

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Issues in Materials Development

by Maryam Azarnoosh, Mitra Zeraatpishe, Akram Faravani, and Hamid Reza Kargozari (Eds.)
Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2016, 225 pages
ISBN: 978-94-6300-430-5 (paperback)

Reviewed by/ Revu par

Rahim Pira
University of Calgary

Pira, R. (2019). [Review of the book *Issues in materials development*, by Maryam Azarnoosh, Mitra Zeraatpishe, Akram Faravani, and Hamid Reza Kargozari (Eds.)]. *Emerging Perspectives*, 3(3), 1-4.

Issues in Materials Development, edited by Maryam Azarnoosh, Mitra Zeraatpishe, Akram Faravani, and Hamid Reza Kargozari, is a resource for materials developers and other readers who are new to the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It offers a practical guide on how to incorporate theoretical foundations into practical aspects of designing materials for ESL and EFL learners. In this book, the editors introduce the basic principles of materials development, assert the importance of materials development, and show its evolution over the past years. The book also discusses the importance of considering learners' needs in materials development, and designing appropriate materials for four language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Furthermore, the text explains the process and strategies for developing various types of materials for pronunciation, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) vocabulary, and computer assisted language learning. This resource also delves into some important issues in materials development: authenticity of the materials, motivating materials that engage language learners, and universal design in materials development. Finally, the authors address the current English Language Teaching (ELT) materials development and propose approaches for further improvement.

Content and Structure

Issues in Materials Development consists of sixteen chapters, and each chapter is authored by different contributors. The first chapter, written by Brian Tomlinson, explains the process and significance of materials development in general and its importance for teachers, material writers, researchers, and applied linguists.

In the second chapter, Alan Malay addresses the principles and procedures in materials development. He lists principles proposed by applied linguists and materials writing practitioners and argues that these "principles need to be based on pragmatic experience, not simply on

theoretical systems” (p. 27). While emphasizing human creativity in materials design, the author also discusses macro-level and micro-level processes that are involved in materials design and writing.

In the third chapter, Alper Darici argues for the importance of needs analysis in materials development. Darici strongly supports this notion by discussing the reasons for conducting needs analysis and how it can be performed. He further suggests that needs analysis is necessary because “students can sometimes observe or sometimes feel if the lesson plan and the material facilitate their learning. ... [and they] can provide the best feedback by drawing our attention to their needs” (p. 31).

Based on the language- and learner-centered syllabuses, in the fourth chapter of this book, Akram Faravani and Mitra Zeraatpishe highlight the process and importance of selection and gradation of materials when designing teaching materials for English language learners.

Guiding readers to be effective language teachers, John Macalister writes about adapting and adopting materials in the fifth chapter. Adapting materials occurs through changes made to the content and sequencing, format and presentation, and monitoring and assessment of materials. Moreover, the author also outlines the model of language curriculum design that “can be used to inform decisions about adapting materials ... [and] about what to adopt. The biggest investment is often the choice of a course book, and so it is important to make the best possible decision” (p. 63).

The next four chapters are about developing appropriate materials to support the language skills of ESL learners. In the sixth chapter, Jayakaran Mukundan, Abdolvahed Zarifi, and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi highlight “important elements that material developers should take into account in selecting and presenting the reading materials.... [and attend to] the selection and presentation of vocabulary items that have proven to significantly affect reading performance” (p. 65). Parviz Maftoon, Hamid Reza Kargozari, and Maryam Azarnoosh discuss guidelines for developing listening materials in chapter seven. The chapter describes listening processes, types of listening materials, technologies used for developing these materials, and characteristics of effective listening materials. This is followed by a discussion on developing materials for speaking skills in chapter eight by Ivor Timmis. Timmis points out a gap between theory and practice in speaking skills, and to fill this gap, he promotes designing activities for learners that considers “accuracy, fluency and complexity at specific phases of the planned activity and how learners can be best prepared for each phase” (p. 92). He advocates designing activities that provide scaffolding for the learners and motivate them to speak in English. Finally, in chapter nine, Jayakaran Mukundan, Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, and Ruzbeh Babaee support developing materials for teaching writing to EFL and ESL learners. In this chapter, the authors stress the importance of using authentic materials of different types in teaching writing to students and argue that these materials should be developed “after gaining a clear picture of the needs and interests of the target audience” (p. 106). The authors also emphasize making writing an enjoyable activity for language learners.

John Levis and Sinem Sonsaat explore designing pronunciation materials for EFL and ESL learners in chapter ten. They examine three materials development principles: intelligibility in pronunciation materials, integration of pronunciation with the teaching of other skills, and provision of sufficient support for teachers in developing pronunciation materials.

In chapter eleven, Handoyo Puji Widodo recounts his research study that was carried out in Indonesia to investigate “the pedagogical roles of portfolios in the development of students’ ESP vocabulary” (p. 121). He argues that “a portfolio as a tool for learning technical vocabulary aims to expand depth and breadth of technical vocabulary knowledge of students” (p. 121).

In chapter twelve, Hassan Soleimani and Maryam Mola Esmaili document the issues surrounding the contribution of technology and computer in the field of materials development. This interdisciplinary field of study is known as computer assisted language learning (CALL).

Chapter thirteen brings up the issue of authenticity in materials development. In this chapter, Soufiane Trabelsi accentuates the importance of developing authentic texts and materials for enhancing efficient language learning. He also discusses four authenticity approaches from his review of the literature on authenticity in ELT area.

Maria Heron, in chapter fourteen, writes about stimulating students’ motivation by using affectively engaging texts. She contends that “if the learners are not affectively engaged with the texts because the content is trivial or they cannot relate to it, they will disconnect and learning will not take place” (p. 159). Furthermore, she emphasizes the connection between emotion and motivation, and how this connection can lead to learning and autonomy.

Chapter fifteen focuses on universal designs when developing materials for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In this chapter, Lilia Savova investigates ESOL instructional design that is drawn from “cognitive and constructivist theories of learning as well as from principles of universal design derived from disciplinary and cross-disciplinary design knowledge” (p. 184). Savova also provides examples of two universal principles of design: the principle of 80/20 and Gestalt principle of similarity.

Finally, in chapter sixteen, Dat Bao presents the core qualities of second language teaching materials while stressing on major areas for improvements in today’s ELT materials development. Bao outlines “four major dimensions that mark the desirability of second language materials” for ESL learners: linguistic values, cultural content, learning resources, and learners’ identity and living environment (p. 195).

Critique

One of the strengths of *Issues in Materials Development* is the discussion of various resources used for developing materials for language learners. For instance, Widodo presents the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and shows how these online resources help the language learners to comprehend “the frequencies of identified words and recognize how words are used in context” (p. 128). Within the same chapter, the author also writes about various online dictionaries and the importance of these resources in providing the language learners “with quick access to the meanings of unfamiliar words” (p. 128).

According to Widodo's research, these resources have been proven to be successful for language learners; hence, they are invaluable for new and experienced teachers and material developers who want to take advantage of these free, online resources.

Issues in Materials Development also provides ample recommendations and suggestions for implementing different strategies when developing teaching materials for ESL, EFL, and ESP learners. Its greatest strength lies in promoting a learner-centered approach, one that considers the needs and strengths of the learners, and that values the notion of "one-size-does-not-fit-all." Language learners come from different backgrounds; hence, it is critical for teachers to "consider starting their year applying needs analysis in small scales and then decide what the best is for themselves and their learners" (p. 40).

The research studies included in this book are contextualized for learners outside of Canada such as Indonesia and Tunisia. Canada is a multicultural society, and language learners in Canadian classrooms come from a range of different backgrounds. Hence, from a Canadian perspective, this book is somewhat limited in providing effective strategies for developing materials for language learners in Canada. Teachers and materials developers may have to seek additional research that proves the success of these strategies in Canadian classrooms. Additionally, as a text for developing materials for English language learners, it falls short of being edited carefully, and contains several spelling mistakes, sentences with missing articles and punctuation marks, and minor printing errors.

Overall, *Issues in Materials Development* provides a practical and theoretical overview of the issues encountered when developing materials for language learners. Language teachers, practitioners, researchers, and educational materials developers would benefit from reading this book because it offers resources for designing classroom content that can build and enhance English language learners' vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. Moreover, this book will also provide readers with sufficient knowledge and skills in developing materials that are predominantly learner-centered. As a contemporary text, the book also provides enough exposure to readers on how to integrate technology when developing materials for language learners.

Reference

Azarnoosh, M., Zeraatpishe, M., Faravani, A., & Kargozari, H. R. (Eds.). (2016). *Issues in materials development*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.