RESEARCH ARTICLE

INVESTIGATING THE UTILITY OF THE MATERIALS USED FOR TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR THE NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN HODEIDAH UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the kind of the teaching materials used for teaching English language requirement courses English 101 and English 102 for the non-English majors in Hodeidah University. These courses do not develop students' proficiency in English language. The researcher analysed the teaching materials to evaluate them and find out their points of weaknesses. Because the materials are inconsistent and unsystematic, it was not possible to find common features for which a common checklist can be used. Therefore, he used a general checklist to find out their general features without delving deeply into much details about each lesson. Because there are a lot of teaching materials, he selected only five sample materials and evaluated them. The results showed that these materials are grammar-based and meant for lecture-oriented teaching.

1.   INTRODUCTION

English 101 and English 102 are names of the two language requirement courses the non-English majors in Hodeidah University study. The aim of teaching these two courses for the non-English majors is to improve their language proficiency. Unfortunately, according to the results of Haj's study (27), these courses do not improve the students' proficiency. They are supposed to be ESP courses (Moharram 347). However, what is being taught is not related to ESP. The teachers who come from the Faculty of Education to teach these courses to the students of the different departments of the university, find neither ready-made teaching materials nor syllabi in the concerned departments. They use whatever accessible materials they find. These materials are mainly GE because it is not easy to find ESP materials that suit the context for two reasons. First, ESP materials are domain-oriented and need-based, it is, therefore, not easy to find ESP materials that can work in more than one situation. The second is the low proficiency of the students, which makes it more difficult to find GE materials that can suit their proficiency level in GE, let alone ESP materials. So, the teachers use whatever materials they find accessible to them. Therefore, it is pertinent to evaluate the teaching materials used for teaching English language to these students.

2.   **Literature Review**

Teaching materials can play an important role of exposing the learners to the language especially in countries where English is a foreign language (Dudley-Evans & St John171). This exposure is in the form of language input (Richards251).As language input can bring about language learning, it is of urgent need to evaluate it to find the areas of strength and weaknesses. Textbook evaluation has turned into a very important area in English language teaching (Shatery and Azargoon 1). A teaching course is said to be successful when it meets and achieves a pre-specified set of learning objectives. When these objectives are not achieved, different aspects of the teaching process should be reconsidered and evaluated. Though teaching methods, learning environment and other elements should be taken into consideration, more important among them are the teaching materials. So, when the teaching outcomes are below the expected level, the first thing to be thought of is materials evaluation. Rea-Dickins and Germaine state that "[Materials] evaluation is an intrinsic part of teaching and learning" (4). They see evaluation "as the means by which we can gain a better understanding of what's effective, what's less effective and what appears to be no use at all"(28). "Materials evaluation will be considered a procedure that involves examining learning materials to establish their value" (Tomlinson in Dickinson 2).

Many educationalists try to define the process of teaching materials evaluation. Though these definitions have many commonalities, each one focuses on an aspect more than the other. Worthen and Sanders focus more on the objectives and the alternatives, and propose a restricted definition for the term, "Evaluation is the determination of the worth of a thing. It includes obtaining information for use in judging objectives, or the potential utility of alternative approaches designed to attain specified objectives" (19). Brown agrees with Worthen and Sanders about information collection but he brings the context into light. He defines evaluation as "the systematic collection and analysis of relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum and to assess its effectiveness within the context of a particular institution involved"(24). In Brown's definition, the evaluation should be done in relation to the context in which the materials are used. For Richards, the concept of evaluation is broader. He implicitly considers materials as one aspect of curriculum evaluation and brings the learners' needs into light. He states that "curriculum evaluation focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language programme [teaching materials are one of these aspects] in order to understand how the program works, enabling different kinds of decisions to be made about the programme such as whether the programme responds to student needs, whether further teacher training is required for teachers working in the program or whether students are learning sufficiently from it"(286). So, materials evaluation according to the definitions above begins with collecting the necessary information about the effectiveness of the materials. This effectiveness is measured against the achievement of the pre-specified objectives to heal the points of weaknesses and so improve the teaching program/ materials. However, if due to some reason or the other, these pre-specified objectives are not stated, the materials evaluator has to find other criteria to measure the success or the failure of the materials.

According to (Richards 256), the need for materials evaluation is due to the fact that the teaching materials which can bring about positive results in one situation may not do the same in other situations. The need for materials evaluation arises from the fact that commercial textbooks which are written for general market cannot meet the specific needs of a particular group of students (Tok 508). No textbook can be perfect in itself, but some textbooks may be more suitable to a particular group of students (Grant 8). The tools of evaluation can also be different from one situation to the other. Though the checklist is widely used for materials evaluation, Mukundan (170) finds that depending on checklist only is not enough. Other ways which can be used in addition to the checklist are questionnaires, tests for evaluating course book units and interviews (Zohrabi 216)

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3.   Methodology
3.1.   Research Tool

First the researcher collected some sample materials to find out what kind of evaluation tool is suitable. Unfortunately, the researcher found no commonalities among all the sample materials he collected. Even the lessons of each one single material are also collected from different sources in a way that makes nothing in common can be said about them. Therefore, he could not find any systematic checklist to use. It was clear that without delving deeply into the lessons to find the problem why such materials cannot bring about language learning, the broad lines of language teaching materials are missing. The researcher had to approach them globally. He developed his own checklist as it is better to be more flexible and use the way that suits the situation(Alderson and Beretta 248-9). The checklist he developed has two axes (see the appendix). The first is to find out the number and the ratio of the topics in relation to the skills and the number and the ratio of the activities in relation to the skills. The second is to find out whether the materials help the students use the language or not.

3.2.   Sample Materials

The researcher collected many sample materials and went through them. Out of the total number of the materials he collected, he found only five samples that can be evaluated according to the checklist. So, he used these five materials as the sample for the other materials.

4.   Data Analysis

Table (1):The number and ratio of the language topics and activities in the five samples

Samples	Number and Ratio of Topics							Number and Ratio of Activities						
	L	S	R	W	G	V	T	L	S	R	W	G	V	T
1	0	0	4	2	7	0	13	0	0	14	8	30	0	52
2	0	7	5	1	4	0	17	4	13	4	4	10	0	35
3	0	0	5	0	12	0	17	0	0	5	0	50	0	55
4	0	0	6	0	4	0	10	0	0	7	0	4	0	11
5	0	0	0	0	6	0	6	0	0	9	2	3	7	21
T	**0**	**7**	**20**	**3**	**33**	**0**	**63**	**4**	**13**	**39**	**14**	**97**	**7**	**174**
%	0	11.11	31.74	4.76	52.38	0	100	2.29	7.47	22.41	8.04	55.74	4.02	100

Codes:**L**= Listening, **S**= Speaking, **R**= Reading, **W**= Writing, **G**= Grammar, **V**= Vocabulary, **T**=Total

Table (1) above summarizes the number and the ratio of the language topics and activities in the five sample materials. There are 63 language topics in the five samples. There are neither listening nor vocabulary topics. Speaking topics are 7 with a ratio of 11. 11%. Reading topics are 20 with a ratio of 31. 74%. Writing topics are 3with a ratio of 4.76%, and grammar topics are 33 with a ratio of 52.38%. Regarding the language activities, there are 174 activities. Listening activities are 4 with a ratio of 2.29%, speaking activities are 13 with a ratio of 7.47%, reading activities are 39 with a ratio of 22.41%, writing activities are 14 with a ratio of 8.04%, grammar activities are 97 with a ratio of 55.74%, and vocabulary activities are 7 with a ratio of 4.02%. The grading of the language topics from the highest ratio to the lowest ratio is as follows: grammar, reading, speaking,and last comes writing. Listening and vocabulary are not included. The grading of the language activities from the highest ratio to the lowest ratio is as follows: grammar, reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary, and last comes listening.

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Table (2): The distribution of pages in the five samples

Samples	Total Number of Pages	Language Content	Activities
Sample 1	29. 5	15	14.5
Sample 2	25.5	15.5	10
Sample 3	30	16	14
Sample 4	38	30.5	7.5
Sample 5	26	15.5	10.5
Total	**149**	**92.5**	**56.5**
Ratio	100%	62.08%	37.92%

Table (2) above shows that the total number of the pages in the five samples materials selected for the evaluation is 149 pages in total. Out of the total number of the pages, 92.5 pages are for the language content with a ratio of 62.08% and 56.5 pages are for the activities with a ratio of 37.92%.

5.   Discussion and Conclusion

The results summarized in table (1) above show that the ratio of the grammar topics (52.38%) is more than the ratio of the topics of the language skills together in addition to the topics of the vocabulary and that the ratio of the grammar activities (55.74%) is more than the ratio of activities of the language skills together in addition to the vocabulary activities. This indicates that the materials are grammar-based at the expense of the language skills. The results summarized in table (2) above show that the ratio of the pages of the language content (62.08%) is more than the ratio of the pages of the language activities (37.92%). One can conclude that the materials used for teaching English language requirement courses 101-102 to the non-English majors of Hodeidah University are grammar-based at the expense of skills-based materials, and lecture-oriented at the expense of activity-oriented materials. Being not skill-based and not activity-oriented should make these materials ineffective and not able to bring about learning.

However, as was stated above that the conditions of the teachers and the way they collect the materials, one cannot judge the teachers, whether they give the grammar and the content more priority, unless s /he observes them closely in their classrooms. So, based on the results of the findings of Haj (2016) and the findings of this study, a future study about the teaching methods can be conducted to form a clear understanding of the situation. Based on the findings of the three studies, the possible solutions can be suggested to improve their proficiency in English language.

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Appendixes

The Evaluation Checklist

Table 1: The Number and Ratio of the Language Topics and Activities in the Five Samples

Sample	Number and Ratio of Topics							Number and Ratio of Activities						
	L	S	R	W	G	V	T	L	S	R	W	G	V	T
1														
2														
3														
4														
5														
T														
%														

Codes:**L**= Listening, **S**= Speaking, **R**= Reading, **W**= Writing, **G**= Grammar, **V**= Vocabulary, **T**=Total

Table 2: The Distribution of the Pages in the Five Samples

Sample	Total Number of Pages	Language Content	Activities
Sample 1			
Sample 2			
Sample 3			
Sample 4			
Sample 5			
Total			
Ratio			

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