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Małgorzata Jedynak

WHAT DO FL TEACHERS EXPECT FROM THE COURSE BOOKS? THE ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' NEEDS

Introduction

What may be observed nowadays is a tendency for over-reliance on classroom teaching materials with non-realistic expectations made of them in English language teaching (Rea-Dickins and Germaine 1992: 29). Indeed, for many teachers foreign language materials seem to be these elements of learning/teaching situation over which they have little control. Analyzing the blurbs of various textbooks it may be noticed that the needs and interests of the learner are taken into consideration by the book authors. The fact made the author of the article realized that while learner variables have been frequently analyzed by the SLA researchers (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991 or Ellis 1994) teacher variables have not been given a deserved amount of attention. Undoubtedly, the research findings focused primarily on learner variables influence on methodology of foreign language teaching including materials development. In comparison to the studies on learner variables, these devoted to teacher variables seem hard to find. Discussion about teachers has mainly focused on their roles in a classroom. Contrary to popular beliefs, teachers are not passive. They need to adapt flexibly to the roles determined by the objectives of the method and the learners' expectations. Teachers can be said to be the central figures in material development since they select materials and/or have an influence on the selection process. In the article the author makes an attempt to demonstrate some potential benefits of studying teacher variables. The identification of teachers' needs may help to answer the questions, which of them predict the final selection of a course book and which can be generalized as an indicator for the popularity of a particular course book.

Learners' versus teachers' needs

In the last twenty years the issue of needs analysis has appeared in the literature on foreign language teaching. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Johnson (1989), Robinson (1980, 1990), and Richards (1990) described various needs, however they focused only on learners' communicative needs. What may be observed from the analysis of the literature is the fact that teachers' needs are not given significance at all or they are treated as a part of situation analysis.

The academic study of needs was most popular in the 1950s. Nowadays it receives less attention among psychologists, however, educationalists still delve the issue. For psychologists *need* is a psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a goal, giving purpose and direction to behavior. The conceptions of “need” may vary radically between different cultures or different parts of the same society. The literature identifies many various types of needs. Masuhara makes a collective list of needs one may come across in the literature devoted to needs analysis (Masuhara in Tomlinson 1998). Needs may be defined in terms of ownership (whose needs are they?), kinds (what kinds of needs are identified?), and sources (what are the sources for the need?).

Undoubtedly, learners’ needs differ from teachers’ needs in terms of kind and source. As far as learners’ personal needs are concerned, the main sources of these needs are age, sex, cultural background, interests and educational background. Learners’ learning needs, in turn may be seen as dependent on learning style, previous language learning experiences, gap between the target level and the present level in terms of knowledge (e.g. target language and its culture), gap between the target level and the present level of proficiency in various competence areas (e.g. skills, strategies), and finally learning goal and expectations for a course. It is also worth to mention learners’ future professional needs having the source in requirements for the future undertakings in terms of knowledge of language, knowledge of language use and foreign language competence.

Foreign language teachers also have personal needs, the sources of which are in their age, sex, cultural background, interests, educational background and teachers’ language proficiency. An equivalent of learners’ learning needs are teachers’ professional needs. FL teachers have their own teaching styles just like learners have their own learning styles. Undoubtedly, teachers’ training experience and teaching experience have a great influence on professional needs. In any discussion about needs in educational context one should also consider administrators’ needs which coexist with learners’ and teachers’ needs. Schools impose to a great degree a selection of a course book which is related to market forces, educational policy of a given country and various kinds of constraints such as time, budget or resources.

Masuhara (1994) made an important point, that in order to evaluate some group’s needs the data must be taken directly from this group and their related documents by objective means. For example, to assess learners’ needs one should avoid asking teachers for opinion. Teachers’ survey opinions about learners needs are subjective and even if the data collected in this way is informative it tends to be variable and thus vulnerable in terms of reliability. We may say that such a survey measures teachers’ perception of learners’ needs but it does not refer to objectively perceived needs experienced by learners.

All categories of the needs described above influence the others. Thus, in any discussion on teachers’ needs in material development one should take into account the fact that they are influenced by learners’ and administrators’ needs. When teachers are for example requested to prepare a list of their needs from a course book their responses may be influenced by teachers’ perception of administrative needs, measured learners’ needs, teachers’ perception of learners’ needs and teachers’ wants. Thus, in order to design a reliable research methodology on teachers’ needs

it seems vital to construct it in such a way as to eliminate the impact of other factors e.g. learners' needs and administrators' needs.

The needs that have been presented above derive from personal and professional traits of a teacher. Masuhara (in Tomlinson 1998: 242) also suggested another division of needs into self-perceived needs, needs perceived by others, and objectively measured needs. The first type of needs refers to the needs reported by the teacher. The second category of needs refer to the needs teachers are not aware of, however, they can be identified by other people such as researchers, teacher trainers or teachers' colleagues. These needs are the result of observation of teacher's teaching or analysis of his/her responses from questionnaires. The last group of needs is identified on the basis of objective studies in which quantified data is collected. Since the data undergoes analysis by a third party the final results are unbiased and accurate.

Teachers' needs and teachers' wants

Teachers' wants can be distinguished from needs "when there is preference despite the fact it may not be necessary, obligatory, encouraged, or assumed" (Masuhara in Tomlinson 1998: 244). If a teacher prefers to employ certain techniques of teaching vocabulary it would be rather called his/her want and not a need. Similarly, when a teacher implements in a classroom constructivist approach it reflects his/her want even though it is regarded as significant by administrators. The study of teachers wants is important since it may reveal that teachers' commitment and involvement due to their preference of materials and techniques/methods/approaches are a key to effective foreign language learning. Frequently what is identified as "needs" by either teachers themselves or others (administrators, researchers, teacher trainers) may be also categorised under a heading of "wants." For example, foreign language adult learners have twice as many conversational classes which is based on the needs assessment of these learners, but it may be also because the teacher wants to enhance communicative competence of his/her learners.

Identification of both teachers' needs and wants seems crucial for foreign language material development. Firstly, knowing teachers' psychological needs the administrators, course book writers and teacher trainers are able to prepare teachers for a change related to redesigning the materials or selection of different materials. Moreover, identification of teachers' needs gives insights for new approaches in teacher development courses. Undoubtedly, it also provides course book and FL materials writers with some information about the content, coverage, and format of teachers' guidelines (teachers' books). Furthermore, they may set FL materials evaluation criteria on the basis of teachers' needs analysis. Similarly, identification of teachers' wants may contribute greatly to the format of teachers' guides, new directions in the content and approaches to FL materials. Additionally, it provides administrators, teacher trainers and researchers with information on how teachers react to various materials and implement them in a classroom. Teachers' needs and wants have appeared in the debate between the supporters and sceptics of course books. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) basing on Torres' survey results argue for the benefit of structured course books which cater for teachers' need for security

in classroom management. On the other hand, Sheldon (1988) shows that teachers need more theoretically and practically sound course books which may be modified and supplemented as required according to their classroom needs. However, both researchers seem to have one common ground in their approaches, namely that both teacher's confidence and professional expertise have an influence on how they view teachers' needs from a course book.

Adaptation of FL course books

It seems that there are two categories of FL teachers. In the first group there are teachers who treat course books as immutable objects and they tend to teach the textbook itself. The others treat it as a resource for creativity and inspiration or a learning tool for their learners (Cunningsworth 1995: 139). Researchers have addressed various problems with FL materials. According to O'Neill (1981: 153) the course book only provides some props and framework for classroom teaching. He also notices that there is no course book that would satisfy equally well learners and teachers. A similar point of view is presented by McDonough and Shaw (1993: 83) who claim that no matter how internally coherent a course book is, it will be not totally applicable. This observation is shared by Allwright (1981) and Swales (1980). The latter states that no given course book will be capable of satisfying teachers' and students' needs. Diversity of needs exists in all classrooms and there is no means to cater for this diversity. It is worth mentioning the position of Sheldon (1988: 239) who draws our attention to a very important fact namely cultural appropriateness of some course books related to the thinking underlying the textbook writing which may be different from or in conflict with the assumptions held by the teachers.

There is one common conclusion that emerges from all the views mentioned above. Teachers should see course books as their servants instead of master; as a resource or an "ideas bank" which can stimulate teachers' own creative potential (Cunningsworth 1984: 65). This idea is reflected in Richard's work in which he argues that foreign language teachers should approach course books with the expectation that deletion, adaptation, and extension will be normally needed for the materials to work effectively with their class (Richards 1998: 135).

Description of the study

As it has been pointed out in the abstract, the study investigates what teachers actually do in FL materials adaptation, including why they make the changes and to what extent their adaptation influences their teaching. It is believed that teachers' needs are reflected in the changes they implement in FL materials. A survey consisting of five open-ended questions was distributed to six teachers of English working in secondary schools in Wrocław. Ranging in age from 32 to 34, they all had about 8 years of working experience. All respondents used the same course book, very popular in Polish secondary schools, but taught different units because of different paces of teaching. The course book was published by the English publishing house in line with communicative approach principles and it consisted of 4 volumes for over three-year use. The first volume, not used in this secondary school, was designed for beginners. The pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate volumes

were only evaluated by the teachers. Each volume consisted of 12 units in which one can find the reading text (300–600 words) and the exercises to practice all language skills and language aspects such as grammar, lexis, and pronunciation. What is characteristic of this course book is that there is an abundance of short dialogues in pre-intermediate volume and the sections on phonetics do not occupy much space. In order to investigate how the secondary school teachers use the course book, i.e. what changes they introduced to optimize its potential and the effect of their teaching, the following questions were asked in the questionnaire:

1. What are the main advantages and disadvantages of the course books that you have used so far?
2. Have you ever made any adaptations to the units? Could you explain what adaptations have you made and how?
3. Could you tell your reasons for the adaptations you have made?
4. Are you able to evaluate the final effects of your adaptations?
5. Can you specify any factors which prevented you from adapting the unit the way you planned?

The results of the study

The data that was elicited from the respondents concerned four aspects: teachers' evaluation and adaptation of the textbook, rationales and underlying principles, effect of the teachers' adaptation and constraints they had encountered in their adaptation process. As far as the process of adaptation is concerned the secondary school teachers admitted that they carried out evaluation prior to adapting a course book. The respondents differed in their opinions about advantages and disadvantages of the course book they all use. The following advantages of their course book were identified by the questionnaire respondents:

1. It prepares learners for final secondary school exams.
2. It provides authentic materials.
3. It grades and sequences the material in a logical way.
4. It contains valuable self-study materials for the learners.
5. It is a source of various texts on the topics which appeal to the learners' interests.
6. It helps the learners improve reading and writing.
7. It contains practical guidelines for the teachers, especially in terms of background information and language points.

From the collected data one may say that the advantages of the course book are: preparing learners well for exams, its potential of expanding students' knowledge base with rich authentic reading materials, its focus on the language system and developing students' language competence, encouraging self-study. The respondents also identified the following disadvantages of the course book:

1. It provides little variety of activities.
2. Speaking and listening are not given much attention.
3. Some topics are out-of-date (e.g. the text about prince William when he was a child).
4. It does not suit the students' needs.
5. It is focused too much on language form and language use.

The main drawbacks of the course book observed by the respondents are: the limited varieties of activities, the lack of balance on the four language skills, too much importance attached to reading and writing while overlooking speaking and listening, out-of-dateness, low level of relevancy to students and focus on the language. Since the teachers felt the need to adjust the course book they applied a variety of adaptation techniques. The most popular was addition (6 respondents), others involved deletion (4 respondents) and modification (2 respondents). These techniques were utilized either at a particular stage of the lesson, or all the way through the lesson. The teachers enriched their classes by adding some warm-up activities, background information, language practice exercises, group work and reading comprehension questions. As far as deletion is concerned they omitted grammar exercises and detailed explanations of words. Modification of the course book involved changing dialogues into a role-play or adapting the text into a play for students to perform.

The author of the article also intended to discover the six teachers' underlying rationales and principles. It was found that they were guided in the course book adaptation by the following principles: 1) to cater for students' needs, 2) to integrate traditional and communicative methods, 3) to integrate as multiple language skills as possible in a reading lesson, and 4) to meet their own preferences and needs. As far as the teachers' views about the effects of materials adaptation are concerned there emerged a consensus among them that they had achieved the desired effects in a sense that they stimulated their students' interests, created a light and lively atmosphere and generated more student involvement. The analysis of the responses to the last question from the questionnaire revealed that they had encountered obstacles in their effort to adapt materials. The majority of the respondents reported that the constraints that emerged concerned: mismatches with traditional beliefs and practices, and inadequacy of teachers' expertise and physical constraints.

Conclusions

The study presented above looked at a group of six secondary school teachers and course book adaptation in their teaching practice. What is striking in the observations is the fact that in the adaptation process they do not treat their own needs and preferences as priorities. They either indeed cater for the students' needs or identify their own needs with these of the learners. Adaptation to the course book was common to all teachers, however, they did it to various degrees. Generally speaking the changes in materials were perceived by the teachers positively. The study carries important practical implications in a number of dimensions. From a research perspective, it highlights the necessity of doing further research on teachers' materials adaptation to shed light on various practical issues involved in teachers' use of materials. From the perspective of training methodology, it suggests that materials development is an effective way of helping teachers to understand and apply theories of language learning – and to achieve personal and professional development.

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Czego nauczyciele języków obcych oczekują od podręczników?

– analiza potrzeb nauczycieli

Streszczenie

Wybór podręcznika do nauki języka angielskiego oraz sposób przerabiania zawartego w nim materiału jest najczęściej uzależniony od potrzeb i zainteresowań uczniów. Wielu nauczycieli nie traktuje priorytetowo swoich potrzeb identyfikując swoje potrzeby z potrzebami ucznia. W badaniach glottodydaktycznych rzadko poddaje się analizie potrzeby samych nauczycieli, których zadowolenie również wpływa na efektywność procesu dydaktycznego. Zidentyfikowanie potrzeb psychologicznych nauczycieli może ułatwić autorom podręczników oraz metodykom przygotowanie nowych materiałów lub przekształcenie starego materiału w taki sposób, aby spełnić oczekiwania zarówno uczniów jak i nauczycieli.

Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje badanie na temat oczekiwań nauczycieli języka angielskiego w szkole gimnazjalnej w związku z używanymi przez nich podręcznikami. Pytania, które zadała autorka artykułu ośmiu respondentom dotyczyły wad i zalet stosowanych przez nich podręczników, sposobów, w jaki dostosowują materiał z podręcznika do lekcji i przyczyn, dla których to robią. Analiza odpowiedzi respondentów pozwoliła na zidentyfikowanie pewnych ich potrzeb dotyczących wprowadzenia większej różnorodności ćwiczeń, zachowania równowagi pomiędzy ćwiczonymi czterema umiejętnościami językowymi a przerabianiem nowych tematów. Badani nauczyciele stosowali różne techniki adaptacji materiału z podręcznika, takie jak rozszerzanie lub opuszczanie pewnych jego treści oraz ich modyfikację.