

Adapting Learning and Teaching Material for a Robust Learning Situation: A Case Study

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Abstract

The market is flooded with language learning materials which while adhering to the principles of language learning and the demands of the defined curriculum, broadly address different learning situations. Hence there are textbooks for different categories of schools based on the classification arrived at using different criteria. Classroom contexts are diverse and so are learners within a single context. Thus, simply adopting a textbook, however robust it may be, may not yield the desired learning outcomes. The grassroots teacher requires to use her sensitivity, creativity, ingenuity and awareness to adapt and supplement the material she is provided with. Today there is a surfeit of supplementary digital content and software at their behest to help profile learners, make learning interesting, provide additional exercises or tools of assessment. It is upon them how best they can adapt the material available to them and make use of technology to make the language learning situation more robust in their own context.

Keywords: different learning situations, classroom context, learning outcomes, curriculum, materials adaptation, digital content

Introduction

A coursebook is a tool in the hands of teachers. They can follow it to the letter, assuming that it is the right fit for their learning situation, since it has been developed by knowledgeable people and prescribed by experienced educators and administrators. Since the classroom processes are dynamic, they can think on their feet whenever any hurdles show up. If successful, the idea or strategy is repeated and soon is added

to the teacher's repertoire. But it runs the danger of getting routinized as the lesson may become "frozen, ossified, or inaccessibly submerged, leaving a schedule of routines" (Prabhu, 1990, p. 174). It is also true that "course books are inescapably limited by the magnitude of the audience for which they were written." (Teeler & Gray, 2006, p. 36) and the topics they discuss may be unfamiliar to the learners. This means that teachers need to plan their lessons well, innovate and continually adapt the material, to suit their current learning situation.

A good coursebook can provide the right guidelines and a sense of direction to not only the teacher but the student as well (Woodward, 2001). In addition, good published material can breathe life into the lesson by offering engaging themes that stimulate discussion and imaginative responses (Harmer, 1998). But any published material needs to be adapted to suit the context for the best results.

Anything that is employed to enhance the learner's knowledge, be it textual, graphic, tactile, real or virtual can be termed as learning material. Publishers like the Oxford University Press, bring out a complete package for English language learning, which includes a multi-skill course book covering a variety of genres, tasks and exercises, a workbook covering all the basic language skills with embedded test papers, a teacher's book containing suggested lesson plans, an answer key to the coursebook, extra worksheets and discussion on pedagogy. The e-book, is a digital version of the course book with added features like animation, audio recordings of poems and pronunciation, interactive grammar, vocabulary games and a dynamic question bank. In addition, there is a web-based learning and assessment solution to help build students' language skills and subject knowledge along an individualized, self-paced learning path.

Novice teachers can depend upon all these resources till they feel confident enough to create supplementary material of their own to suit their context. In addition, the digital world is replete with resources and interactive platforms for learning. The richness of material notwithstanding, any published material is meant to cater to a wide range of users, it being impossible to address any individual or group directly. A book can be gainfully employed with some amount of adaptation according to the context. Simplification of the text, explanation of concepts, analogies, examples, supplementary textual,

visual, audio or video material, games or puzzles, additional exercises, multiple transactional strategies, reorganization of units or deletions, all denote adaptation. Being consistent with constructivist practice, teachers are expected to revise the material and provide “contextual clues to maximise learning” (Adelman & Vallone, 2008, p. 23). This can best be done when teachers are aware of the pre-existing knowledge of the learners to be able to “make connections between the new knowledge and existing knowledge.” (Herrera & Murry, 2007, p. 62).

Objectives of the Present Study

In order to explore the extent to which English teachers adapted the material on hand, a brief study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To ascertain teachers’ perceptions of the teaching-learning material and the need for adaptation
2. To list different processes of adaptation used by teachers including the use of technology
3. To list the proactive strategies used by teachers to optimize learning
4. To list the ways in which teachers address diverse needs of the learners
5. To explore teachers’ expectations from the curriculum framers and administrators

Sample Size and Methodology

The population of the study comprised 28 English teachers at different levels, working in different learning contexts. An attempt was made to include demographic diversity.

They were provided with a questionnaire (Appendix 1) which they completed and this was followed by a brief discussion to seek clarification, if required.

Respondents of the Study

Six different types of schools were undertaken. Following is the demographic map of the population. We shall refer to them as School 1, School 2 and so on when we place the information received in perspective (i.e. the particular learning context).

S. No.	Description of School/s	Profile of the Learners	Curriculum/Board	Number of Teachers
1.	Co-educational govt. aided schools catering to linguistic minority in NCT Delhi	L1 – Tamil 60% Economically Weaker Section (EWS), 30% middle class, 10% upper middle class Parents- largely illiterate or first-generation learners Exposure to English outside school- Nil Learning English is initially a challenge; students are fired by the desire to do well in life; and catch up with encouragement and guidance	NCERT, CBSE	4
2.	A co-educational school in Dehradun, run by a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the under-privileged children of remote reaches of Uttarakhand	90% from financially downtrodden background Gender ratio of (Girls:Boys) 7:3, girls (hostellers) boys (day boarders) No prior exposure to English; have a will to learn; teachers act as mentors At school-leaving stage are comparable with others; win laurels, and even participate in international programmes	NCERT, CBSE	3

3.	A co-educational residential school in Dehradun, for students with special needs (visually challenged) run by the central government	Students largely belong to lower middle and middle class 80% first generation learners; home environment not conducive to learning English Display a strong desire to learn English and use every opportunity to improve their language skills.	NCERT, CBSE	2
4.	Branches of a private group of English medium co-educational school in the national capital	Mix of educated middle class and business class 25% EWS and first-generation learners with not much support at home for learning English; students have different pre-existing knowledge of English Have access to books and technology; pace of learning varies	NCERT, CBSE	9
5.	A prestigious residential school for girls in Dehradun	Students largely from affluent, privileged families; a small percentage from the underprivileged group 40% come from smaller towns in UP and Punjab who find learning English difficult initially Majority are conversant with English and comfortable using it	International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP)	6

6	A prestigious residential school for boys in Dehradun	Students largely from affluent families; small percentage belong to EWS 80% are fluent in English having previous exposure to it at home and school Are fairly successful in achieving the benchmark set by the international curriculum	IGCSE, CISCE & IBDP	4
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Results

The findings display a diversity in both demography and linguistic abilities of L2 not only amongst the schools but also within the population of a school. One positive trend noticeable is that the students with L2 challenge have an intrinsic motivation to learn English.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Teaching-Learning Material

The course books followed by these schools vary from NCERT and CBSE textbooks to those brought out by private publishers and authentic material used in the IGCSC and IBDP courses.

66.6 per cent teachers of schools using government published books at all levels found the books to be appropriate and relevant to their learners’ experiences. They found the exercises in them to be doable in their classrooms. Most importantly, the books are affordable for the average learner.

This is indicative of the fact that adaptation is minimal since most teachers adhere to the exercises in the book alone.

There is, however, one conflicting opinion where 33.3 per cent teachers felt that the secondary level books tended to be uninteresting, having a large representation of non-fiction lessons which did not find favour with the students. They also seemed to have inadequate representation of reputed authors of English, the texts having been largely drawn from newspapers, magazines and journals. In addition, a few units had been featured in the books for many years, and needed replacement.

In this aspect, the books are adapted with teachers providing the students with other texts related to the themes and issues dealt within the book.

In another set up, books of a private publisher, though activity- based, are found to be replete with activities that cannot be completed within the allocated time. The syllabus too appears to be highly structured thus forbidding the learners from going beyond the text. Teachers felt that there ought to be provision for explanation, interpretation and discussion. Teachers teaching the primary and the middle classes using books of another publisher felt that the books were appropriate for their level of students. However, the factual texts needed to be simplified.

The third kind of curriculum comprised 'authentic material ', originally aimed at the native speaker. Sixty per cent of the teachers said that though they have not conducted a formal book survey they seek students' opinion regarding the material periodically. They felt that since the syllabus can be easily covered by their learners well within the stipulated time, there ought to be some additional texts or activities. Eighty per cent of teachers found the material to be well-designed and easily transactable in the classroom. The exercises too are found to be useful

Fifty per cent teachers of this group, however, observed that with the inclusion of a few texts based on the Indian context, the curriculum could become more relevant. Otherwise, the range of genres covered was adequate, providing an exposure to good examples of writing wherein learners could study language, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, style, cohesion and the flow of ideas.

Adapting the Material on Hand

The responses of the teachers revealed that schools and contexts with limited resources largely depend on the prescribed course material with minimal adaptation. On the other hand, teachers teaching in a richer linguistic context adapted as per need and topical relevance, customizing the material for greater learner-engagement.

School 1

The textual material is largely adopted but at times it is supplemented with the following resources and strategies to optimize learning:

- Storytelling and using a narrative style in the junior classes
- Reading stories (preferably 20 titles in a year) in L1 and then in L2

for ease of comprehension and prediction while reading the L2 text.

- Using aids like flashcards, charts, pictures, PPT presentations, videos and stick puppets
- Drawing linkages between the text and students' life- experiences
- Using techniques like role play and discussion to enliven the lesson
- Creating additional grammar exercises or downloading the same from the Internet

School 2

Though constrained for resources, the teachers try to make the most of the given situation. The techniques for adaptation used are:

- Creating new activities based on particular themes/ linguistic aspects
- Using the Internet to make lessons memorable
- Loud reading of texts using modulation and expression
- Sharing in pairs the summary of the lesson completed
- Creating material for self-learning and self -assessment
- Use of discussions/ debates based on interpretation and observation
- Exploring new vocabulary, expressions (grammar), phonics
- Employing different teaching styles for the same unit
- Translating dialogues from regional films on similar issues, into English
- Drawing analogies from students' life and culture; using a cross-cultural connect
- Using interactive activities for grammar
- Creating newspaper reports based on the content of the lesson
- Using photography as a tool to build vocabulary

School 3

Transacting material which has been primarily written for the sighted with visually challenged target groups can be a challenging task. The methods that the teachers use to adapt are among the following:

- Simplification of the text
- Use of day-to-day conversational language
- Exposure to additional texts from literature and making linkages with text on hand
- Collaborative learning for peer support

- Reversal of questions from long answer-type to fill in the blanks and vice versa
- Use of flashcards and exercises in Braille and developing a learner's kit
- Videos for the low-vision students
- Extensive use of audio books

School 4

Resources are not an issue in this context but exposure to the target language is. Hence the teachers depend upon technology to fill the gaps. Methods of adaptation include:

- Simplification of content
- Optimum use of Smart Classroom, using animated PPT's
- Use of online games for recapitulation, quizzes
- Video recording of one's lesson and sharing it with colleagues
- Creating own worksheets and follow up activities
- Using a virtual background for storytelling
- Use of puppets
- Discussions and mind maps for complicated lessons
- Brainstorming and KWL (What I know-What I want to know—What I have learnt) charts
- Pair and share activities
- Use of open-ended questions for reflection and critical thinking

Schools 5 and 6

The teachers displayed awareness about pro-active language teaching by enriching the classroom environment in multiple ways. Methods of adaptation mentioned by them are:

- Simplification and breaking the units into sub-parts
- Making the objectives of the lesson clear at the outset
- Supplementing with resources like additional worksheets, PPT's, films, documentaries
- Use of online resources and shareable podcasts or video posts
- Providing extra reading material
- Use of quizzes, debates, discussion, games like hot-seat, etc.
- Use of theatre crafts like role play, dramatization
- Use of visual crafts

- Use of cross curricular concepts
- Drawing linkages with real life
- Questions to develop critical thinking, evaluation and analysis of literature
- Collaborative activities for variety in interpretation, peer learning and support
- Customizing the material and providing for personalization

Use of Digital Resources

Having the Internet in the classroom (Smart Class) can be a boon for the language teacher as there is a plethora of interactive resources available there. Amongst the digital resources mentioned by the teachers are:

- Powerpoint presentations
- Videos on YouTube, podcasts
- Poems and stories available on the Internet including audio books and e-books from 'Book Share'
- CBSE TUTORIALS (having sample questions and papers)
- Ted Talks
- Video recording and playback of speaking activities
- Menti- to start discussions and spark ideas
- Kahoot, a platform with learning games
- Flippity for vocabulary development, to make flash cards from a spreadsheet
- Google forms for teacher development
- Whiteboard.fi-using a virtual whiteboard where students can post ideas
- TATA class Edge and Google Classroom; virtual classrooms
- Quizziz for grammar games and quizzes
- Padlet, an online noticeboard

Turnitin- an app that automatically evaluates and grades assignments/papers and matches text similarity to check plagiarism

- Litcharts for analysing and explaining literature
- Kami- an app that transforms an existing document into an interactive learning experience
- In Thinking—an innovative educational consultancy service with close links to International Baccalaureate

- G Suite comprises Gmail, Hangouts, Calendar and Currents for communication and a drive for storage

It is possible that the enforced virtual teaching due to the COVID-19 outbreak has led to greater exploration and use of digital resources. Having access to such support allows the teacher to make the learning situation more interactive and communicative.

Strategies Used for Achieving the Curricular Outcomes

The resources alone may not be effective without accompanying classroom procedures. The teachers display both awareness and experience in the use of proactive teaching methods. The table below gives an idea of the variety and extent of the use of some of the strategies.

S. No.	Strategies Used by the Teachers Towards Proactive Learning	%
1.	Relating topics/ideas to students' own experiences (life, TV serials, epics and legends)	14.2
2.	Correlating language teaching to other subjects	7.1
3.	Communicative activities that encourage oral interaction: debates, declamation, discussions, brainstorming, sharing ideas and opinions	53.5
4.	Creative writing tasks with verbal or visual input, weaving creative activities into the lesson	14.2
5.	Performing and theatre arts like role plays, mimicking characters, jam sessions, poetry reading, dramatization, literary festivals	57.1
6.	Storytelling and narration of incidents, sharing the sequence of events of stories read, using a virtual background for storytelling, participation in assembly programmes, creative tasks based on stories (different end, new title, additional character, etc.)	25.0
7.	Puzzles and games, interactive exercises, memory retrieval exercises, riddles, Spell Bee, quizzes, etc.	28.6
8.	Using newspaper stories and headlines	7.1
9.	Collaborative tasks and activities	10.7
10.	Open-ended questions for critical thinking and personalization, greater teacher/learner interaction, individual responses and interpretation of literature, Observe-Wonder-Think activities	50.0
11.	Project and research- based tasks	21.4

12.	Use of photography to develop new vocabulary; preparing videos	8.3
13.	Democratic classroom: encouragement for maximum participation, differentiated activities to engage all the students	17.8
14.	Integrating visual arts in the English class, using visual aids	25.0
15.	Variety in content, innovating in exercises	7.1
16.	Self-assessment, formative assessment, enhancing self-knowledge	14.2

In addition, are mentioned strategies like ensuring the teacher’s use of L2 exclusively in the classroom barring the early years. Other suggested strategies are using immersion techniques, fun activities, humour and organising seminars and workshops.

Addressing the Diverse Needs of the Learners

Proactive teaching notwithstanding, there may still be a need to give special attention to the weak students or slow learners. Gifted learners too need a fillip. When asked how they addressed the diverse needs of their learners, the following were the responses:

S. No.	Methods to Address Diverse Needs of Learners	%
1.	Differentiated tasks, special worksheets for the weak; creative and challenging exercises for the gifted	71.4
2.	Remedial teaching for slow learners	46.4
3.	Individual attention, assessment through observation, providing individualized tasks, regular feedback and encouragement	46.4
4.	Simplifying content for the weaker students	7.1
5.	Providing support through collaborative tasks, peer and pair learning, Buddy system, talent-wise grouping (art, dance, music, etc.) for interpretation or representation of content	32.1
6.	Special classes for the gifted	17.8
7.	Open communication, emotional support, increased wait time during questions, encouragement to take responsibility for own learning	25.0
8.	Encouraging weak students to read more and listen to talks; backroom support	7.1
9.	Teaching a lesson using different ways bearing in mind diverse abilities	7.1
10.	Encouraging reflection, analysis and evaluation of the content or the lesson; developing higher order thinking skills	14.2

A few other ways mentioned were infusing the fun element to lower the students' affective filter, using activities based on different senses (sight, smell, hearing, touch etc.), using a wide range of vocabulary (simple to sophisticated) and exploiting individual talents through differentiated tasks.

Suggestions and Expectations

The suggestions received from the teachers were wide and varied such as:

- Continuous teacher development
- Books preferably developed from the learners' points of view, especially those with special needs
- A blend of national and international curricula, course books related to the cultural background of the learners
- Provision for formal teaching of listening and speaking
- Greater variety in genres, incorporation of global issues; high level of appeal and interest
- Literature covering a wide range of authors across space and time
- Incorporating puzzles and games for vocabulary development
- E-publication of class magazines, authored, edited and illustrated by students themselves
- Variety in writing tasks to suit different abilities
- Provision for the use of constructivist methods

Discussion and Conclusion

It is evident that teachers today are aware of the need for adaptation. However, in many contexts, there is some amount of control over the teachers where the curriculum and the materials are centrally imposed. In such scenarios, it is advisable to do a needs analysis to identify the linguistic abilities of the learners in L2 as well as the teaching-learning environment as learning contexts differ from one situation to another. It is essential to specify learner needs and identify activities relevant for emergent purposes while mapping the curriculum which teachers would perhaps adapt using available resources so that learners move towards achieving the curricular goals (Graves, 2008).

In today's context, the penetration and wide outreach of the Internet, has

made it possible for a resourceful teacher to make learning interesting and meaningful.

It is advisable to build the students' confidence in the course book through a Book Survey wherein students study various aspects of the coursebook like the cover, arrangement of units, their features, like design, length, themes and exercises. Based on the feedback, the teacher can make decisions regarding portions that need to be simplified, supplemented or deleted to optimize learning (Woodward, 2001).

In conclusion, one can say that any material, however well planned and designed, would require to be adapted in one way or the other to facilitate learning.

The author would like to thank teachers of DTEA Schools, New Delhi, PYDS, Learning Academy, Dehradun, NIVH, Dehradun, GD Salwan Group of Schools, New Delhi, Welham Girls' School, Dehradun and The Doon School, Dehradun for their association with the study.

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