|  |
| --- |
| **EFL MATERIALS: THEIR TYPES, ROLES, AND FUNCTIONS IN THE ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS** |
| ABSTRACT  There may be various reasons for looking closely at materials to see if they are appropriate for the students. Whatever the reasons for considering whether materials are appropriate for the students, the decision that a teacher takes is vital since s/he can take at least some of his/her ideas from the textbook. Good instructional materials are an important part of the process of institution. Materials which are as attractive and user-friendly as possible should be created in response to a perceived need on the part of the users, and not because they are simply available. Even when materials selection meets this simple criterion, there is no guarantee that it is effective  There are various types of EFL teaching materials as they are discussed such as traditional materials which are often contradicted with communicative materials, commercial and non-commercial materials, teacher-developed/adapted/made materials, authentic and non-authentic materials. Furthermore, the roles and functions of EFL materials in the English teaching and learning process for the EFL teachers can serve as a master, a servant, an end, resources, teaching aids and as a syllabus. For EFL students, the materials may serve as self-tutor and learning aids.  Key words: EFL materials, EFL learners, ELT and learning process  **Introduction**  EFL (English as a Foreign Language) material is one of the most important factors that has a big influence on the achievement of the goal of English teaching. Low in Nunan (1991:209) states that designing appropriate materials is not a science; it is a strange mixture of imagination, insight and analytical reasoning, and this fact must be recognized when materials are assessed. Nevertheless, the selection processes can be greatly facilitated by the use of systematic material evaluation procedures which help ensure that materials are consistent with the needs and interests of the learners they are intended to serve, as well as being in harmony with institutional ideologies on the nature of language and learning.  There may be various reasons for looking closely at materials to see if they are appropriate for the students. Whatever the reasons for considering whether materials are appropriate for the students, the decision that a teacher takes is vital since s/he can take at least some of his/her ideas from the textbook. Good instructional materials are an important part of the process of institution. They are set out to teach through the process of (1) defining instructional objectives, (2) setting learning tasks or activities to attain the objectives, (3) informing learners of what tasks they have to perform, (4) providing guidance in how to perform tasks, (5) providing practice in performing tasks, (6) providing feedback on performance, and (7) enhancing retention of the skills the learner acquired through performing tasks.  Materials which are as attractive and user-friendly as possible should be created in response to a perceived need on the part of the users, and not because they are simply available. Even when materials selection meets this simple criterion, there is no guarantee that it is effective. McCall (1984) observes that the fact that materials are selected for use and even receive a positive response from the students is not necessarily proof of the value of those materials.  Richards and Rodgers (1986:25) have pointed out that the distinctive features of instructional materials within a functional/communicative methodology might be specified in the following terms:  1) Materials will focus on the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation.  2) Materials will focus on understandable, relevant, and interesting exchanges of information rather than on the presentation of grammatical form.  3) Materials will involve different kinds of texts and different kinds of media, which the learners can use to develop their competence through a variety of different activities and tasks. Considering the third point above, it is clear that as English teachers, we need to use various materials, media, different activities and tasks which are suitable with the students' needs and interests in order to make the students interested in studying English seriously.   **Types of EFL Materials** In most, if not all, foreign language teaching situations, EFL materials play a crucial role because they are the main teaching and learning aids. EFL materials can be in the form of textbooks, course notes or handouts, or recordings. EFL teachers, therefore, should have broader knowledge of the kinds of EFL materials, and of selecting and developing materials for their classroom use.  There are various types of EFL teaching materials as they are discussed in the following.   1. **Traditional vs. Communicative Materials** The term traditional is used here, to describe a type of the material (textbook) rather than mentioned how old the textbook is. These kinds of textbook are still being published. These try to get students to learn a language as a system. Once they have learned the system, it is hoped that they are then equipped to use the language for their own purpose in any way they think fit. The characteristics of the traditional textbooks, which are pointed out by Grant (1987:13), are: a. They tend to emphasize the forms or patterns of language (the grammar) more than the communicative functions of language. b. They tend to focus on reading and writing activities, rather than listening and speaking activities. c. They often make use of a great deal of L1. d. They emphasize the importance of accuracy. e. They tend to focus rather narrowly on a syllabus and examinations. f. They are often attractive to some teachers, because they seem easy to use, and are highly examination-oriented.   The traditional textbooks are still used since they have a great advantage that a teacher can use them without too much difficulty. However, a problem with traditional textbook is also found that students work through them, sometimes for years, and often conscientiously, whereas, they are incapable of using the language.  Communicative textbooks, then, try to overcome the problem found in the traditional textbook by creating opportunities for the students to use the language in the classroom before using in real life. Nowadays, the word communicative has not been strange. Mostly the new textbook claims to be communicative. Communicative textbooks vary quite a lot, but very broadly, they have the following characteristics: a. They emphasize the communicative functions of language, not just the forms. b. They try to reflect the students' needs and interests. c. They emphasize skills in using the language, not just the forms of language, and they are therefore activity-based. d. They usually have a good balance among the four language skills, but may emphasize listening and speaking more than a traditional textbook does. e. They tend to be very specific in their definition of aims. f. Both contents and methods reflect the authentic language of everyday life. g. They encourage work in-groups and pairs, and therefore make heavier demands on teachers' organizational abilities. h. They emphasize fluency, not just accuracy.  Grant (1987:14) further states that a communicative activity is any classroom exercise that helps the students to use the language they have learned in the classroom in real life.  **Some examples of communicative activities are as follows:** - Students listen to authentic language of real-life purposes. For example, the students might listen to a recording of an airport announcement. - Students talk to each other as they might in real life with an English speaker, for example, to find out something they do not know. We call these information-gap exercises; the idea is to give the students a purpose for communication. - Students use reading skills such as those needed in finding information, or the main points, from a newspaper article, etc. which they may need to use in real life. - Students express themselves in writing in realistic situations, and for realistic purposes, for example, writing a postcard to a pen friend, completing an application form, making notes.  **2. Commercial vs. Non-Commercial Materials** There is a certain amount of controversy associated with the use of commercial materials, particularly course-books. One of the major concerns is that any given course-book will be incapable of catering the diversity of needs, which exists in most language classrooms.  Commercial materials (textbooks) are largely produced in various levels, and available in the market. They can be for general English and English for specific purposes. Non-commercial textbooks are usually produced for exclusive use to meet the curricular objectives. The government as a grant usually provides them.  When selecting commercial materials, it is important to match the materials with the goals and objectives of the program, and to ensure that they are consistent with one's beliefs about the nature of language and learning, as well as with one's learners' attitudes, beliefs and preferences.  Sheldon in Nunan (1991:209) provides an extensive checklist of questions, which can aid in the selection of commercial materials. He proposes that materials should be evaluated according to criteria such as their rationale, accessibility, layout and ease of use. A somewhat more accessible list of evaluative questions is provided by Breen and Candlin (1987:14-23). Their checklist invites the teacher to adopt a critical stance toward the materials' aims, appropriateness and utility.  Furthermore, Littlejohn and Windeatt in Nunan (1991:209) suggest that commercial materials can be evaluated from six different perspectives:  (a) the general or subject knowledge contained in the materials,  (b) views on the nature and acquisition of knowledge,  (c) views on the nature of language learning,  (d) role relations implicit in materials,  (e) opportunities for the development of cognitive abilities, and  (f) the values and attitudes inherent in the materials.  **3. Teacher-Developed/Adapted/Made Materials** To cater as many existing needs and to meet the learning objectives in the EFL classroom, teachers are often urged to adapt and develop materials based on the available ones, or make their own. Of course, this is not an easy thing to do. Good teacher-made materials are arguably the best there are: relevant and personalized, answering the needs of the learners in a way no other materials can. The teacher-developed/adapted/made materials can be in the form of course notes, lesson units, or handouts. Furthermore, Ur (1996:193) gives some guidelines for teacher-made materials that they should: - be neat: clean, with level lines of neat writing, clear margins, different components well spaced; - begin with short and clear instructions (if appropriate, in the learners' mother tongue), usually including an example; - be clear and attractive to look at: have a balanced and varied layout, using underlining and other forms of emphasis to draw attention to significant items; possibly using color and graphic illustration; - be clearly do-able by the learners on their own; - (optionally) include a self-check facility.  **4. Authentic vs. Non-Authentic Materials**  **Authentic texts** (either written or spoken) are those which are designed for native speakers: they are real texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language in question. Any English newspaper is composed of what we would call authentic English, and so is an English radio program. An English advertisement is an example of authentic English, so is a chapter from a book on teaching methodology written by Englishman for English-speaking readers. The use of English authentic materials will enable the EFL learners to understand the language as the native speakers of English use it. It is true that understanding EFL texts especially edited for ELT (English Language Teaching) does not guarantee that authentic English materials will be understood. There is an almost unlimited supply of real-world textual materials (authentic materials) which can be used by the creative EFL teachers to meet their classroom needs of materials, e.g. schedules, calendars, advertisements, menus, notes, receipts, coupons, tickets, and the list goes on. An authentic material for listening subject, however, is very different from reading, where, because the learners can work individually and at their own pace, authentic material carries fewer risks. In the typical listening situation, care has to be taken to see that learners are not discouraged by excessive difficulties. In general, authentic materials are best used where the learners themselves are likely to appreciate them and accept them in spite of difficulties. One such area is that of pop songs, where the learners are rarely put off by difficulties and hardly ever taken in by the pseudo-product.   **A non-authentic text**, in language teaching terms, is one that has been written especially for language students. The argument for using authentic materials is derived from the notion, that the most effective way to develop a particular skill is to rehearse that skill in class. Proponents of authentic materials point out that classroom texts and dialogues do not adequately prepare learners for copying with the language they hear and read in the real world outside the classroom. They argue that if we want learners to comprehend aural and written texts in the real world, then the learners need opportunities for engaging in these real-world texts in class. In relation to spoken language, Porter and Roberts in Nunan (1989:54) suggest that materials written specifically for English language teaching have the following features which make them different from genuine speech:  Intonation - marked by unusually wide and frequent pitch movement  Received pronunciation - most speakers on British ELT tapes have an RP accent which is different from that which learners will normally hear in Britain  Enunciation - words are enunciated with excessive precision  Structural repetition - particular structures/functions recur with obtrusive frequency  Complete sentences - sentences are short and well-formed  Distinct turn-taking - one speaker waits until the other has finished  Pace - this is typically slow  Quantity - speakers generally say about the same amount  Attention signals - these 'uhuh's' and 'mm's' are generally missing  Formality - materials are biased toward standardized language; swearing and slang are rare  Limited vocabulary - few references to specific, real-world entities and events  Too much information - generally more explicit reference to people, objects and experiences than in real language  Mutilation - texts rarely marred by outside noise  **The Roles and Functions of EFL Materials** In general, EFL materials have twin functions:  (1) EFL materials offer information and data about English, the social context and culture within which communication takes place and derives much of its meaning and value. In this sense, EFL materials need to be authentic in terms of communication and to the world outside the classroom;  (2) EFL materials promote learning. They fulfil this in the way they offer activities and tasks which challenge the competence of the learners. In this sense, the EFL materials should be: (a) based on the students' needs and world, (b) challenging that is having the right level of difficulty and within the students' reach (in terms of the students' knowledge and experience), (c) reflecting the real life use of the language (authentic), (d) highly interesting, (e) novel, meaningful, useful, and (f) introducing both spoken and written standard form.  **For specific purposes, EFL material functions**   1. to teach English to students of non-English department, e.g. job seekers, professionals (engineer, technicians, pilots, doctors, tourism practitioners, etc); 2. to teach English on a special subject, not about the subject; 3. to teach certain forms used in the special subject.   Most, if not all, EFL teachers use a textbook or course book. Some may use one textbook only and follow every step in the textbook slavishly; others may use several different books, adapting them where necessary and supplementing them with their own materials. Thus, according to Rasyid (1992:2-3), EFL materials (textbooks) may serve different functions to the teachers, depending upon how the teachers treat them.  **1. The textbook as a master** Wright (1987:96) states that if a teacher teaches 'through' the materials, problems may occur with a textbook as the master: (1) the learning objectives are the textbook's, (2) there is little room for improvisation, and (3) teacher and learner roles may well be predetermined and contrary to expectations.  **2. The textbook as a servant** If the teacher, as Wright further states, teaches 'with' the materials, with a textbook as servant, then he is freer to improvise and adapt the course of lessons to the needs of the learners. Teachers and learners can also generate new content from within and from outside the materials, and concentrate on interpersonal relationships in the class.  **3. The textbook as an end** If the teacher teaches 'through' materials, starting from the first unit to the next, and believes that the goals set in the textbook are the things that the students have to learn, the textbook becomes an end. The teacher will then feel relieved, and think that his task is over if he has taught through the textbook.  **4. The textbook as resources** The materials in the English textbooks usually offer information and data about English and in particular about the social context and the culture within with communication take place and drive much of its meaning and value. The textbooks can fulfill this if they contain authentic materials.  **5. The textbook as teaching aids** The materials in the textbook may have a role to promote learning and language learning in particular. The textbook fulfils this role in the way the materials offer activities, tasks, and exercises which challenge the competence of the learners.  **6. The textbook as the syllabus** A textbook may be written following the order of syllabus items of a particular course. Many English textbooks for secondary schools in Indonesia, for example, in the same order of the national syllabus items (structural syllabus). On the one hand the textbooks relieve the secondary school teachers of English from the pressure of having to think of materials for every class. On the other hand, the teachers might slavishly follow the prescribed procedures in the textbook which involve a rigid sequence that is the same format from one unit to the next. This is of course not motivating, as it leaves no room for variation.  **For EFL Learners:**  **1. The textbook as a self-tutor** An English textbook may function as a self-tutor to students. For Example, most course materials for the Open University are designed in such a way that the students can learn the materials and assess themselves.  **2. The textbook as the learning aids** The learners learn through the materials for the EFL textbook, starting from the first unit to the next, under or without the teacher's instruction. They were told to learn by all means the contents of the textbook, hoping to have a good achievement at the end.  Conclusion Based on the previous discussion, the writer puts forward some points as a conclusion such as follows:  1. English teaching material is one of the most important factors that have a big influence in achieving the goal of the teaching. 2. Materials which are as attractive and user-friendly as possible should be created by the teachers in response to a perceived need on the part of the users, and not because they are easy to make them available. 3. The knowledge of EFL materials and the skill of how to develop English teaching materials using authentic materials should be possessed by the teachers of English in order that they can make their teaching more real and be in accordance with the real life situations. |