

Teacher Designed Material Focusing on Integrated Skills Approach (ISA) To Teach a Prose Lesson – An Empirical Study

Dr. M. Srilakshmi and K. Jayasree

Abstract

According to Nunan (1992) teaching materials are often the most substantial and observable component of pedagogy. In general, students are taught English by using available course textbooks. In most of the cases learning materials in the text books are not appropriate to the requirements of the students. As long as teachers have the objectives of teaching, they should not get discouraged by such a situation. Once the teacher has the objective in mind and is familiar with the needs of the learners, he/she can develop his/her own materials for the learners to accomplish the objectives or to fulfill the learner's needs. While working on Teacher-produced materials, teachers have to be skillful in choosing or designing integrated activities for their students. Integrating the four language skills enhances the focus on realistic communication which is essential in developing students' competence in English. This article throws light on material developed by teacher integrating the four language skills to teach a selected prose lesson.

Introduction

According to Tomlinson (1998) materials development refers to anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake. Generally, teachers try to use all teaching material given in the textbook. Text books are not aimed at any specific group of learners and they often try to focus on one particular skill in an unnatural way. In most of the cases a textbook does not always meet the variety of conditions in a language class (Ur, 1996; Richards, 2003). So, taking into consideration the demands and needs of students, teachers need to find teaching materials unavailable in the textbooks and alter them. In designing materials, teachers' observation and comprehension of their students is very important. While designing material the teacher must take into account the learning needs, learning preferences, learning interests, students experience etc. Also, materials development allows the teacher to promote the integration of skills as contrasted with the segregation approach. This enables the learners to acquire a clear picture of the nuances and complexity of the English language. Integrating language skills in developing material allows the teacher to keep an eye on students' progress in various skills at the same time. This way of designing material integrating the skills develops interest in students for English language and they look at it not just as a key to pass an examination but as a tool to interact with people and succeed in the later phase of their life.

Focus of This Article

This article throws light on activity-based material developed by teacher integrating the four language skills to teach a selected prose lesson. The material gives exposure in the classroom to real and unscripted language. Unlike the course books the teacher-produced material is based on real-life experiences which give scope for students to address the issues.

The empirical study emphasizes teacher-produced material using integrated skills approach to teach prose. For this study one prose lesson titled “Climatic change and human strategy” by E. K. Federov was taken from the text book by the teacher and material was designed integrating the language skills. The lesson was taught using the material and the findings revealed that teacher-produced material enabled the teacher to overcome the lack of fit of the material present in the course book.

Teacher-produced Material

1) Teacher brings four pictures relevant to the theme of the lesson to the class. Even before the lesson starts students are divided into teams and each team is given a picture. They are asked to make a discussion and jot down the key points. 10 minutes time is given. One after the other the teams share their ideas to the whole class.



2) KWL Chart

Know: Each student is individually asked to write in the given table what he/she knows about the topic. (before the lesson starts).

Want to know: Each student is individually asked to write in the given table what he/she wants to know about the topic. (before the lesson starts).

Learned: Students are encouraged to read the lesson and each student is individually asked to write in the given table what he/she has learned. (after the lesson is completed)

Topic: Climatic change and human strategy		
Know	Want to know	Learned

3) Divide the class into teams of 5 members. Now give a hand out with the following table and ask them to interview the remaining 4 in the team and fill the chart.

Name	Changes they noticed in climate over the years		
	Land	Water	Air

After the chart is filled each student is asked to come out of the team and explain the differences their friends noticed. Students can compare and check their statements from the others.

4) Students are asked to read the lesson and then complete the exercise.

Match the following by reading the text

a. Climate during the last several 100 million years	Principle
b. The planet on which we live is not	Irreversible changes

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c. The atmosphere circulation pattern is very straight forward	Adverse consequences
d. The transformation of the land surface changes	Resilient
e. A set of long term actions avoid	Homogeneous
f. Mistakes in our assessment of environment leads to	Cumulative errors
g. Scientific community and general public are more concerned	Local atmosphere circulation patterns

5) Pick one sentence from the text where present continuous tense is used and one sentence where simple past is used. After students pick the sentences they are asked to discuss the contexts where they are used.

6) Teacher highlights few words in the lesson. Students are asked to pick synonyms and antonyms of the following words from the highlighted words given in the text. Students are asked to read the text and based on the contextual meaning they are asked to answer.

Synonyms: a) Useful b) Coexisting c) Unfavorable d) Declare

Antonyms: a) Strong b) Relaxed c) Stop d) Friendly

7) Mark True/False

a) The transformation of the land surface doesn't change the local atmosphere circulation pattern.

b) Climatic changes may be irreversible in the decades immediately before us.

c) The second strategy is to make recommendations on how to avoid the adverse consequences of climatic change.

d) Several hundred million years ago the climate of the earth as a whole was much more homogenous.

e) Science is not able to find solutions to urgent problems for mankind.

8) As an individual what would be your strategy to deal with climatic changes?

Students are divided into teams and each team is given a chart. They are asked to put their ideas on the chart by responding to the question. Later the charts are displayed. The members of each team stand near their chart and the members of other teams visit and pose various questions related to the ideas they have presented.

9) Videotapes related to the lesson are shown to the students. They are then divided into teams and are instructed to discuss the content and new vocabulary. Later, individually they are asked to develop and write an imaginary dialogue conveying the theme of any of the videos. Students can be as creative as possible in conveying the theme and choosing the characters.

10) After-class assignment: Students are given an assignment related to the lesson. They have to work in a group of four or five to complete one after-class assignment. For example: Each group

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has to select one video related to the theme of the lesson (teacher gives titles of videos and students have to choose one among them), such as future global warming, global warming 101 etc., then watch it, write a new version, prepare a power point presentation and present it at the assigned time. Also, each group has to include suggestions and the practical possibilities of implementing them in their presentation.

Findings

- The teacher-designed material was able to address the individual needs and heterogeneity existing in the classroom.
- It avoided the one-size-fits-all approach.
- Tapping the interest and taking into account the different learning styles of students increased motivation and involvement in learning.
- There was also greater choice, freedom and scope for spontaneity when teacher-designed material was used.
- Learners developed confidence and were at ease.
- The material provided the learners with opportunities to use language in various situations.
- As the integrated-skills approach (ISA) was used while designing the material it enhanced the focus on true communication which is vital in developing students' competence in English. This approach allowed the teacher to track students' progress in various skills and promoted the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms. In toto it gave much scope for improving all the LSRW skills
- The teacher-produced material enabled the students to comprehend the text completely.
- The teacher-produced material helped the learners to retain the text for a longer time as they had to refer to the text numerous times to complete the exercises.
- The teacher-produced material gave much scope for improving all the LSRW skills as Integrated Skills Approach (ISA) was followed.

Conclusion

An important advantage of teacher-designed material is contextualization. The text book or commercial material is not aimed at any specific group of learners or any particular cultural or educational context. The material enables the teacher to take into account the particular learning environment and to overcome the lack of fit of the course book.

Besides the advantages, there are many pitfalls in the teacher-produced materials. Sometimes teacher produced materials may lack overall coherence and a clear flow. If the material is not organized properly it may not give the desired results. Errors in the material, poor construction, lack of innovativeness and lack of clarity may affect the standards of the material. Teaching materials are not a complete way of teaching but an aid to learning. It is not necessary to require it in all lessons. A teacher can use it according to topics and need of students. Use of too many materials in one lesson may distract attention from the main topic and cause negative effect. So, teacher produced materials should always be relevant to the subject.

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Dr. M. Srilakshmi
Professor of English
DVR & Dr. HS MIC College of Technology
Kanchikacherla – 521180

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Krishna District
Andhra Pradesh
India
tripuranenisrilakshmi568@gmail.com

K. Jayasree
Asst. Prof of English
DVR & Dr. HS MIC College of Technology
Kanchikacherla – 521180
Krishna District
Andhra Pradesh
India
jayasreetati@gmail.com