

TEACHING MATERIALS - A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN ELT

SHARMISTHA BASU

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Narula Institute of Technology, Agarpara, Kolkata, India

ABSTRACT

Resource materials are considered as a pivotal aspect of English Language Teaching (ELT). Traditional teaching aids like text books, rapid readers, work books, handouts and blackboards are integrated with technology oriented resources like computers, LCD projector, handy cam, audio & video player and others. Teaching materials build an environment of interest for the teachers as well as learners. A syllabus design plays an important role in language learning whereas a curriculum may be referred as a prescribed course of studies, which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of education. There are different designs of syllabus based on various patterns catering to the needs of various group of learners. The level of the content to be taught should accord with the stage of intellectual and emotional development of the learners. Keeping this in mind learning materials are often simplified to keep up the interest of the learners. The learners are motivated to develop the sub skills of language: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) through different training materials. The enhancement of these skills promotes the students to become a successful professional. This paper aims to discuss the multifarious aspects of teaching materials that helps to accomplish the objective of teaching-learning process.

KEYWORDS: Teaching Aids, ELT, Learners, Teachers

INTRODUCTION

The process of teaching –learning depends largely upon the different types of materials available in the language classroom. There are aids available like text books, rapid readers, work books, handouts, blackboards, audio/visuals etc. The syllabus needs to be designed keeping in mind the learner's needs. Based on the syllabus the educators frame the curriculum for a certain time period. In order to make the learning easy materials are often simplified so that the learners can grasp the meaning of the context. The four basic skills of language teaching: LSRW are best developed through the use of teaching aids in the classroom. The development of these skills assists a learner to become a successful professional.

Need for Teaching Aids are Classified as Follows

- Every individual has the tendency to forget. Proper use of teaching aids helps to retain the concept permanently.
- Individuals can learn better when they are motivated properly through different training materials.
- It provides a complete example for conceptual thinking
- It creates the environment of interest for the students
- It helps to increase the vocabulary of the learners
- It is of a great help for the teacher to prepare their lessons systematically

- The students can have a direct experience of the learning

Let us analyze the utility of the teaching materials individually

Black Board

Blackboard is perhaps the minimum resource available to all kinds of language teachers. It is necessary to make the best use of it. There are many activities which can be done using the blackboard such as formation of anagrams, Draw & Describe, cross words etc...

Text Book

The text books are important as through reading this, the pupils can be made to acquire complete mastery over the language, which means the acquisition of new vocabulary, the various forms of the language, the different structures of the sentence etc...

Rapid Readers

These are meant for cultivating the habit of independent and silent reading in the pupils. This habit cannot be developed with the help of the books which are meant for intensive study. Rapid readers lay stress not on the language but on the subject matter so that the pupils can get the essential ideas quickly without any hindrance of the language.

Audio Visuals

When verbal description is not sufficient to comprehend or visualize, visual aids play a crucial role. For learning proper pronunciation, audio-visual aids are quite helpful. Simple sounds and pronunciations can be projected on the screen with overhead projectors. The words can be broken into syllables and students would be able to view the syllables as they pronounce them. Visual representations of tongue and lip positions can be made to practice a language's sounds.

Handouts

These are supplementary materials which can be teacher's notes in the class or additional reference.

Work Books

These materials are good for practice purpose. It helps the learner in self-evaluation and prepares them for examination.

Syllabus & Curriculum

The term 'syllabus' has been designed from the Latin word 'syllabi' which means 'list'. It is defined as an outline and summary of topics to be covered in an education and training course. A syllabus is often prepared by an examination board or by the Professor who supervises or controls the course quality. It usually contains specific information about the course such as information on what positions are to be covered in the course, a schedule of test dates and the due dates for assignments, grading policy etc...Syllabuses are used to ensure consistency between schools/colleges so that all teachers must know what must be taught and what is not required.

The word 'curriculum' comes from the Latin word meaning "a course for racing". Teachers often speak about 'covering' concepts as one would speak about 'covering' ground and that coverage is often a race against the testing clock.

A curriculum is prescriptive and is based on a more general syllabus which merely specifies what topics must be understood and what a candidate should do to obtain a certain standard or grade. It also may be referred as a prescribed course of studies, which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of education.

A syllabus design plays an important role in language learning. It is based essentially on a decision about the ‘units’ of classroom activity and the ‘sequence’ in which they are to be performed. Units can be based on an analysis of the language to be learnt, in terms of grammatical structures or of lexical items and collocations or on analysis of the components of skilled behavior in the second language. Language teaching syllabus involves the combination of subject matter and linguistic matter. It performs as a guide both for the teacher and learner by providing some goals to be accomplished.

Learner’s Syllabus & Prescribed Syllabus - A Comparison

There are different designs of syllabus based on various patterns catering to the needs of various group of learners. The notion is that in a learner’s syllabus the emphasis lays with the learner, who it is hoped will be involved in the implementation of the syllabus design as far as that is practically possible. By being fully aware of the course they are studying, it is believed that their motivation and interest will increase, coupled with positive effect of nurturing the skills required to learn.

On the other hand a prescribed syllabus provides support and guidance not only to the teachers but to the students as well. In a prescribed syllabus one finds the blueprint for the course expectations, requirements, ground rules, assignments, examination structure and final projects. The syllabus here will also contain information related to expectations about classroom behavior such as participation in classroom discussions, policies on absence and penalties for a wrong deed. In a prescribed syllabus as a teacher we get the idea of the content to be taught during the whole year, so the syllabus structuring can be sketched as per the necessity of the learners.

My experience teaching in an Engineering & Management college for five years led me to the decision that prescribed syllabus is always preferred in the undergraduate level or where the evaluation system is examination oriented. However in teaching English for developing communication competence to adult learners, learner –led syllabus tends to be more effective. For instance when I teach a batch of working professionals, the learner–led syllabus is more suitable because the learners themselves try to adopt the skills which they feel will be important to them in their workplace.

Gradation of Materials

The level of the content to be taught should accord with the stage of intellectual and emotional development of the learners. When the contextual matter is above the level of pupils, they might lose interest. For this reason many a time the main text is simplified to keep up the interest of the learners and motivate them to go on reading. Let us take the example of “A Christmas Carol”, which is one of the finest piece of work by Charles Dickens. The story line is a famous literary work, celebrated all over the world. However the original version of the text is a bit difficult for the learners of second language English. The usage of vocabulary is quite tough to follow, for example look at the vocabulary used during the conversation between Bob and Scrooge regarding the Christmas holiday:

“You want all day off tomorrow” (simplified version)

“You’ll want all day tomorrow” (original text)

So from the above we can say that in the simplified text the purpose is clearly stated but in the original version the sense is implied. Moreover the learners having uneasiness in acquiring English language would find difficulty in grasping the rich imagery and symbolism used in the main text. The Students reading the abridged version has a better understanding of the plot and the attributes of various characters help them to draw an insight into the message the text portrays. Although simplified text is easily understandable but due to lexical control much of irony and wit as well as author's style is affected; for instance in the last part of the Marley's ghost episode in "A Christmas Carol", Scrooge tried to say "Humbug"! but stopped at the first syllable. It might be interpreted that Scrooge was going through the process of redemption and that he may be seen as a changed man later. However in the simplified text the passage ends with – "Scrooge went straight to bed and fell asleep immediately". So here again there is no room for thinking more. Hence it is a challenging task for the writers of the abridged version to make the proper usage of words and expression to cater to the needs of different group of learners. So along with simplified text, the learners should be inspired to read the original text.

MATERIALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LSRW

Listening

Listening is an important skill because in order to be a good speaker, one needs to be a careful listener. However most of the English textbooks which are currently used for teaching either do not give any importance to listening or give inadequate practice to the learners. If we want to prepare our learners for real life listening we should introduce them to authentic materials. We can use these materials as long as the activities are designed at a standard suitable for our learners. For example we can make the learners listen to a conversation or a dialogue and ask them questions related to the topic of the conversation. Activities which can enhance listening abilities and help to improve English communication are listed below:

- Listening to Sports commentary
- Watching English movies with subtitles
- Listening to an incomplete story and guess the remaining part
- Listen to an expert on a topic and then read about it in a book and check how much of the latter matches with the expert's lecture.

Speaking

Speaking is considered to be the most difficult skill as learners face some common obstacles which come from intrapersonal barriers to communication such as anxiety, nervousness etc...Language laboratories play a very vital role in developing the speaking skills of the learners. Audio-visual aids help in pronunciation practice. Extempore speeches help to build the creative speaking abilities in the learners. In many institutes the language lab is specially designed to extend facilities for improving oral communication. Some labs have software with a virtual recorder. It promotes in enhancing the intonation of the speaker. The technology assists in improving the pronunciation of the students by playing the model pronunciation and learner's response. An ideal ELT Classroom should have such a seating arrangement which provides computers for the students to work individually. Furthermore there needs to be a LCD projector, a board, a microphone and proper acoustics so that the speaker is audible all around. A handy cam and an audio system are necessary for video records and aural activities. The video shots can be displayed with the help of the projector to facilitate the learners to see

and hear themselves in various interactive modes. This will enable them to identify their defects and rectify it and improve themselves. The lesson modules should be based on mainly focusing the enhancement of pronunciation, stress and phonetics.

Reading

Reading helps to improve knowledge, vocabulary, grammar, intonation, confidence and cross-cultural information. In everyday life most of the time we read for meaning and in order to extract meaning from the text, we have to use a variety of skills like recognizing the script of the language, understanding information which are implied, skimming and scanning to locate specifically required information and so on. As teachers we need to use certain textbooks. We choose the passage which trains our learners in reading techniques. The proper application of reading methodology is very important for the learners in attempting comprehensions. As we know that understanding of comprehensions are vital to the students for cracking most of the competitive examinations, so in order to prepare the learners for competitive examinations, the selection of passage is very crucial. We should take care to see that learners are able to attempt short answer type questions, MCQ, True/False type questions related to the passage. The teacher should also ensure that the questions cannot be answered without reading the text (i, e, it should not be possible for the learners to answer the questions using their General Knowledge).

Writing

It is often found that learners are reluctant to spend much time on writing in the class. However several studies on writing have shown that most students have very low writing proficiency. Hence considering this scenario there is a need to develop suitable materials to enhance writing skills for the learners. The use of self-made instructional materials is one of the effective strategies to facilitate learner's skills in writing. These instructional materials can be prepared keeping in mind certain writing competency levels of the students such as lack of appropriate vocabulary, inaccuracy in grammar(word order, use of prepositions, tenses etc...)

Task based instruction enable learners to perform real life target activities using language like filling up any kind of official application forms, describing a picture in own words, listening to a conversation and writing that etc...The best part of using information from everyday life help the learners confront selected language items in the kind of context where they naturally occur rather than the circumstances that have been assembled by a textbook writer.

CONCLUSIONS

The materials are considered as a determining element in the relationship among the teacher, learner and the language. Control of the resources and materials available reflects the teacher's capability in ELT. Materials should be designed as per Syllabus and curriculum framework. Gradation of materials is necessary to suit the learner's requirements. Traditional materials should be integrated with the latest technology oriented resources to achieve the objective of successful teaching-learning of the basic skills of language.

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