Adaptation: A Conservative Top-down Pedagogy

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Abstract

The changes in curriculum are usually intertwined with changes in textbooks. In fact, textbooks are written as a bridge between what is done in curriculum and what is intended. Thus, to develop a material, one of the preliminaries is to determine the learners' needs. Though the process of needs analysis is time consuming, the writers suggest that by providing a shortcut to needs analysis, the process of adaptation will be well strengthened and cost effective. Adoption, in contrast with adaptation, is often pedagogically criticized on the grounds that teachers, as the consumer of information, often reinforce students to memorize extraneous bits of information ready-made. To the present writers, the material developers who prefer to adopt rather than adapt usually ignore the needs of students; in contrast, adaptation entails revisiting students' needs in order to make them ready for the target situation.

Key words: deficiency, difference, needs analysis, professionalism, textbook

Introduction

Textbooks are respected as "resource books for ideas and activities" rather than as "instructional materials" (Allwright, 1999, p. 25). However, if this receptacle of ideas is not employed right, it can be a source of deviation. As to Richards and Renandya (2002), " if teachers use textbooks as the primary source of their teaching,…the teacher's role can become reduced to that of a technician whose primary function is to present materials prepared by others" (p. 67); in fact, to Richards and Renandya, adopting textbooks as the main source "deskill teachers" (p. 67). Furthermore, "textbooks [, if misused,] can be a source for financial corruption" (Heyneman, 2006). In fact, textbooks published commercially might be a source of corruption since as Richards and Renandya (2002) claim, they may not reflect students' needs and may contain inauthentic language. Henceforth, textbooks as the necessary tools for students and helpful guide for the novice teachers should be adapted with care in order to meet students' needs and not threaten teachers' professionalism. Nevertheless, to Heyneman "[textbooks] can be responsible for antiquated ideologies" (p. 36). Richards and Renandya (2002) assert that textbooks might present an idealized view of the world and fail to deal with real issues. Regrettably, to make the textbook acceptable, idealized topics rather than controversial topics are preferred.

Nevertheless, textbooks play a constructive role in the curriculum. Textbooks appear to be the heart of teaching centers. As Heyneman puts forth, "textbooks can be the cognitive cement behind a fully literate society" (p. 36). Still, in recent years, there has been a lot of debate on the actual role of materials in teaching. The centrality of textbook has been reiterated by several scholars (Allwright, 1999; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Meanwhile, textbooks are considered as "an appropriate vehicle for future education" (Heyneman, 2006, p. 35).

Although several practitioners (e.g., Grant, 1987) claim perfect textbooks do not exist, yet there is an optimistic willingness toward finding the best possible ones that will fit and be appropriate to a particular learner group (Tok, 2010). Along the same line, Sheldon (1988) takes a conservative perspective toward using textbooks. To Sheldon, textbooks do not only represent the visible heart of any ELT program, but also offer considerable advantages for both students and the teachers when they are being used in ESL/EFL classrooms. Among the advantages of textbooks, Haycroft (1998) holds that textbooks are considered as culturally essential for students since students can be informed about their progress and their achievement can be evaluated. Using textbooks, due to their credibility, gives students much confidence since textbooks are generally sensitive to students' needs (O'Neil, 1982). However, from a pedagogical perspective, as Littlejohn (1992, cited in Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 316) claims, "the precise instructions which the materials give reduce the teacher's role to one of managing or overseeing a preplanned classroom event". In this regard, Hutchinson and Torres claim that it seems that the teachers are at best apathy and the worst hostility to textbooks and are motivated to have their own curriculum and materials. This sense of enmity may be one of the weak reasons why teachers prefer adapting to adopting. Nevertheless, we can claim that even the teachers who adopt a book and pursue its procedures appeal to adaptation. In fact, at the heart of adoption, there is a hidden stream of adaptation. When one prefers to adapt rather than adopt, he/she surely considers students' needs, while those who would rather adoption may show no inclination toward needs analysis. In fact, everything is determined a priori. The present paper contends that if there is a shortcut to needs analysis, the process of adaptation will be held more legitimate and plausible.

Why textbooks?

Although there appears to be very little research on the exact role of textbooks in the language classroom, we shift our attention to two general perspectives toward the role of textbooks suggested by Allwright (1981). The first—the *deficiency* view— according to Allwright, sees the role of textbook as being to compensate for teachers' deficiencies and ensure that the syllabus is covered well. Underlying this view is the assumption that experienced teachers always know what materials to use with a given class and have access to or create them. Along the same line, Allwright asserts that the classroom lesson in the form of texts, activities and so forth is conducive to the interaction between three elements of teacher, learners, and materials. What this interaction produces are opportunities to learn (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). The *difference* view, on the other hand, sees materials as carriers of decisions best made by someone other than the teacher because of differences in expertise (Allwright, 1981).

As Crawford (2002) claims, "for many, however, both the deficiency view and the difference view challenge teachers' professionalism and reduce them to classroom managers, technicians or implementers of others' ideas" (p. 82). Crawford goes on to hold that these views turn out to be problematic since "teaching materials are not neutral and so will have a role to play in deciding what is learnt" (Apple, 1992, cited in Crawford, 2002, p. 82). In fact, there is no doubt that textbooks are

respected as an agent for change. According to Crawford, being an agent for change entails meeting a number of conditions: (1) textbooks become a vehicle for teacher and learning training; (2) textbooks must provide support and help for teachers to manage classroom; and (3) textbooks should provide the teacher with a clear picture of what the change should be look like; and (4) textbooks need to create a sense of responsibility for the change.

Furthermore, the setting in the classrooms is "inherently unpredictable and potentially threatening to all participants" (Crawford, 2002, p. 83). To reduce the degree of unpredictability, and also threatening among students, the textbooks are susceptible to play the role of "a structuring tool" (Crawford, 2002, p. 83). Accordingly, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) assert "textbooks…are the most convenient means of providing the structure that the teaching-learning system—particularly the system in change—requires" (p. 317).

Although the functions of textbook differ a lot within the cultural system, the availability of cut-and-paste books sticks the role of teachers to the margin. In fact, considering teachers as a gerund rather than a participle who sticks to their chairs and play the role of a simple transmitter and are actively involved in the operation of a given system results in the stagnation of teacher role. Adhering to an essentialist perspective, these teachers insist that knowledge be considered as a property that belongs to them who hands it out among students. The beliefs hidden in the textbook, from an essentialist look, is considered secure if they are told by wise and virtuous men (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Most explicitly, according to an essentialist thought, the role of a teacher is viewed as a model (Sharon, 2008). The movement, as Sharon (2008) asserts, began with Bagley's (1905, cited in Sharon, 2008) deeply-held ideology that education should teach knowledge from the past because if students were separated from past knowledge the future of democracy would be jeopardized.

In contrast, from constructivist perspective, learning is viewed as the process of adjusting the environment to accommodate new experiences. Along the same vein, granting a pivotal role to teachers would suggest that teachers must learn how to integrate and organize content of a textbook to make learning an interactive and meaningful experience, as opposed to an act that can be completed alone by self-directed study with a textbook (Wen-Cheng, Chien-Hung & Chung-Chieh, 2011). Having inclination toward constructivist perspective, the present writers hold that no textbooks can be employed without adaptation. In a sense, in order to make materials more suitable for particular contexts in which they are used, we can't help appealing to adaptation.

There is no doubt that textbooks are more than educational tools; they are, per se, political and cultural. Mœglin (2006) puts forth, "the textbook guarantees the promotion of political and ideological strategies" (p. 17). In fact, "no one contests that textbooks communicate the dominant political and philosophical ideals of the day" (Mœglin, 2006, p. 19). Diverse trends towards textbooks reveal a shift from what Giroux (1997) calls a culture of positivism to an anti-positivist paradigm. As to Giroux, culture of positivism considers textbooks as a "storehouse of artifacts constituted as canon" (p. 122). To Giroux, "knowledge appears beyond the reach of critical interrogation except at the level of immediate application" (p. 122). Teachers are considered as mere consumers of information stored in the textbook. From anti-positivist look, in contrast, teachers and students are considered as active producers of meanings constructed based on their experience. In fact, learning will be enhanced if students' voice is heard. In much the same way, when students are let talk from their vantage points, power will be decentered. As Giroux insists the decentering power in the class should help "students take their place in society from a position of empowerment rather than a position of ideological and economic

subordinations" (p. 120). Thus, in a classroom, where power is shared, as Dehler, Welsh, and Lewis (1999) argue "juxtaposing conflicting understandings [that] creates a space for learning—an opportunity to recognize how differing perspectives coexist and complicate the learning milieu" (p. 18). They accordingly hold:

> juxtaposing contradictions, such as participation and control, students may learn to debate opposing perspectives, grapple with their simultaneity, and recognize the biases and limitations of their sense making processes. The objective is to develop students' capacities for *paradoxical thinking*: the ability to comprehend the complicated interplay of opposites by picturing a paradox in its more complete surroundings. (pp. 16-17)

However, textbook is not considered a whole, but an element in the construction of knowledge (Dehler et al. 1999). Prabhu (1991) claims that textbooks are considered as social events. In much the same way, Giroux (1997) treats the text as one social construct produced out of multiple discourses. Dehler et al. (1999) also continues, "questioning underlying assumptions including the place of the author, whose perspective is adopted, for what purposes, and with what ends, becomes part of the students' role in understanding which voices are privileged and which are silenced" (p. 16). But the question that is remained unanswered is whether we should adapt or adopt.

Why adaptation?

There is no doubt that "one of the most important decisions an instructor makes is the selection of a textbook" (Chatman & Goetz, 1985, p. 150). However, the decisions turn out to be daunting when textbooks are considered as political tools; when they become the site of struggles and compromise in order to determine how and by whom they will be produced, how and by whom their contents will be selected, how and to whom they will be distributed, and how teachers and students will make use of them (Shannon, 2010). In effect, teacher practice and textbook use are intricately entwined (Sikorova, 2011). However, a number of studies carried out have shown that teachers are highly dependent on textbooks. In fact, the textbooks play a significant role in helping the teachers decide what and how to teach. Accordingly, Sikorova (2011) identifies three approaches to textbook use: adhering, elaborating and creating. The first approach, *adhering* (or adopting) to the textbooks, considers the textbooks as the authority; thus, few or no adaptations to text are made. *Elaborating* on the textbook lessons entails supplementing them with other resources and *creating* a textbook involves developing one's own units of study.

Undeniably, textbooks can rarely be employed without adaptation to make them more suitable for particular contexts in which they are used. In fact, the context necessitates a number of changes that will make the textbooks more appropriate. In this regard, McDonough and Shaw (2003) maintain that adaptation entails *personalizing, individualizing* or *localizing* the content. Madsen and Bowen (1978, cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003, p.78) have also added *modernizing* to this list. As to McDonough and Shaw (2003), *personalizing* refers to the increase in the relevance of content in relation to learners' interests and needs. *Individualizing* addresses the learning styles of both individuals and the members of a class working closely together, and *localizing* takes into account the international geography of English language teaching and recognizes that what may work well in London may not well do in Moscow, for instance. And as Madsen and Bowen put forth, m*odernizing* refers to the process of updating materials. In

fact, many out-of-date materials render not only misleading but also incorrect content; henceforth, materials need being up to date.

On the plausibility of adaptation, students' needs should be taken into account. Besides, learners should be involved in the curriculum design process (Allwright, 1981) to determine what they lack, want or wish. Compatible with adaptation, several scholars offer lists of reasons for doing adaptation. According to Nation and Macalister (2010):

1. The course book does not include all the activities that the teacher has used successfully before.

2. The course book material does not fit comfortably into the time available for the course.

3. The course book contains content that is unsuitable for the learners' level of proficiency or age.

4. The course book does not include language items, skills, ideas, discourse or strategies that the learners need.

5. The course book does not apply principles that the teacher feels should be applied. (p. 161)

Sheikhzadeh Marand (2011) also contends that effectiveness in achieving the purpose of the course and appropriateness of materials in relation to students comfort and familiarity with the material are considered as two important factors for learning purposes. According to Sheikhzadeh Marand, these two important factors will be determined only if we take into consideration the characteristics of learners. That is, for whom the materials are going to be developed: for adults, for children etc. Furthermore, the adaptation of existing materials occurs when the teachers recognize a mismatch between what students need and what the textbooks lack. In effect, materials are adapted in order to achieve congruence (McDonough & Shaw, cited in Madsen & Bowen, 1978). Henceforth, teachers should not be simply at the service of the content of textbooks; that is, teachers' prophecy is not limited to transmit the content of printed materials, but their role, as the transformer of intellectuality, is to bring changes to their understanding. Cunningsworth (1984) warns teachers that textbooks are good servants but poor masters. He goes on to hold that the teachers who set their objectives in terms of finishing several chapters are in fact servants of the textbooks. In this regard, Sheikhzadeh Marand (2011) asserts that the teachers should aim their instruction at "what students need to learn" (p. 553). Put differently, looking beyond the confines of the classroom, we need to know what our students need to do with language after learning it (Sheikhzadeh Marand, 2011).

A short-cut to needs analysis

Most of the syllabuses developed by specialists pursue a top-down pedagogy. What is undeniable is that power and politics, in material development, dictate the path to sway. In other words, top-down syllabuses regard learners as passive receptacles of language. In Freire's (1972) terminology, learners are seen as 'blank pages' who are not actively involved in the construction of knowledge. In brief, there is a mismatch between what is learnt and what is taught. Henceforth, teachers and learners are relieved of responsibility of knowledge construction. Freire's notion of *banking education* exactly reflects Roger's (1982) image of *cultural imposition*. In fact, to Freire (1972),

The teacher chooses the program content, and the students adapt to it; the teacher chooses and enforces this choice, and the students comply; the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; the teacher thinks, and the students are thought about. (pp. 46-47)

In fact, based on Prabhu's (1992) claim, lessons are social events; they are experience of growths.   In other words, students don't learn from what the teachers say, but learning occurs through the process of teaching. Candlin (1984) also inspired by Freire (1972) goes on to hold that a syllabus is "a window on a particular set of social, educational, moral, and subject-matter values" (p. 30).   The fulfillment of the tenets of a syllabus is possible if the learners are not stuck to the margin, and as Candlin (1984) reiterates, the notion of learnability of the syllabus can only be approached through the learners; this takes place if the syllabus issues are negotiated by students. In other words, in a negotiated syllabus, "both the content and the operational features of syllabus are open to discussion with the learners from the start of the program" (Clark, 1989, p. 134). A negotiated syllabus is, then, an internally generated rather than an externally imposed syllabus (Clark, 1989). In this vein, Clark outlines five underlying principles for adaptation: (1) learner commitment, (2) learner as materials writer and collaborator (3) learner as problem solver, (4) learner as knower rather than assimilator, and (5) learner as evaluator and assessor. To him, it is well appreciated if the students are allowed to make an effective contribution to what happens in the classroom. In effect, learners, through negotiation with teachers, are going to highlight their needs. Although negotiated adaptation can make the existing materials more relevant to the learners' needs, the given process seems to be time consuming.

Long (1985) asserts that needs analysis is "a notorious bottle-neck" (p. 90) in the development of language teaching materials. Maftoon (2001), analyzing Long's view, claims that Long is not necessarily in disfavor with the nature of needs analysis. To him, Long is "very critical of the procedures involved in the diagnosis of needs" (p. 22). Maftoon inspired by Long's shortcut to language needs identification states, "since applied linguistics understandably lacks expertise in specialized and specific disciplines, syllabus designers can turn to Long's proposal for the identification of learner's language needs" (p. 24). Long proposes a simple cost-effective procedure which is ready made by specialists in their respected fields and easy to access. "Long asserts that job descriptions—lists of activities people are to perform in real-life situations—provide syllabus designers with a wealth of prepared objective needs people are normally expected to do in authentic situations" (Maftoon, 2001, p. 23).

Very time-consuming, but needs analysis can provide a very in-depth and valuable assessment of the needs. Since the linchpin of adaptation is based on students' needs, scholars can make an endeavor to reduce the process of needs analysis in order to make them more cost effective.   Referring to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who refer to needs analysis as the analysis of the target situation needs , we can investigate the needs that, a particular group may face at a desired final destination of the course. The need that a group of nurses, for instance, is supposed to meet at the earlier day in a hospital will be how to interact with patients, how to inject them, and so forth. In a sense, not spending time on the target situations in order to analyze the needs that a nurse might face in the target situation, the needs analyst can utilize the ready-made materials in order to develop a new material. Furthermore, consulting with specialists in the related fields will also pave the way for material developers in order to meet the needs of these nurses. In order to determine the subjective needs of students, it is advisory to observe them in the process of learning. In effect, although probably the most accurate information can be elicited from the learners, trusting the judgment of our experienced colleagues conducting an ESP lesson can also be well-appreciated.

Conclusion

What is undisputable is that the selection of textbooks should be in line with students' needs. Textbooks, as vehicles for delivering content knowledge, were always at the center of academic and pedagogical challenges issues. Adopting a textbook as a panacea was always a dream since the pedagogy governs adopting a textbook was always top down. Furthermore, no one can claim that adopting a textbook following a syllabus will fulfill all teaching and learning requirements appears to be a panacea. In this case, the teachers appear to consume the ready-made product. Henceforth, several scholars among them Cunningsworth (1995) highlights the issue of needs analysis and   counts criteria for evaluating textbooks: (1) they should correspond to learner's needs; (2) they should reflect the uses which learners will make of the language; (3) they should take account of students' needs as learners and should facilitate their learning processes; and (4) they should have a clear role as a support for learning. What such scholars highlight is the issue of needs. But what they put into the margin is how students who lack expertise are going to negotiate their needs; further, is there any short cut to analyze students' needs. Also, for those who claim that textbooks have to be adopted simply because the teachers lack the basic and necessary content knowledge to understand and interpret textbooks is also implausible since teachers' perception and attitudes toward the use of textbooks together with the subject knowledge turn out to be as one of the major factors that underlie the effective use of textbooks. In fact, adaptation is not a rudimentary job. The changes in curriculum are usually intertwined with changes in textbooks. In facts, textbooks are written as a bridge between what is done in curriculum and what is intended. No one denies that students' engagement in curriculum development is necessary, but less has been written to what extent they should get involved. It is less-than-a- realistic wish to assume that the material developed in an instructional enterprise is simply directed by the needs determined by students. Ideality is far from reality. Textbooks are political tools. Curriculum development is pedagogically top down. Even the textbooks developed based on students' needs, though bottom-up in pedagogy, will be dictated by policy makers. Conservatively, such books also pursue the top-down pedagogy.

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