
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Pedagogical Considerations for the Use and Development of Learning Materials in Moroccan EFL Classrooms

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| ABSTRACT

Instructional materials play a significant role in language teaching and learning processes as they provide learners with the input needed for them to learn the language effectively. They also support enriching language instruction and stimulate learners' interests and motivation. The aims of the present study were to explore Moroccan EFL high school teachers' perceptions of instructional materials, the criteria they follow when developing materials, the types of learning materials they use besides the textbook, and the challenges they encounter in materials development. For this purpose, the study used a mixed methods design that combines both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. The sample of the study consisted of 160 public high school teachers who have different teaching experiences. The instruments that were used to collect data included a questionnaire, classroom observation, and document analysis. The results of the study revealed that teachers hold different perceptions about materials. On the one hand, some teachers view materials as anything that can be used to facilitate language learning, while others relate material to grammar worksheets that can be used to support the understanding of certain grammatical items. Further analysis revealed that the materials they develop for their learners focus on grammar with very little attention to communication. In addition, the findings showed that the textbook is the main learning material used in Moroccan EFL classrooms. However, the majority of teachers reported that they are unsatisfied with the EFL materials they use. Moreover, the findings found that teachers are not well trained and do not have the necessary skills that will allow them to develop effective materials. Also, authentic materials are not easily accessible, and they cannot be easily used. The study concluded with some pedagogical recommendations for Moroccan EFL teachers and materials developers.

| KEYWORDS

Instructional materials, materials use, materials development, Moroccan EFL classrooms.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The history of materials development has shown that researchers had many struggles trying to introduce this field of study into academic settings. In the nineties, it was considered to be part of the language teaching methodologies and not as an independent field. In this regard, Tomlinson (2001) pointed out that the field of materials development was a "subsection of methodology, in which materials were usually introduced as examples of methods rather than as means to explore the principles and procedures of their development". (Tomlinson 2001, p.66). Researchers have contributed in different ways to the development of the field of materials design. As a case in point, Tomlinson founded the Association of Materials Development (MATSDA) in 1993, which aimed at bringing together researchers, material developers and teachers with the purpose of making the field more innovative and academic. (Tomlinson, 2001). The association of materials development has encouraged teachers all over the world to work towards the development of high quality materials.

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Furthermore, it is widely known that materials development is one of the major courses that are offered to teacher trainees in TESOL/TEFL programs. Materials development as a field is concerned with the study of the implementation, adaptation, and procedures followed in designing certain materials. In this sense, Tomlinson describes the process of materials development as 'both a field of study and a practical undertaking. As a field, it studies the principles and procedures of the design, implementation and evaluation of language teaching materials. As a practical undertaking, it refers to anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input...' (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 66). The process of developing materials, therefore, includes the selection, evaluation, and adaptation of materials that can facilitate language teaching and learning. The primary purpose of materials development is to provide learners with sources of language input that can help them acquire the language effectively. Materials development is a very crucial component in language teaching as it raises teachers' awareness of the importance of the context. In other words, the classroom is a small community where we can find different learning styles, different cultural backgrounds, different needs and wants. Teachers, therefore, have the responsibility to cater for all of these differences. In doing so, teachers are not far from being materials developers. This suggests that every teacher is a materials developer who is supposed to evaluate different materials that are responsive to their learners' needs and interests, adapt them, and supplement them in a way that is appropriate to the context in which they will be implemented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Materials development

Materials development is considered to be a practical undertaking and a field of academic study. As a practical undertaking, it involves the production, evaluation, and adaptation of materials. As a field, it studies the principles and procedures of the design, writing, implementation, and evaluation of materials. These two aspects should be interactive in the sense that theoretical frameworks should inform and should be informed by the practitioners. In this regard, Tomlinson (2001) points out that materials development studies the principles and procedures of the design, implementation and evaluation of language teaching materials. As an undertaking, it involves the production, evaluation and adaptation of language teaching/learning materials by teachers for their own classrooms and by materials writers for sale or distribution. Ideally, these two aspects of materials development are interactive in that the theoretical studies inform and are informed by the development and use of classroom materials (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 66).

On the other hand, Grave (2000) defined materials development as "the planning process by which a teacher creates units and lessons within those units to carry out the goals and objectives of the course. In a sense, it is a process of making your syllabus more and more specific" (Grave, 2000, p. 163). This definition suggests that materials development allows for flexibility and creativity. It is flexible in the sense that it gives teachers the chance to bring materials that can help them meet different needs and expectations. It also allows creativity. Since they bring new materials to the class, they become more effective and creative in their teaching practices.

2.2 Instructional materials

Tomlinson (2011) defines materials as anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language. Materials can obviously be videos, DVDs, emails, YouTube, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks or photocopied exercises.

They can also be newspapers, food packages, photographs, and live talks by invited native speakers, instructions given by a teacher, tasks written on cards or discussions between learners (Tomlinson, 2011.p.2). In other words, materials can be in the form of linguistic, visual, auditory, or kinesthetic input. They may be presented in print (a textbook, a workbook, a photocopied handout...), in audio or video form, on CD-ROMS, on the internet or through live performance or display. Everything that presents or informs about the language being learned can be used as learning materials. This definition implies that materials are not limited to textbooks. In fact, many people associate the term materials with the textbook simply because they have limited experience with using different materials besides the textbook (Tomlinson, 2011).

Richard (2001) maintains that "instructional materials generally serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom" (Richards, 2001, p.251). Instructional materials can be considered the backbone of any educational institution because they support language learning and, hence, teaching. They give non-experienced teachers the chance to develop their professional skills and plan lessons in an effective way. According to Nash (1999), instructional materials should arouse and maintain interest, simplify instruction, aid retention, and stimulate active thinking.

Moreover, materials can also help teachers develop professionally as they provide them with models that they can follow to develop their own materials. In this respect, Nunan (1998) summarizes the role of materials in the following lines:

Materials are, in fact, an essential element within the curriculum and do more than simply lubricate the wheels of learning. At their best, they provide concrete models of desirable classroom practice, they act as curriculum models, and at their very best, they fulfill a teacher development role. Good materials also provide models for teachers to follow in developing their own materials. (p.98)

According to Tomlinson (2011), some materials writers rely on their repertoire and inspiration, whereas others establish the principles first before they start designing the materials. Tomlinson suggests that materials designers should follow a set of principles. In other words, they should follow a principled framework that should be based on both universal principles and local criteria in the designing process. Tomlinson maintains that materials development “should not be random recreations from repertoires nor crafty clones of previously successful materials” (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 66). In other words, they should derive from different fields, including second language acquisition (SLA), language teaching, and research on materials use and evaluation. According to Hall (2011), materials should meet learners’ interests, preferences, and learning styles. They also need to expose learners to an input that matches their proficiency level. In addition, materials should include activities that foster learners’ critical thinking skills.

2.3 Materials and Language Learning

Tomlinson (2008) maintains that materials developers should make use of the results of research on language acquisition and learning to see how people learn languages and what they can do to facilitate language learning. In this respect, Tomlinson (2008) points out that “this should not stop us from applying what we do know about second and foreign language learning to the development of materials designed to facilitate that process” (Tomlinson 1998a, p. 6, cited in Tomlinson, 2008, p.15). Learners should be exposed to a rich experience of language in use so that they can acquire language in the appropriate way. Language acquisition can only happen and it can be facilitated if the language input is comprehensive and contextualized. In addition, learners should feel at ease and motivated. In addition, learners should achieve a deep and multidimensional processing of language (Tomlinson, 2008). To put it differently, materials should provide learners with opportunities where they can have exposure to authentic language and make them feel engaged and conformable while learning the language. It is important to note that these factors play a significant role in facilitating language learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research objectives

The purpose of the present study is to cast light on materials use and development in Moroccan EFL classrooms. It sets out to explore teachers’ perceptions about materials. That is, it intends to find out how teachers perceive materials. It also aims to investigate whether teachers use supplementary materials besides textbooks. Moreover, the study sets out to find out whether Moroccan EFL teachers follow the criteria of materials development or not. Furthermore, it seeks to find out the challenges faced by teachers when developing their own materials.

3.2 Research design

The present study adopted a mixed methods research design since it does not investigate the relationship between variables or the effect of a treatment on a certain group. As it has been mentioned earlier, the current study aims at exploring materials use and development in Moroccan EFL classrooms. As a matter of fact, the research design adopted in this study was chosen for a miscellany of reasons. First, it helps to determine the nature of the problems and get a better understanding of the problem being investigated. Second, exploratory research is effective in the sense that it lays the ground work that will lead to future studies. Moreover, since the ultimate goal of the present study is to explore materials use and development in Moroccan EFL classrooms, the present design seems to be highly compatible with the purpose of the present study. Thus, the quantitative side of the research design is represented by the data which were yielded by the questionnaire and, which were tuned into numbers, while the data yielded through classroom observation represents the qualitative side of the research design.

3.3 Participants

The population of the current study consists of 160 Moroccan EFL public high school teachers who have different teaching experiences and different academic backgrounds. The number of males was 95(59.38%), whereas the number of females was 65 (40.62%). It is worth mentioning that participants come from different cities in Morocco. In addition, three of the teachers observed in a public high school in Marrakech are all males with a teaching experience of more than seven years in the public sector, and more specifically in Moroccan high schools. The number of the observed classes was ten classes. They included common core classes, first year baccalaureate classes, and second year baccalaureate classes. In addition to the target sample, twenty private school teachers participated in the piloting of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Participants background information

	Gender		Academic background			Teaching experience			
	Male	Female	BA	MA	PHD	1-6	7-12	13-18	Over-18
Number of participants	95	65	90	64	06	89	30	27	14
Percentages	59.38	40.62%	56.25%	40%	3.75%	55.62%	18.75%	16.88%	8.75%
%	%								

3.4 Research instruments

The current study used three instruments for data collection, namely classroom observations, document analysis, and a questionnaire. Since the study aims to investigate how materials are used in Moroccan EFL classrooms, the researcher decided to opt for observation as it allows for a deeper understanding of the issue being investigated. Moreover, the rationale behind using the questionnaire is related to the fact that teachers’ perceptions cannot be viewed; that’s why it seems most appropriate to use this tool of data collection. Furthermore, most of the studies which investigated the issue of materials use and development used these two instruments. The rationale behind using different data collection methods was to obtain multiple perspectives on the issue under investigation and to ensure that the evidence collected was as accurate as possible.

4. Results

The results of the study revealed that Moroccan EFL high school teachers hold different views about materials. That is to say, some perceive materials as anything that can be used to facilitate language learning, while others restrict materials to the worksheets used to support the learning of grammatical items. In addition, teachers hold positive attitudes towards the use of supplementary materials in the classroom as they help them stimulate learners’ interests and motivation. The study also indicated that teachers believe that learners’ needs, age, language proficiency level, and cultural background should be given importance in the design of materials. Authenticity and SLA research, on the other hand, do not seem to be of paramount importance for the vast majority of teachers. Moreover, the findings showed that there is much focus on the use of printable materials like grammar worksheets and reading comprehension texts, while there is very little use of authentic materials such as magazines and newspapers. As far as the challenges encountered in the process of materials development are concerned, it was found that there is a lack of training and financial support in materials development in Morocco. Also, the task of designing materials is not an easy task; it requires a lot of effort and time on the part of the teacher. Last but not least, sometimes, having access to authentic materials is not as easy as it may seem.

5. Discussion

This section is devoted to the analysis and discussion of the results obtained.

5.1 Moroccan EFL high school teachers’ perceptions about materials

The findings of the present study suggest that Moroccan EFL high school teachers hold different views about materials. That is, the vast majority of the participants attribute materials to anything that can be used to facilitate language learning. More specifically, only a very few teachers restrict the concept of instructional materials to the grammar worksheets that can be used in the teaching of grammar. This goes in hand with the definition provided by Tomlinson (2011), which states that materials should facilitate the learning process, and they can come in different forms. This suggests that Moroccan EFL high school teachers do not associate materials with only one type of materials, but rather, they have broad views about them. This implies that there should be variation in the use of these instructional materials.

5.2 Moroccan EFL High School Teachers' use of instructional materials besides textbooks

Based on the analysis of classroom observation data, it can be concluded that the textbook was the main learning material used in the teaching and learning processes. It was found that two teachers out of three relied on the textbook. It played a very significant role in their classes as it represented the core of the syllabus. In other words, most of the learning activities are taken from the textbook. This suggests that there was not any attempt to adapt the materials of the textbook according to students' interests and language proficiency levels. However, the textbooks used were not interesting or motivating for learners. The vast majority of students felt bored when the textbook was used. According to Tomlinson (2008), the materials we use should contextualize learning and should make learners feel at ease and motivated. In the case of the observed classes, students were not motivated simply because they found the content irrelevant and it did not represent their needs and expectations. This implies that there is no careful analysis of learners' needs and wants, and it seems that the textbook mainly serves the objectives of teaching more than learning. That is to say; teachers find it easy to stick to the use of the textbook because it saves them time as they do not have to invest any effort to develop new materials. Materials developers have to gather the right information about the needs of learners, and they also need to examine carefully the context so that they can produce materials which can have the desired impact on language learners. Though teachers complain about the quality of the textbooks they are using, they still rely on the textbook in their teaching practices. This should not be surprising as those textbooks save them time energy, and they help them meet the objectives of the syllabus. The results indicated that the textbook is the main material used by 78 Moroccan EFL high school teachers. It can also be stated that course-books still remain an indispensable teaching tool for many teachers. Sheldon (1988), Hutchinson & Torres (1994), and Richards (1990) believe that course-books lie at the heart of any English language teaching situation.

5.3 The types of materials used by Moroccan EFL high school teachers

The results of the present study indicate that a lot of teachers use printable worksheets more than other types of materials, while very few teachers opt for a particular course book; on the other hand, very few teachers choose magazines and newspapers. These findings showed that only very few teachers select a particular textbook; the majority opted for printable materials. This suggests that they are unsatisfied with the textbook they are using, and that's why they resort to developing other materials that can be more responsive to the needs of learners. It can also be noted that there is variation in the use of supplementary materials by the participants who filled in the questionnaire. In contrast with the findings of this study, a study was conducted by İsmail ÇAKIR (2015) in which he investigated teachers' choices of instructional materials in teaching English at elementary schools in Turkey. The findings revealed that most of the teachers are not very willing to take part in teaching activities that require the use of additional materials, which basically means that they stick to the use of the textbook

5.4 The criteria EFL high school teachers follow when developing materials

Materials developers should follow a set of criteria when developing materials so that they can design effective materials which can have a positive effect on language learners (Tomlinson, 2011). In other words, the development of materials should not be based on random decisions. The results of the study, therefore, showed that the vast majority believe that learners' needs, interests, age, and language proficiency levels should be taken into consideration when developing materials for learners. However, the findings showed that only a very few number of the participants regard authenticity as an important criterion in the development of materials. This suggests that there may be no use of authentic materials in Moroccan EFL high school classrooms. Additionally, the findings also revealed that the criterion concerning research on Second Language Acquisition does not seem to be important in materials development. This finding is consistent with the findings of the document analysis and classroom observation. In other words, the results of both instruments indicated that the developed materials cannot have a significant impact on language learning since their design is not based on principles of Second Language Acquisition. It is very crucial for materials developers to draw from research on Second Language Acquisition so that they can know how their learners can learn in a way that is rewarding for them (Cutting and Farr, 2015).

5.5 The challenges encountered by Moroccan EFL high school teachers when engaged in the development of materials

The results revealed that there are a number of challenges that EFL high school teachers encounter when developing effective materials. The first challenge, which was the most frequent one amongst the participants, is related to financial constraints. In other words, most of the teachers reported that they have large classes, and they cannot make copies for all of them, and this is because they are not supported financially by the administration of the schools where they teach. It is worth mentioning that developing effective materials can be very costly, especially when teachers look for them on the Internet. For instance, if they want to bring authentic material like a short story or a video, they need to pay an amount of money to the websites so that they can have access to them. This implies that when financial support is not provided, the quality of instructional materials that Moroccan EFL high school teachers develop may not have an effect on the learner. Moreover, the findings showed that there is a lack of training when it comes to materials development in Morocco. This implies that not all teachers are well trained and highly qualified to develop effective materials. Training plays a significant role as it provides teachers and materials developers with the necessary background knowledge and skills needed to help them carry out their responsibilities as they are expected to perform them. Another challenge

related to finding authentic materials is a hard task for the ELT community. This is because they are not easily accessible, and sometimes, teachers do not know how to differentiate between authentic and non-authentic materials. Another problem with the issue of authenticity is that teachers have problems with the use of these instructional materials. Teachers do not really know how they can adjust the authentic text to the level of the student. For instance, when a teacher makes modifications to a text to adapt to the level of students, the text may lose its authenticity.

6. Conclusion

The data gathered from this study revealed interesting results which can be of great help to EFL teachers and materials developers. Teachers are invited not to rely too much on the textbook; they should vary the use of instructional materials. Also, teachers should be encouraged to use different techniques of adaptation like adding, omitting and expanding to make textbooks more appealing to their learners' proficiency level and interests. In addition, they need to develop materials that can meet learners' needs, interests, ages, cultural backgrounds, and language proficiency levels. For this reason, teachers have the responsibility of analyzing the needs of their learners as well as the environment in which the materials are going to be implemented.

6.1 Pedagogical implications and recommendations

Moreover, Moroccan EFL teachers are invited to take into consideration authenticity and research on Second Language Acquisition as two criteria along with other criteria when engaged in the process of developing materials. That is to say, the materials they develop for their learners should not only meet their expectations, but they also need to expose learners to an authentic language. The development of materials should be based on principles of SLA and language and pedagogy. Teachers are invited to make sure that there is a match between their beliefs and, the types of materials they bring to class and the way they use these materials.

Teachers should have solid training in materials development. In other words, teachers should be exposed to different concepts, approaches, and techniques that can allow them to develop effective materials for instruction. Although teachers assume that they are doing their best, they still need more orientation concerning the way they use, evaluate and adapt textbook materials to make the content suitable to their students' interests, age and level before they begin teaching. Lastly, teachers should be supported financially so that they can vary the use of instructional materials.

The following recommendations are advanced to help teachers use instructional materials effectively:

- Teachers should bear in mind that learners are not the same; they have different needs, ages, cultural backgrounds, and interests. For this reason, teachers should not rely too much on the textbook; they should use different learning materials.
- Moroccan EFL teachers should design materials that target different skills. That is to say, teachers are required to develop materials that promote both linguistic and communicative competence.
- Materials developers in Morocco should update the learning materials included in Moroccan textbooks so that they can meet learners' age and expectations.
- Moroccan EFL teachers should not rely on the textbook to check learners' understanding because it may contain ready-made answers. This is because sometimes students may have the answers in the textbook they buy or borrow from their classmates.
- Teachers need to bear in mind that materials can not only be limited to textbooks and grammar worksheets, but they can include videos, real objects, and whatever can be used to facilitate language teaching and learning processes.

6.2 Limitations of the study

Although the study was pre-planned and designed carefully, certain limitations were encountered while conducting it. Firstly, given the short period of time in which classroom observation was conducted, it might not be representative of all EFL classrooms in a wider context. In other words, the observation would have been more comprehensive if it had been conducted in more than two weeks. Also, the presence of the researcher as an observer could have influenced the performance of teachers as well as students in their classrooms.

Also, the data obtained from the analysis of the materials cannot be generalized to other teachers and other contexts because the selected number of materials was not big, and they were given only by three male teachers. This is because teachers were reluctant to share their materials with the researchers. Also, the lack of published literature in the field was a great challenge. The researchers could not have access to a number of interesting issues which he planned to include in the theoretical background of the study. In addition, because of time constraints, the researchers could not interview the students to see whether they were satisfied with the supplementary materials their teachers brought to class or not. It goes without saying that though the study has such limitations, it is believed that it has its own contribution to the betterment of materials use and development in Morocco. In this regard, the study offers some pedagogical implications and some suggestions for future research.

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