
UNIT 1 TEACHING-LEARNING MATERIALS - THEIR NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Any teaching learning programme would always have material to support the objectives of the learning programme. This is important to ensure that the expected learning outcomes are achieved. What are these materials? How are they developed? What are the implications of course books?

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- understand the concept of materials in language teaching;
- explain the processes involved in material development;
- discuss the features of course books;
- discuss the implications of different materials for the language learning process; and
- select appropriate teaching-learning materials for your ESL learners.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In any course of study, we would have a curriculum designed with a structured syllabus and the syllabus supported by textbooks that would take the learner through the course. The course would subsequently be evaluated through various approaches. As a learner our first step when we join a course of studies would be to find out which textbooks/materials would help us to tackle the course laid down for the subject. An adult learner may take the help of different text books to approach the course. Recommended books from the library would also be of great use. However, if we were to teach a course, we would at the outset identify the book(s) selected for the course of study. Textbooks, course books, teaching/instructional materials are the most tangible materials for use by the teacher and the student. These give direction to the teacher, help in the completion of the course, and are a strong guideline for examination preparation. While they are not acceptable in all contexts, textbooks also help the students in being successful in examinations as very often examinations are textbook-based. Materials, thus are without doubt an important part of our formal educational system.

1.2 WHY DO WE USE MATERIALS?

Language instruction has five important components - learners, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation. Why are materials important in language instruction? What do materials do in language instruction? Can we teach English without a textbook?

There are many views on whether text books are the right materials for use in a classroom. Here are two views:

The school of thought led by Allwright (1981) argues

- 1) Text books are too inflexible to be used directly as instructional material. They control the content, methods, and procedures of learning and teaching. The way the textbook presents material is the way students learn it.
- 2) On the other hand materials should teach students to learn. They should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning.

O'Neill (1982), argues

- Textbooks make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons. They are efficient in terms of time and money.
- Textbooks can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation.
- They help the learning and teaching process. The educational philosophy of the textbook will influence the class and the learning process.

Teachers who are experienced may be able to produce material for teaching but by and large in spite of all the criticism against text books, most classroom teaching rely heavily on prescribed materials. Today it is a recognised fact that the learner is the most important aspect of any learning process. Curriculum, materials, teaching methods and evaluation is therefore designed to suit the learners' needs. The teacher is responsible to ensure how the said needs are addressed. They may adapt, supplement, and elaborate on those materials and also monitor the progress and needs of the students and finally evaluate students.

Though students should be the centre of instruction, in many cases the materials become the centre of instruction. Since many teachers are busy and do not have the time or inclination to prepare extra materials, textbooks and other commercially produced materials are very important in language instruction. Therefore, it is important for teachers to know how to choose the best material for instruction, how to make supplementary materials for the class, and how to adapt materials.

Materials include textbooks, video and audio tapes, computer software, and visual aids. They influence the content and often the process of learning. The choice of deductive vs. inductive learning, the role of memorization, the use of creativity and problem-solving ability, production vs. reception, and the order in which materials are presented are all influenced by materials.

Technology, such as OHP, slides, video and audio tape recorders, video cameras, computers, and mobiles support instruction/learning.

Very often the material selected could also have a hidden curriculum. This could include attitude towards:

- Knowledge
- Teaching and learning
- The role and relationship of the teacher and student
- The values and attitude towards society and of society
- The approach to learning a language
- The linguistic and cultural information that the writer considers important.

Language should as far as possible be based on standard accepted forms of English. Vocabulary should be familiar to the students and if new words are introduced, they should be done gradually. Grammar also needs to be functional. A variety of literary forms is advisable in the preparation of material like newspaper articles, poems, letters etc. so that students are introduced to authentic texts which they are likely to encounter in real life.

A text book should as far as possible be related contextually to the cultural background of the students. It should have the following characteristics:

- **Content:** The content should be interesting and motivating and cover a wide range of subjects.
- **Difficulty:** The difficulty level should ensure that the text is challenging and introduces new levels of proficiency. However, it should not be too hard that the student feels frustrated.
- **Instructional issues:** The teachers and students should be very clear about the task set and the expectations from them.
- **Support for learning:** This can take the form of vocabulary lists, exercises which cover or expand on the content, visual aids, technology, etc.

Some Concerns

Companies use all sorts of means to promote their text books/materials. One must be careful not to be led astray by promotional talk. When selecting material from other sources, copyright issues must be kept in mind.

To conclude, let us remember that all materials control instruction at least in the present Indian context. So, in the choice of materials it must be emphasised that they must be appropriate to the level, fulfil learner needs and must be based on correct, natural and current English.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Why are textbooks important for learners and teachers alike?

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2) In your opinion should examinations be based entirely on textbooks prescribed for the course? Justify your answer.

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3) How do you think the teacher and the learner can deal with inadequacies in the textbooks?

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4) Why are textbooks said to be limiting instruction?

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5) Textbooks are said to be necessary in spite of some weaknesses. Why?

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6) Discuss the importance of the learner when designing materials.

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7) What are the materials today that are included in any instruction?

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8) What are the characteristics on which materials are based?

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9) What aspects of the learner should be kept in mind when selecting material?

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1.3 MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Materials development involves understanding how materials are developed, designed and customized for language teaching-learning. The process involves both teachers and materials writers. The teacher evaluates the material for use in the classroom while the writers conceive and prepare the material based on the teacher /learner needs.

Current Trends

The publishing trade certainly dominates material developments. While they do claim that it is supported by research on what teachers and children need, this may not be entirely true, as the trade is often driven by economic and commercial pressures. Unfortunately, teachers and true language experts are unable to compete with the publishing trade and so tend to eventually give in to them. However, some positive trends with regard to the production of material are:

- Materials requiring investment by learner where they discover for themselves the intricacies of the language and content,
- Interactive learning packages which use different media to provide richer experiences of the language.

Materials and Resources for Language Teaching

- Extensive reader series that do not rely just on language activities but provoke the reader to think as well.
- Personalized texts that refer the learner to actual life and the use of language in such situations.
- Increased use of internet sources for language learning.
- Introduction of functional grammar rather than rules of grammar.
- More and more government research institutions like the NCERT etc. are involved in preparing materials where there is no commercial angle to these materials.

Some negative trends exhibited in material production are:

- A rising emphasis on grammar driven texts.
- The texts used are often very short and do not take the reader through the language experience.
- Literature tends to get neglected in the course books.
- Most of the activities are language stimulated and do not focus on critical and analytical thinking.
- Most of the books and the activities underestimate the learner linguistically, intellectually and emotionally.

Areas of focus in developing materials should be :

- localization and personalization of materials
- emphasis on creativity and flexibility
- more learner centred
- more content that is meaningful to the learner
- global and multicultural content
- content that engages the learner and challenges him/her
- more involvement of other sources like media, internet, technology etc.
- more workshops to train teachers to write materials.

It is always advisable in the interest of the language learner that these books are developed by professionals who are experienced and competent in the area of language learning and teaching and who are not led by commercial needs of publishing houses. Teachers, very often do not make good material writers, but if given the right training and exposure there is no reason to believe that this is not possible. Experiments in many parts of the world where national institutes have involved teachers in writing materials have proved that teachers can make great contributions to text book writing.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Why is it said that materials development must involve both teachers and material writers?

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2) What are some of the positive trends in materials production?

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3) What are some of the negative trends in materials production?

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4) What are the three things to be kept in mind when preparing or choosing materials?

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1.4 SELECTION OF MATERIALS: THE COURSE BOOK

Any language learning course is supported by materials often referred to as the Course Book. The Course book has become to most learners and teachers ‘the heart of the programme’. The plethora of material available in the market makes it a challenging task to select the right course book.

In the early days, ELT course books usually had a number of reading texts with comprehension questions and a few grammar and vocabulary exercises. Today course books are offered as packages for language teaching and learning. It includes workbooks, teacher guides, audio and video support. Selection of the course book is therefore a very important decision to be made by the teacher. The success or failure of the course book is dependent on a number of variables.

These relate to the learner goals and needs and many more criteria. It is important to keep in mind the theoretical and pedagogical assumptions underlying the creation of these course books. While conventional wisdom will help prioritize the potential of the material, it is important to look at the materials from the point of flexibility, adaptability and relevance to the changing needs, goals and interests of modern day language learners.

Course books- Controversies

There are different schools of thought with regard to the utility of course books. In recent years some schools have expressed the view that published materials do not provide all the input that a teacher is seeking to engage with the students in the classroom. They tend to restrict the teacher and the learner by pre determining the content and teaching procedures. Since course books are usually produced centrally by a group, driven sometimes by government policy they could be viewed as some form of institutional control and could be disempowering for the teacher.

There is a great deal of advocacy today for teacher generated materials. This is more aligned to the concept of learner centred classrooms and makes the material more relevant and motivating for the learner. Yet there are issues in this approach because it is too time-consuming, it is dependent on teacher quality and may not be standardized. Course books on the other hand have the following advantages (Bell and Gower, 1998)

Course books:

- are very practical in a non-English speaking environment where teacher may not be adequately trained.
- provide a route map for the teacher and learner to remain in touch with what has been taught and what will be taught.
- provide structure and predictability.
- free the teacher to attend to more important tasks like lesson planning, and using their creative skills to create more tasks.
- support the teachers who lack experience and training.
- are usually developed by experts who follow a theoretical and methodological approach and this could be superior to teacher developed material.
- can be agents of change and help introduce new concepts into teaching-learning.

So, course books are here with us to stay. We only need to ensure that in their usage they do not take away creativity and responsibility from teachers and learners. They need to support the dynamic and interactive process of learning. They should be flexible enough for teachers to use them for the individual learner and above all they must be motivating, interesting and lively for both the teacher and the learner. They should encourage the learners to think critically and analytically.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What does the term course book imply?

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2) How are course books different today?

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3) What are the points to keep in mind in the selection of course books?

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4) What is the controversy regarding course books?

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5) What are the advantages of course books?

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to introduce you to the concept of learning materials in English language teaching. The positive and negative effects of prescribed materials have been discussed at length. While course books play an important part in any teaching learning scenario, we have tried to bring out the importance of using other materials like audio, visuals etc. The teachers' role and significance in the selection of material, in identifying the needs of the learner and in providing the writers with the necessary expertise has been brought out throughout the unit. The course writer's role today has also been seen as a theoretical and pedagogical expert. Materials must be above all flexible and adaptable so that the teacher and the learner who are the ultimate users can really use them to support the teaching learning scenario in the classroom. We hope this unit has been a learning experience.

1.6 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Textbooks give direction to the teacher and student about the course to be covered. They also provide direction when preparing for an examination.
- 2) No, examinations must go beyond the course books. This would help the learner expose himself/herself to much more than just the text books. It would also prevent rote learning from a text.
- 3) Inadequacies in textbooks can be dealt with by using other recommended reading material, and using the library to enrich the language skills. Teachers can look at authentic material. They can also create their own material.
- 4) Textbooks are said to limit learning if we depend only on them because:
 - textbooks are too inflexible.
 - they control the content, methods, and procedures of learning and teaching.
 - the way the textbook present material is the way students learn it.
 - they control the assessment process.
- 5) Textbooks are said to be necessary because:
 - they make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons
 - they are efficient in terms of time and money
 - they allow for adaptation and improvisation
 - the educational philosophy of the textbook will influence the students and the learning process.
 - they can be resources for ideas and activities.
- 6) Today the learner is the most important factor in any teaching learning scenario. The curriculum, materials and the teaching must be adapted to the learner who is being addressed. The textbook must be flexible so that activities can be added or modified to suit the learner and the learning context.

- 7) Besides textbooks, audio tapes, videos, computer software, visual aids, teaching and learning aids are used. Materials used will influence the methodology used in teaching to a large extent.
- 8) The characteristics on which material is based are:
 - world knowledge
 - teaching and learning context and process
 - the role and relationship of the teacher and student
 - the values and attitude towards society
 - the approach to learning a language
 - the linguistic and cultural information that the writer considers important
- 9) The aspects of the learner to be kept in mind are:
 - Language should be simple
 - Grammar and vocabulary should be age specific
 - Material should be learner friendly
 - A variety of literary forms should be used
 - It should suit the learner culturally

Some other points include:

- Content: The content should be interesting and motivating and cover a range of subjects.
- Difficulty: The difficulty level should ensure that the text is challenging and introduces new levels of proficiency.
- Instructional issues: The teachers and students should be very clear about the task set and the expectations from them
- Support for learning: This can take the form of vocabulary lists, exercises which cover or expand on the content, visual aids

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The teacher is able to evaluate the needs of the learner and convey it to the material writer. This helps the writer conceive the text book more appropriately and make it learner centred and learner partnered.
- 2) Some of the positive trends are:
 - Materials requiring investment by learner where they discover for themselves the intricacies of the language
 - Interactive learning packages which use different media to provide richer experiences in language
 - Extensive reader series that do not rely just on language but provoke the reader to think critically as well
 - Personalized texts that relate to the learners to actual life and the use of language in such situations

- Increased use of internet sources for language learning.
 - Introduction of functional grammar rather than rules of grammar
 - More and more government research institutions like the NCERT etc. are involved in preparing materials and there is no commercial angle to these materials
- 3) Some of the negative trends are:
- A rising emphasis on grammar driven texts with exercises to drill in different aspects of grammar
 - The texts used are often very short and do not take the reader through the language experience.
 - Literature tends to get neglected in the course books.
 - Most of the activities are language stimulated and do not focus on critical and analytical thinking
 - Most of the books and the activities underestimate the learner linguistically, intellectually and emotionally
- 4) The needs of the learner, the teacher's needs and the language policies of the government should be kept in mind when choosing materials. The materials should offer flexibility so that the teacher can adapt the material to her student needs. They should also focus on current social issues in society so that the students can be critically engaged with the text.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Course books refer to the books prescribed for a particular course of study.
- 2) In the past course books were merely reading texts with comprehension questions, grammar and vocabulary practice. Today it is offered as a package for language teaching and learning and includes work books, teacher guides, audio and video support.
- 3) Besides keeping the theoretical and pedagogical assumptions in mind, it is important that the materials are flexible, adaptable and relevant to the changing trends, goals and interests of the learners.
- 4) It is said that they restrict the teacher by being too policy driven and enforcing a predetermined content. This could be disempowering to the teacher.
- 5) Advantages of course books:
 - are practical in a non-English speaking environment where teachers may not be adequately trained
 - provide a route map for the teacher and learner to remain in touch with what has been taught and what will be taught.
 - provide structure and predictability
 - frees the teacher to attend to more important tasks like lesson planning, and using their creative skills

- support the teachers who lack experience and training
- are usually developed by experts who follow a theoretical and methodological approach and this could be superior to teacher developed material
- can be agents of change and help introduce new concepts into the teaching-learning process.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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