

Challenges (What, Why and How) of Material Production For the ESL Learners at the Tertiary Level

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Material production is an important area in ELT, it remains mostly a neglected area of research in Indian scenario for want of professional approach by the teachers of English. A teacher of English is expected to nourish a desire for professional development in material production for which one has to face many challenges. The teacher generated materials can be always preferred to the commercially produced materials. The present article ventures to trace various pivotal principles behind the material production and reviews the challenges and concerns from the English teachers' point of view.

1. Introduction

Tomlinson defines material production as “anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to exploit those sources in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake” (2). Though material production is an important area in ELT, it remains mostly a neglected area of research in Indian scenario for want of professional approach by the teachers of English. As such, the material production in ELT demands multifarious skills. A teacher of English is expected to nourish a desire for professional development in material production for which one has to face many challenges. Material production is both artistic inspiration and rational process. As Low puts it, (qtd. in Johnson) “designing appropriate materials is not a science: it is a strange mixture of imagination, insight and analytical reasoning” (153). Considering the daunting task of producing materials, most of the teachers at the tertiary level resort to choose ready-made materials produced by commercial publishers. As a result the learning process of the learners is adversely and seriously affected.

Let us analyse the setback with the commercially produced materials. The commercially produced materials may not have been produced keeping the learners' situations and needs in mind. Nunez and Tellez (2008) observe the absence of complete course book which caters to the needs of the learners and fulfils the expectations of the teachers as well. Their observation is a clarion call to the teachers of English to take up the task of producing materials that will match the specific needs of their learners. Such ventures are bound to mould the teachers

into professionals. The present article ventures to trace various pivotal principles behind the material production and reviews the challenges and concerns from the English teachers' point of view.

2. Demands of Material Production

It is worth-noting that every ESL classroom has its own diversity. Learners' learning speed varies and the manner in which they internalize is different as well. Nunez and Tellez (2009) suggest that the teacher who designs the materials should consider this diversity in order to "keep a balance among students' language learning needs, preferences, motivations and expectations, their affective needs, and the institutional policies" (173).

In a similar way, the teacher designer of materials should keep in mind to encourage pair and group learning activities. Jacobs and Stephen maintain that ". . . cooperative learning is associated with benefits in such key areas as learning, self-esteem, liking for school, and interethnic relations" (53). Such activities generally boost the learners' motivation, enhance self-esteem in students and reduce anxiety and prejudice.

In second and foreign language learning, theorists propose several advantages for cooperative learning: increased student talk, more varied talk, a more relaxed atmosphere, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amounts of comprehensible input. (53)

The added advantage is that the learners share a lot of information and increase their subject learning. Further the learners develop a sense of belonging towards their class.

It is very relevant to focus on another valuable element of enjoyment in the material Production. Toasta and Small also assert the necessity of incorporating elements in the material produced that would ensure joyful learning for the learners. The students are naturally motivated and engaged in a convenient, warm-hearted and challenging learning atmosphere.

An essential element of success in an EFL classroom is the possibility for the class to be an opportunity to learn and the students to find learning enjoyable. For this reason, teachers ought to create materials that promote pleasant learning settings, thereby fostering, motivation, interaction and long-term learning. (173)

The next demand placed before the teacher designer of materials is creating effective teaching-learning environments. In this regard Tomlinson (web) is of the opinion that the

materials produced should facilitate the increasing of the learners' knowledge of the language, understanding of it and at the same time helping them to learn "what they want and need to learn."

The teacher-designer of materials should keep in mind the meaningfulness and relevance of materials to the learners. It is advisable to take into account the learners' needs, interests, attitudes and expectations. The teacher-designer should develop the materials so as to develop effective, appropriate and flexible learning situations for their students and for their language programmes.

3. Why should teachers produce materials?

Block earnestly supports the teachers of English to produce materials for their own settings and learners' needs. He persuades the teachers of English to take up the moral responsibility of designing materials professionally for their learners. He produces certain solid reasons to motivate the teachers. He enumerates the following reasons. They are as follows:

3.1. Contextualization

3.2. Timeliness

3.3. The Personal Touch

3.1. Contextualization provides an ample opportunity to the teachers to gauge the particular learning environment. It helps the teachers to overcome the limitations of the commercial course books. Moreover, the ready-made course books concentrate on various features of grammar explicitly which can be deeply disengaging. Having more control over the material, a teacher can always have a variety of topics, situations, functions etc., to be incorporated in the materials. Thus from a vast range of possibilities, the teacher can create flexible materials (Nunez & Tellez 2009: 173) which Tomlinson (web) calls 'flexible frameworks'. While choosing a context for a material, Block endorses realistic and interesting contexts instead of fictitious contexts "... which students have never heard of and obviously have absolutely no emotional tie to" (213). Thus he concludes that choosing 'realistic contexts' would always anticipate the students' active participation during the administration of teacher-made materials.

3.2. Timeliness is an added advantage in teacher-constructed materials. The teacher-designer of materials always has a free hand to update the materials with regional, national and international events if necessary. Consequently, the teaching-learning moment can be readily altered, adjusted and anticipated to avoid the 'lack of fit' problem of the commercially produced materials.

3.3. The third argument in favour of teacher-generated materials is the personal touch. With a well-designed material, a teacher of English can always authentically appeal to the learners. Learners will also feel that the material has been specially designed by their teacher and specially for them to learn the language. Block believes that “students appreciate teachers who prepare their classes, and materials give clear and tangible evidence of preparation” (214). Thus teachers who are aspiring to produce materials can take pride in designing their own materials for their students.

4. Essentials of Material Production

In order to develop the materials, a teacher needs to keep in mind certain fundamental aspects. They are as follows:

4.1. Target Population & Need Analysis

4.2. Principles of Language Acquisition

4.3. Principles and Strategic Components of Material Production

4.1. Target Population & Need Analysis: Before commencing to develop materials, the teacher-producer has to fix the target population of learners. Once the target population is decided upon the teacher-producer has to grapple with the need analysis. Nunez and Tellez (2009) agree with the opinion that “the importance of including students’ voices in order to update teaching materials in terms of the way learners would like to learn” (172) is justifiable. Bose insists on the same point to develop appropriate tasks in the materials “depending on the needs of the learners” (19).

4.2. Principles of Language Acquisition: According to Tomlinson (web) the following are the acceptable principles of language acquisition.

4.2.1. The learners are exposed to a rich, meaningful and comprehensible input of language in use.

4.2.2. The learners need to be engaged both affectively and cognitively in the language experience.

4.2.3. The learners who achieve positive affect are much more likely to achieve communicative competence than those who do not.

4.2.4. The learners can benefit from using those mental resources which they typically utilize when acquiring and using their L1.

4.2.5. The learners can benefit from noticing salient features of the input.

4.2.6. The learners need opportunities to use language to try to achieve communicative purposes.

4.3. Principles and Strategic Components of Material Production: Tomlinson (1998) considers the following principles of material production to be fundamental in order to strategically help the learners acquire English.

4.3.1. Materials should achieve impact.

4.3.2. Materials should help learners to feel at ease.

4.3.3. Materials should help learners to develop confidence.

4.3.4. Materials should require and facilitate learner self-investment.

4.3.5. Materials should expose the learners to language in authentic use.

4.3.6. Materials should provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language to achieve communicative purposes.

4.3.7. Material-designers should take into account that the positive effects of instruction are usually delayed.

4.3.8. Material-designers should take into account that learners differ in learning styles.

4.3.9. Material-designers should take into account that learners differ in affective attitudes.

4.3.10. Material-designers should permit a silent period at the beginning of instruction.

4.3.11. Materials should maximise learning potential by encouraging intellectual, aesthetic and emotional involvement which stimulates both right and left brain activities.

4.3.12. Materials should not rely too much on controlled practice.

4.3.13. Materials should provide opportunities for outcome feedback.

5. Challenges

Taking material Production as a challenge will always nourish a professional growth and accomplishment in the long term of teaching career. Material production takes a prominent place among ELT scholars for there is a great demand for materials to the specific needs of the learners. After the onset of globalization varied groups of learners learn English for various purposes. Commercially produced materials suffer from lack of 'fit' syndrome. An

English teacher cannot just prescribe one course book to all purposes. An aspiring teacher-producer of materials will be faced with the following challenges:

- 5.1. Heterogeneity of learners
- 5.2. Linking with existing institutional objectives
- 5.3. Need analysis (learner-centred materials)
- 5.4. Peer evaluation and approval
- 5.5. Generating principled ELT material Production
- 5.6. Designing an attractive layout (Sheldon 8)
- 5.7. Re-enriching of materials
- 5.8. Time-consuming and strenuous nature of production
- 5.9. Teacher's aptitude and attitude towards material production
- 5.10. Overall professionalism in the production and administration in the classroom

6. Conclusion

Besides discussing the Production of materials, there are various other aspects that an English teacher has to consider for teacher development and teacher responsibility. Pettis is of the opinion that "development of teaching competence is our professional responsibility, and we can undertake a wide range of activities in fulfillment of this obligation" (395). Material production is one of the choicest ELT areas that would render professional satisfaction in classroom teaching-learning situations. "... as educators we must make a personal commitment to our own ongoing professional growth" (395). It would bestow upon the teacher-producer of materials the intellectual growth, aesthetic pleasure and moral uprightness. Its cherishing of teaching moments and nourishing of learning moments are chiefly overwhelming.

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