



“DESIGNING EFFECTIVE INTERACTIVE MATERIALS FOR ENGLISH TEACHING AT INFANT LEVEL”

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ABSTRACT

This research article seeks to analyze how teachers can design effective and interactive English teaching materials based on the students likes and needs. This research was carried out in a private language school in Chilpancingo de los Bravos, Guerrero, Mexico. This research has the objective to propose a set of effective interactive English teaching materials for young learners. Also, to analyze the factors teachers need to consider identifying the difficulties, and to define the advantages when designing effective English teaching materials for young learners. The study was fulfilled through a qualitative approach and action research method, which included the teacher-researcher, the teacher involved in the class, and the infant-level students as participants. Data was collected by interviews, classroom observations, and a questionnaire to help evaluate the English teaching materials and the activities. The results showed how the different English teaching materials can affect the learning process of the students, also the props that the English teaching materials have on how the students focus and produce the language.

KEY WORDS:

English, teaching materials, effective and interactive, learning process, materials design.

RESUMEN

Este artículo de investigación busca analizar cómo los docentes pueden diseñar materiales didácticos de inglés efectivos e interactivos basados en los gustos y necesidades de los estudiantes. Esta investigación se llevó a cabo en una escuela privada de idiomas en

Chilpancingo de los Bravos, Guerrero, México. El objetivo de este estudio es proponer un conjunto de materiales didácticos de inglés interactivos y eficaces para estudiantes jóvenes. Además, analizar los factores que los profesores deben considerar, identificar las dificultades y definir las ventajas al diseñar materiales didácticos en inglés eficaces para estudiantes jóvenes. El estudio se realizó a través de un enfoque cualitativo y del método de investigación acción, que tuvo como participantes al docente-investigador, al docente del grupo y a los estudiantes del nivel infantil. Los datos se recopilaban mediante entrevistas, observaciones en el aula y un cuestionario para ayudar a evaluar los materiales de enseñanza de inglés y las actividades. Los resultados mostraron cómo los diferentes materiales didácticos de inglés pueden afectar el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes, además de que los materiales didácticos de inglés tienen un efecto en cómo los estudiantes se concentran y producen el idioma.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Inglés, materiales didácticos efectivos e interactivos, proceso de aprendizaje, diseño de materiales.

Introduction

English teachers adapt their methods and materials to suit different ages, levels, and learning styles, using a variety of resources to engage students and enhance language acquisition. Materials as pictures, objects, videos, and songs appeal to the senses and enrich the learning experience. English, as a global language, is a key tool for communication in fields such as business, science, and education, fostering international cooperation and cultural exchange. Language teaching involves structured instruction to develop skills in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Richards and Rogers (2014), it combines methods, techniques, and materials to enable effective communication. Teaching materials, whether textbooks or teacher-created resources, play a crucial role in attracting students.

To guide this research and according to the previously stated information, the main research question is developed as follows:

- Which are the most compelling interactive English teaching materials for young learners of Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros “Ignacio Manuel Altamirano” (CIEX)?

Furthermore, the main research question is complemented by the following subsidiary questions:

- What factors must teachers consider when designing effective English teaching materials for young learners?
- What are the difficulties teachers face when designing English teaching materials?

- What are the advantages of designing effective interactive English teaching materials for teachers and students?

Effective English teaching materials benefit schools by equipping teachers with lessons plans, strategies, and evaluation tools to assess students progress and maximize their potential. These resources engage and motivate students, accommodating diverse learning styles and abilities to create an inclusive and enjoyable approach, increase students' engagement, and save preparation time by offering ready-made lesson plans and activities. They also support differentiated instruction, enabling teachers to address individual student needs and improve overall learning outcomes. On a broader scale, effective English teaching materials contribute to society by enhancing communication skills across diverse backgrounds. They promote cultural exchange, fostering understanding, respect, and tolerance for different perspectives. Additionally, these materials support academic achievement, as English is a primary language for education and research in many fields, enabling students to access global resources and participate in scholarly discourse.

Literature Review

Teaching English to Infants

Language teaching is the practice of educating students to learn a language, focusing on developing their ability to understand, speak, read, and write a language. It involves a structured process involving a variety of teaching methods, techniques and resources that promote language learning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), language teaching includes theoretical approaches and practical applications aimed at enabling students to communicate effectively in a second or foreign language. Teaching young students may seem simple and not as difficult as teaching adults. The British Council (n.d) suggests that one of the strategies that can help students in the learning process is interactive games, which are necessary tools to help students become more engaged in the subject. In addition, everyday situations can help them solve problems in a more interesting environment and improve their critical thinking. Another tool that can help students is flashcards and repetition. This is a handy tool because young learners are in a critical period for their brains to absorb more information like a sponge. In English learning environments, teachers can adapt tools used in non-English learning environments. Brown (1980) believes that the use of different tools and techniques should be considered when teaching English to young learners because it saves students time and makes them lose interest easily. Understanding the unique characteristics, preferences, and perspectives of students is critical to help teachers develop strategies and teaching materials that can be implemented in the English language learning process.

English Teaching Materials

Understanding learning materials can help people learn a foreign language. Teaching a foreign language class is more than just explaining grammar or syntax; textbooks play an important role in learning and reinforce the knowledge that teachers impart to students. These materials facilitate students' acquisition of knowledge and can motivate students to acquire knowledge in different ways (Kaprodi, 2015). Therefore, understanding specific study materials can help you in foreign language learning. Teaching materials should be considered a necessity while teaching a foreign language. As known, teaching materials are data gathered on how to implement a better lesson for the student. According to Twinkl (n.d), every class a student takes should have a specific objective for learning. Teaching materials allow teachers to offer more interactive, fun, and interesting learning activities. Therefore, teaching materials are a significant key for teaching foreign languages.

Development of Teaching Materials

Teaching materials can improve the student's learning process, but it is essential to consider some factors that help develop these teaching materials. One factor is the student's learning style; each student is different. Therefore, each student might have a different learning style. Some students can be more visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or analytical. Knowing the students' learning styles is critical in designing the teaching materials to help them learn (Fernandez, 2016; Leon, 2016). The development of English language teaching materials has made significant progress over the years, emphasizing the need for culturally appropriate content to engage students while improving language skills. According to Tomlinson (2011), effective teaching materials should be designed with a clear understanding of students' needs, preferences, and learning environment. Such an approach ensures that the materials are not only pedagogically sound, but also adaptable to different learning environments, thus improving students' language learning and communication skills more effectively.

Research Methodology

Research Approach and Method

The qualitative research approach focuses on understanding phenomena through participants' experiences, meanings, and perspectives. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe it as interpretative, capturing the complexities of social realities in their natural contexts. Creswell (2013) highlights its value in exploring problems or concepts in depth, using open-ended questions, interviews, and observations to provide a holistic understanding of subjects; this research adopts the qualitative approach to examine the use of interactive teaching materials.

The study employs an action-research method, which is a participatory approach involving iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection to solve practical problems collaboratively. Introduced by Lewin (1946), this method emphasizes generating knowledge and implementing change through stakeholder feedback. Stephen Kemmis (1988) expanded on this by integrating critical reflection to challenge and transform social practices, fostering sustainable solutions.

In designing teaching materials, action research ensures continuous improvement by incorporating real-time feedback and reflective practices. Lewin's iterative process ensures teaching materials are both theoretically sound and practical, while Kemmis emphasizes critical reflection to address underlying educational issues. This approach enables educators to create inclusive, adaptable, and effective materials that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Participants

The participants in this research will be infant-level students of the English course and the teachers involved in the class. The ages of the students are from 8 to 10 years old. Their economic background is mixed since the school does not discriminate their status. This school is in the downtown area of Chilpancingo de los Bravos, Guerrero.

Another participant is the teacher-researcher. She is a woman and has a Bachelor of Arts in English Letters at Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros (CIEX). Moreover, other participant is the teacher in charge of the group who will apply the proposed activities, she is 22 years old, and she is finishing a Bachelor of Arts in English Letters, too. These activities will take around one month to be completed; the activities will be focused on the English language development and the activities that motivate students to speak and feel good about learning a new language.

The Context of the Research

This research is conducted in a Basic 1 English course at CIEX, where teachers and students use the institutional book *Conversational English Book 1*. The book is divided into 30 units, allowing students to practice, complete exercises, and engage with the language interactively. Students also create a portfolio containing at least two activities per unit, aligned with the book's content. CIEX provides essential resources to support learning, including internet access, classrooms equipped with desks, chairs, televisions, speakers, and other necessary materials for teachers and students. CIEX employs a student-centered teaching methodology focused on developing the four macro-skills of the language —listening, speaking, reading, and writing—

while aiming to produce well-rounded, proficient English speakers. Additionally, the institution integrates a values program to nurture students' personal growth, fostering language skills alongside moral and human development.

Data Collection Instruments

The instruments used were an interview guide, an observation format, and questionnaires, each following a methodology that aims to solve the main research question and subsidiary questions.

- Interview guide: These interviews follow a format, allowing flexibility for adjustments to guarantee the collection of quality information. They have eight open-ended questions each one to gather the necessary data. There are two interviews, one for the teacher and the other for students, one before the treatment and another after the treatment. The interviews before the treatment were necessary to help design the English teaching materials. The interviews after the treatment helped evaluate the effectiveness of the interactive activities and materials.
- Observation format: The observation format was led by a naturalistic method that captures real-life data. A well-structured format was used to record observations systematically and effectively. It was applied during each activity, and it was useful for the researcher in the aspect of giving feedback and collecting the data and factors for designing the teaching materials.
- Questionnaires: These questionnaires allowed the teacher researcher to ensure the effectiveness of the interactive activities through the students' answers. The questionnaire had six closed-ended questions, and three open-ended questions and helped provide positive feedback on this research. This instrument was applied after each activity; if the activities needed to improve or were a success with the students, the questionnaire determined that result.

Main findings

These results were necessary to evaluate each learning material and activity designed according to the wishes and needs of the students. This information was collected through pre- and post-interviews, questionnaires, and an observation format. The collected data was organized and processed by categories to instrument an analysis and present the results in three distinct phases: pre-treatment, during treatment, and post-treatment. These results were obtained from the students, the teacher in charge and the teacher- researcher.

After the activity was applied, a questionnaire was used to learn the students' opinions and

analyze the results to confirm its effectiveness. All the participants evaluated all teaching materials to determine if a change was needed.

To evaluate the interactive materials, it was necessary to design and apply some teaching activities; in this regard, the materials and activities of this treatment were:

- Teaching Material 1 “Touch the Thing”: The objective of this activity was to review the vocabulary. In this activity, students tried to find, touch, and say the color of the flashcard as many times as possible; the flashcards were put in different parts of the classroom.
- Teaching Material 2 “Unscramble the Word”: The objective of this activity was to be able to spell out the word. Each student was given a stack of cards that contained letters of the word of a color. The students had to order the words and spell out the words.
- Teaching Material 3 “Trace the Word”: The objective of this activity was to write and associate the word with the character’s colors. In this activity, the students trace the words of the colors with paint, and their fingers match the colors of the characters.
- Teaching Material 4 “Bingo”: The objective of this activity was to review the colors. In this activity, the students had a sheet with the colors and tokens; the students who made a row of three had to yell bingo and won; after two rounds, the students participated in saying the colors instead of putting the tokens into the sheet.
- Teaching Material 5 “The Guessing Game”: The objective of this activity was to associate the color with the character and to practice the pronunciation. In this activity, the teacher projected the slides on the television; each slide had different characters, but the first slide was always in black and white, and then the students had to say the character’s color.
- Teaching Material 6 “Make Your Pizza”: The objective of this activity was to associate the objects with the colors. For this activity, the students had a pizza divided into colors and toppings according to the colors on the pizza. The students had to cut the toppings, paste them into the corresponding color, and then say what colors were in the pizza.
- Teaching Material 7 “Color What You Listen”: The objective of this activity was to practice their listening skills. In this activity, the students were handed a worksheet with only colored circles and had to circle the colors they heard. In question number one, students were asked if they had learned anything from the activity. All the students said that they learned a lot from the activity.
- Teaching Material 8 “Scavenger Hunt”: The objective of this activity was to associate the characters with the colors. The students had to find the different characters around the classroom, and when they found it, they had to yell the character’s color.

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After the application of the activities and materials and the data gathered from the instruments, it can be stated that the proposed interactive English teaching materials helped improve the students' learning process; and in this regard, some general findings are presented as follows:

- Students found the English teaching materials interactive, useful, engaging, and enjoyable.
- The teacher also observed that the English teaching materials positively influenced students' learning process by associating the activities with the lesson, enhancing the educational experience.
- The English teaching materials successfully reinforced the lesson through attractive and engaging activities. So, the English teaching materials made both effective and interactive the students' learning process.
- Interactive materials such as digital resources, games, and multimedia content engage students and keep them creating a more active learning environment.
- Interactive materials Improved language skills; if interactive materials are carefully designed and include real-life scenarios, they can help students develop their language skills in a practical way.
- Interactive materials improve retention of vocabulary and grammar using repetition, enabling students to recall information more effectively.
- Effective interactive English materials often cater to different learning styles, whether visual, auditory or kinesthetic, ensuring that all learners can benefit from the course, regardless of their preferred learning method. So, these teaching materials can be adapted to the learning styles of the students.
- Interactive English materials that encourage problem solving, discussion, and collaborative learning can help students develop critical thinking and analytical skills that are essential for language learning.
- This research shows that students who used well-structured, interactive materials tend to perform better on assessments and make greater gains in English language skills.
- Students who use interactive materials tend to improve their language more quickly because these resources provide immediate feedback and a more personalized learning experience.

Conclusions

This section includes the conclusion presented by answering the main research questions and supporting it by analyzing and interpreting the participants' experiences using effective and interactive English teaching materials. It also presents the main conclusions related to the subsidiary research questions.

1. Most Effective Interactive English Teaching Materials for Young Learners at CIE: The

most effective materials engage students' senses and spark their curiosity. Based on the analysis, the following materials stand out:

- Flashcards: Versatile in size and purpose, they effectively support various teaching objectives.
 - Interactive Worksheets: While digital versions exist, physical worksheets are better suited for young learners, promoting independent practice and immediate feedback.
 - Digital Flashcards: These visually engaging tools are ideal for reviewing and reinforcing topics, offering interactive feedback.
 - Audio Aids: Essential for language learning, audio aids enhance vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening skills.
2. Key Factors in Designing Effective Teaching Materials: To ensure materials are engaging and educational, teachers should focus on:
 - Visual Appeal: Incorporating images and cartoons to make content more accessible and interesting.
 - Interactivity: Including games and hands-on activities to sustain attention and make learning dynamic and enjoyable.
 3. Challenges in Designing Teaching Materials: Teachers encounter several challenges, including:
 - Time Constraints: Developing high-quality materials is time intensive.
 - Diverse Learning Styles: Addressing varying student needs while maintaining engagement can be challenging.
 - Maintaining Motivation: Designing materials that hold students' attention, especially for less appealing topics, poses a significant challenge.
 4. Benefits of Interactive Teaching Materials: Interactive materials enhance both teaching and learning experiences:
 - For Teachers: Interactive materials increased student engagement, more effective instruction, improved assessment tools, and a positive classroom environment.
 - For Students: Interactive materials provide higher motivation, better comprehension and retention, personalized learning, critical thinking development, instant feedback, and real-world application of language skills.

These findings highlight the importance of carefully designed interactive materials to optimize English learning outcomes for young learners. This study also provides key factors, difficulties, and advantages that can help teachers develop English teaching material.

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