

Comparative Classroom-Based Study on Language Teaching Materials Use

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Abstract: This paper aims to explore the effective use of teaching materials from textbooks in the English learning classroom. Undoubtedly, language teaching materials play a significant role for success in language teaching. It's the same in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) leaning process. This paper discusses the way English language learning materials function in the three principal areas of classroom ecology: curriculum, classroom discourse, and language acquisition through a comparative classroom-based study of one-unit-learning in the two of the author's English classes, both which have the similar English language level and capacity. Adaptation of materials is fundamentally acknowledged as important for meeting SLA learners' needs. In the first classroom language teaching materials on the textbook were used only and fully. In the other classroom language teaching materials on the textbook were adapted by the teacher. Through analyzing the actual patterns of teacher adaptation and the effect on learners, observing learners' engagement with them, comparing learners' output and interviewing some students, the study shows that purposefully designed content choices of language teaching materials led to the affordance for more meaningful discourse, more active interaction and more fruitful outcome. The study identifies four main ways of using teaching materials from textbooks in the classroom, including selecting, reordering, revising and supplementing, which are testified workable and practical.

Keywords: Teaching Materials, Textbook, Classroom-Based Study, Learning, Interaction

1. Introduction

How to use teaching materials on the textbook to teach language in the classroom? Textbooks have been widely recognized as a valuable resource for teachers in the classroom, providing a structured and comprehensive approach to language learning [1, 2, 4, 11]. It has been argued that textbooks can serve as a foundation upon which teachers can build their curriculum, and they can help to ensure consistency and adherence to learning objectives [9, 10, 12]. However, the effectiveness of textbooks ultimately depends on how they are utilized in the classroom. As Brown (2014) described "textbooks have a great deal of power and authority in the language classroom does not seem in doubt" [3]. But there is often limited class period, during which the teacher may not use all of the materials on the textbook. So how to deal with that? Masuhara (2011) calls for the empowerment of teachers [8]. Luke et al. (1989) pointed out that the primary sources of textbooks' power and authority

lie in the way textbooks are used rather than textbooks themselves [7]. Furthermore, Luke et al. (1989) suggest that learners associate the content of textbooks with "a teacher's explanations, claims or opinions about the text... the teacher speaks on behalf of the text" [7]. As Guerrettaz and Johnson (2013) note, materials on the textbook influence both what is taught and how [5]. Interaction between learners and materials occurs when connections can be made between the content of the materials and the students' lives. They also suggest that the connection occurred through teacher prompts instead of by students' self-generation. According to Lee (1995), there are five factors facilitate the interaction between learners and materials: the material, the learner, the teacher, the task, and the environment in which learning takes place [6]. And only when materials engage the learner's interest and impress him learner authenticity occurs [16]. It seems the teacher's duty is to make that interaction and authenticity occur by purposeful use of language teaching materials on the textbook [13-15].

2. Research Design

2.1. Context and Participants

The present study is part of larger two-year project in a *Business English Certificate (BEC)* course designed for students in a university in China. The present study is to compare the three different teaching process and results. Seventy students aged 18-19 years old with Chinese as their mother tongue took the course. Their English language proficiency was intermediate. The teacher is a non-native English speaker who has been teaching at the university for almost 20 years. *BEC* is a required course for first year all majors except for English in the university. Its purpose is to enhance students' comprehensive English competence in terms of listening, speaking, reaching and writing in business related circumstances. Over a 16-week semester, the course met once a week for ninety minutes per session, and five units were completed. This study used one unit to compare three different ways the teacher used at different classroom. One is to use language teaching materials on the textbook only and fully. The other is not to adapt materials on the textbook.

2.2. Research Method

The study adopted experimental method, interview, and observation as the tool to collect data to analyze students' learning process. Experimental method is used to test the relationship between teacher's use of materials on the textbook and students' engagement and output. Through interview and observation when and how students' authenticity occurred were observed and analyzed.

3. Comparative Classroom-Based Study

3.1. Materials on the Textbook

Every unit on this textbook includes three parts: business topic, business skills and exam spotlight. Focus is always put on the first part, business topic. In this unit "ways of working" is the topic. The sequence is vocabulary for different ways of working, reading for how to job-share, listening for working from home, grammar for present tense, and speaking for mini-presentation. Vocabulary part has one warm-up question: how do you work most effectively? By working regular hours / flexible hours? In a team / on your own? From home / in an office? For a boss/ as your own boss? The second task in vocabulary part is to first match these ways of working: freelance, teleworking, job-sharing, shift work, part-time, temping, consultant, flexitime, hot-desking to their definitions, second answer the question: do you work in any of these ways? The last task in this part is to match the nine ways in task 2 to their comments. There is one passage about job-sharing in the reading part, which has seven sentence-length gaps. Students are going to first write given headings into each gap, then answer the question: how easy would it be for you to job-share? Would your employer or boss think it was a good idea? In the listening part the students are going to hear a woman talking about working from home and there are five tasks: four

questions to answer and one schedule to complete. Three exercises are in Grammar part: match the sentences from the listening to the grammar explanations, name the tenses, write the verb in its correct form to complete these tips for working from home. Speaking part has only one task: choose job-sharing or working from home as a topic and prepare a mini-presentation.

3.2. Results and Discussion

3.2.1. Control Group Results

In the first class, consisting of 35 students, teaching materials were used one by one according the sequence. At the beginning of the class the warm-up question "How do you work most effectively? By working regular hours / flexible hours? In a team / on your own? From home / in an office? For a boss/ as your own boss?" confused some students, whose answers to the question were like "I'm a student, I have no idea." The same thing happened while doing task 3 in the vocabulary part. When students clearly know what step and content will be, most of them show less interest in class. Unless the teacher pushed them to answer questions or share viewpoints, large most of the students just sat there and kept silent. The total time of talking was 10 minutes out of 180. When give mini-presentation on the topic of job-sharing or working from home, only 3 out of the whole class could add their own opinion and illustrate it. Half of the left chose the sentences from the passage or the listening exercise on the textbook, while another half couldn't even borrow the opinion from the textbook. In the interview 25 out of 35 said they were reluctant to speak at all, and they were not very willing to learn the topic because they didn't think that would be useful for their real life. 7 out of 35 said they did want to learn more about the topic but they didn't know how. Only 3 out of 35 said they are interested in the topic and really learned a lot through learning.

3.2.2. Experimental Group Results

While in the other class, consisting of 35 students too, teaching materials were purposefully adapted by the teacher. To be specific, first of all, the teacher selected the four parts: vocabulary, reading, listening and speaking, but not the grammar. Reason behind that was Chinese students had learned a lot of grammar during their middle school period, so first they had known a lot about that grammar and then they could lose passion to repeat learning. Second, the teacher revised the two parts, vocabulary and reading. Thirdly, the teacher reordered the materials: speaking first, reading and listening the second, then go back to speaking. Lastly, the teacher adds some new materials to reading and listening.

As for vocabulary part, the teacher asked the students to answer the question at the beginning of the class: "You're working at an international corporation. There's a new working-time policy saying staff can apply for more flexible ways of working. During the coffee break today everyone in your office is talking about that. After thinking carefully, you've got a final decision. Please tell about your decision, including the way of working you're going to apply for and the

reasons.” As business-related major students, most of them have great chance to work in an international corporation after graduation from university, which made the situation realistic for them and relevant to their concerns to some extent. In this stage the students were anxious to know more about flexible ways of working after trying to answer this questing and finding the lack of vocabulary. As a result of that the students had more passion to do the match exercise and had a better understanding of these ways of working.

After vocabulary learning the teacher put the speaking part ahead of reading and listening parts. The students were asked to choose job-sharing or working from home as a topic and prepare a mini-presentation, which was about one minute. 10 out of 35 were willing to be volunteer speakers. The volunteer speakers’ mini-presentation were not very much satisfying. What vocabulary they used were repetition of same words or phrases, such as “working from home, job-sharing, comfortable, efficiency, more, communicate”. Opinions focused on “you have a partner to share the job; it’s comfortable to work at home.”

After that the teacher led the students to the reading part and the listening part. The students read the passage about job-sharing. The first step was to write the headings to each paragraph, through which the students understood each guide better. The second step was to learn some active expressions and sentences. The third step was to find the advantages and disadvantages of job-sharing. The fourth step was to make a conversation with a partner according to the situation: one of the pair, the employee, who wants to start job-sharing with another colleague, is trying to convince the employer that it is a good idea. The other one is the employer, who is skeptical about the idea. Then the students listened to a recording about working from home. The first step was to fill in the schedule and answer questions about working from home. The second step was to find out the benefits and drawbacks of this way of working.

The last step was to get back to mini-presentation about job-sharing. After reading activities students became much more active and confident. 20 out of 25 became willing to be volunteer speakers. Vocabulary they used this time were pretty richer, such as “working sharing, embrace, scenario, disaster, emergency, delegate, brainpower, expectation, arrangement, teleworking, commute, timetable, balance, gossip, office politics, outcome”. Opinions expressed are much more convincing, such as “twice as much experience, skills, brainpower and energy”, “plan the system for handing work over carefully and play to each other’s different strengths. Delegate the workload according to each other’s particular skills and qualities”, “a job-share should be like a marriage- one voice, one unit”, “it’s important with home-working to have a timetable and stick to it”, “it means the company saves money on office space and as long as I get the work done, they’re happy”.

3.2.3. Discussion

In control group the students are being confused, bored, passive and with superficial understanding of the topic. But

in experimental group the students are being interested, excited, active and with deep understanding of the topic. The problem lied in the materials themselves couldn’t engage the learners’ interest and impress them as being in some way relevant to their concerns. In other words, the learner, the material, the teacher, the task, the environment, all of these factors didn’t cooperate together naturally. It’s not difficult to make a conclusion that the interaction between students and the textbook take place only when the teaching materials are reprocessed by the teacher.

4. Conclusion

Teaching materials from textbooks can be utilized effectively in the English learning classroom by organizing the course around the textbook, adapting the materials to meet the specific needs of the students, supplementing them with additional resources. By using these strategies, teachers can create a dynamic and engaging environment that facilitates interaction between learners and materials, thereby promoting deeper learning and enhancing the overall language classroom experience. In this study the teacher used four methods to adapt language teaching materials on the textbook: selecting, reordering, revising and supplementing. Results showed that these methods are practical and workable.

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