prediction. Finally, post-use evaluation is retrospective and contribute to teaching practice improvement. (See figure 1)

*Figure 1. Division of materials evaluation phases.*



When planning the lesson, the pre-use stage of materials evaluation can answer the questions “What to choose?”. Consequently, whilst-use evaluation and post-use evaluation can answer the questions “How is it working?” and “What was the impact on the learning process?”, respectively. Post-use evaluation acquires great importance since it gives information for future intervention and, therefore, strengthen pre-use evaluation, as a cycle. (See figure 2)

*Figure 2. Materials Evaluation Cycle.*



### 1.6 Techniques for adapting materials

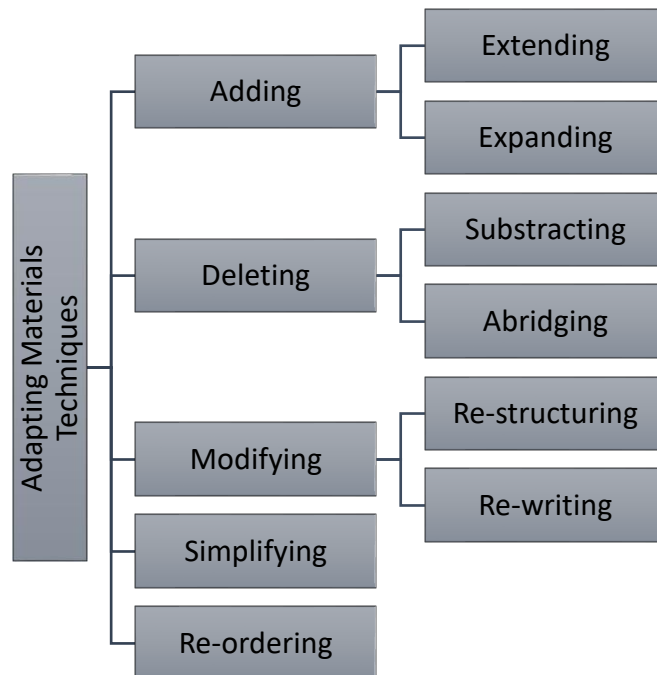
Once the materials have been analyzed and evaluated, the teacher decides whether to adapt it or not. If yes, then he has to adapt it with the purpose of fitting the method, language content, subject matter, the balance of skills, progressing and grading, and cultural content with the target learners (Islam & Mares, 2003). Considering that, McDonough and Shaw (1993), state four objectives to adapt materials and five techniques to do it.

According to these authors, you can adapt materials in order to personalize, individualize, localize or modernize them. This is with the purpose of making them real, considering all ways in which learning can occur, encouraging learner



autonomy, potentiating higher-level cognitive skills, permitting input accessible and engaging. Granted that, here come the five techniques for adapting materials: adding, deleting, modifying, simplifying, and re-ordering (McDonough & Shaw, 1993). (See figure 3)

*Figure 3. Adapting Materials Techniques based on McDonough & Shaw (1993).*



### 1.7 Sharing the experience

For this part of the essay, I attempt to share my teaching experience in regards to students' coursebook. To contextualize the reader, I currently work at a secondary school with students between 12 to 15 years old. According to our National English Program for Basic Education (PRONI), they must be at the B1 level due to they were supposed to have English classes since Kindergarten. Therefore, the coursebook I use at work was designed in accordance to those national standards.

I sadly say that my students do not fulfill that learner profile and our education ministers demand us to use the materials the government provides, that is, the students' book and the reader's book. I have to adapt many of the tasks to accomplish what my authorities ask me to do but without affecting students. Thus, in this work, I can share my experience based on the adaptations I did and the results I obtained.

As I mentioned in the part of materials evaluation, there is a stage that favors more the improvement of the teacher intervention and provides more information. That is the post-use evaluation. My experience stands on three important aspects of materials evaluation: pre-use evaluation, post-use evaluation, and retrospective evaluation.

According to Ellis (1997), retrospective evaluation "...provides the teacher with information that can be used to determine whether it is worthwhile using the materials again, which activities 'work' and which do not...". Talking about micro-evaluations, the teacher has to select the task and describe it "... in terms of its objectives, the input it provides..., the conditions of the performance, the procedures to carry out, and the outcomes." (Ellis, 1997). Done this, the teacher continues with the rest of the steps.

### **1.7.1 Carrying the evaluation out**

To share my experience, I chose one of the lessons I recently carried out with my third-grade-secondary students. For the development of the analysis, I use the stages proposed by Ellis (1997): choose the task, describe, plan, collect the

information, analysis of the information, reach conclusions, and make recommendations.

#### A) Choose the task

The task I chose is on the students' book, Unit 2B, page 34. This is about TV shows.

#### B) Describe the task

The task consists of three parts. For the first part, students look at the pictures and number them by following the genres they belong to. The genres are written at the top of the page. Secondly, they have to create a chart with three columns to talk about the name of the program, the purpose, and the intended audience. Finally, in total class, they have to agree in a program everybody watches and answers some questions about the participants, their roles in the program, the setting, and the tune or graphics it shows.

#### C) Planning the evaluation

Purposes: To see the ways in which the tasks can be improved in accordance with students' characteristics and needs.

Audience: the teacher carries out the evaluation for herself to see the results and make future choices in regards to materials selection, adaptation and approach.

Evaluator: the teacher whilst carrying the task out.

Content: learning-based evaluation to see in which extend learning objectives had been achieved in regards to materials adaptation.

Method: using observations.

Timing: during and after the tasks.

#### D) Collecting information

By carrying out the planning part of the evaluation, I found that the tasks were not as suitable as expected in accordance with my students' characteristics. That is, the level of English and the complexity of them seemed to be not achievable for them. Therefore, I had to use certain teaching techniques to change them. Thus, the adaptation process gave me key points to improve the lesson and to ensure students' success in learning.

#### E) Analyzing the information

Once I have collected the needed information, I proceeded to analyze the situation in which I can ensure learning and easiness for my students, without losing the authenticity of the tasks. That allowed me to make choices in regard to the tasks and the techniques to use. Additionally, after the lesson, it also allowed me to measure the impact it had.

#### F) Reaching conclusions and making recommendations

The materials adaptation strategy I did was adding, precisely expanding, and deleting, I mean abridging. Moreover, I applied the reordering strategy in a part of the tasks. As they do not have the expected level of English, I had to adapt the lesson to they achieve the learning objective and, to use the resource the government gave them. My lesson was developed as follows:

Part 1:

The teacher writes three questions on the board:

Do you watch TV?

What do you like to watch?

What's your favorite genre?

After that, she writes her own answers to give an example.

Do you watch TV? Yes, I do.

What do you like to watch? I like to watch movies and series.

What's your favorite genre? My favorite genre is suspense and romantic movies.

Then, I started asking several students and writing their answers on the board.

In this stage, I used the "adding" strategy, especially expanding. This was done because the book did not consider the lack of preparation my students had.

Additionally, I could not start the class just by asking them to organize the name of each genre in the picture. By expanding the lesson, I can achieve my students to contextualize the content, then get interested in it.

Part 2:

The teacher asks them to open their books on the page of the unit. She invites them to look at the pictures to try to recognize each of the elements as characters, objects, activities. Then, she tells them to look at the genres written above. She

starts pronouncing, then students repeated. Once they have finished with drills, the teacher asks them to write the name of each genre in the correct picture.

When finishing, the teacher asks for the answers through students' participation and gives feedback.

### Part 3:

For the last part of the lesson, the teacher asks students to make a chart on their notebooks. It has to contain seven spaces to fill in. Per each of the genres, students have to write the name of a program, the purpose, and the intended audience. They can work in pairs when they do not relate to a genre. Classmates can help each other to complete the chart.

In this, I applied the re-ordering strategy due to students were supposed to do this for the second part of the class. I changed this because they needed more context to accomplish it.

The teacher deletes the last part of the exercise which consisted of selecting a TV show to analyze. Then, they were supposed to discuss open questions. Due to my students do not have the level to accomplish this task, I decided to avoid this.

## **Conclusions**

The main purpose of this work was to share the teaching experiences in regards to all the frameworks developed. It is important to consider ourselves as materials'

designers and reflect on the teaching experiences with the purpose of improving our teaching intervention and, therefore, favoring students' learning process.

Sometimes, available materials do not match real teaching contexts, therefore, materials analysis and materials evaluation open opportunities for the teachers to adapt the existing ones or even design owns based on the tasks' methodology proposed there. If materials do not match the real context, then the learning process can be affected.

To adapt materials to favor students' learning process does not mean to lose authenticity. A task can be suitable but authentic. We have to keep in mind the most important thing when talking about language learning: achieve communication. Thus, we become facilitators for language learning but creators of opportunities to put language into practice.

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