

INNOVATIVE MATERIAL DESIGN/ADAPTION ENSURES SUSTAINABLE ELT

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ABSTRACT:

This study enables an insight into the understanding of the importance of innovative material designing/adaptation with a focus to sustainable ELT. The researcher has sensed from her teaching experience that amongst the five basic components of language instructions - students, teacher, materials, methods and evaluation; practically, both students and teachers depend on materials especial written text materials as their main tool of instruction. This sense of realization triggered the researcher towards the necessity of designing and re designing/ adapting ELT materials, considering its sustainability in the context of Bangladesh. The study therefore, is not an improvise collection of thoughts and ideas rather it is a frame work of practical knowledge and experience of ELT classrooms at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The paper includes models of some texts, activities and technological uses that has helped students in becoming a more practical learner. Finally, the research paper concludes by giving feedback on the practice as experienced by the teacher (researcher) with the target group in connection as to how innovative material design/adaption can help sustainable ELT.

Key Words: Sustainable, Material, Improvise, Framework, Practical knowledge

INTRODUCTION:

Broadly speaking, ELT has its utilitarian importance in almost every part of the world. Bangladesh is not an exception. Like, any other Asian countries, in Bangladesh, English is taught /learnt either as a foreign language or as a significant functional language. Hence, the utilitarian purpose of ELT in the country is also becoming wide spread and in connection to this, as a language teacher, I have experienced that self - designing /adaptation of course materials is quite rationale ; especially if our focus is on students' needs and also, in a context where the learner is not a native speaker of English. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, this study is not an improvise collection of thoughts and ideas rather it is a frame work of practical knowledge and experience of ELT classrooms , at the tertiary level of a prestigious university (private) , in Bangladesh.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT IN BRIEF:

Studies of material development are a recent phenomenon. Until recently materials development was treated as a sub-section of methodology, in which materials were usually introduced as examples of methods in action rather than as a means to explore the principles and procedures of their development. However, it was not until the 1990s, when courses started to give more prominence to the study of materials development, that books on the principles and procedures of material development started to be published (e.g. McDonough and Shaw 1993; Hidalgo et al. 1995; Tomlinson 1998a).

An important factor in changing attitudes to materials development has been the realization than an effective way of helping teachers to understand and apply theories of language learning and to achieve personal and professional development is to provide monitored experience of the process of developing materials. therefore, an effective classroom teacher needs to be able to evaluate, adapt and produce materials so as to ensure a match between the learners and the materials they use. 'Every teacher is a materials developer' (English Language Centre 1997) .In some ways, this is a formalization of the implicit understanding that a teacher should provide additional teaching materials over and above course book material.

In Bangladesh, however, ELT has already obtained a prestigious status but at the same time it is true that though the ELT teachers at the primary and secondary levels of education are not competent enough to prepare their own teaching materials, at the tertiary level ELT teachers on and above average are much more competent, educated and efficient. Moreover, as the use of English in different domains in Bangladesh has increased the approach, concepts of teaching and learning have also updated. ELT teachers in this country have their own limitations in terms of time, energy, opportunities, resources etc. but in recent years many ELT intellectuals and teachers have obtained foreign degrees and trainings and have changed the scenario of the academic arena of Bangladesh. Teachers are also engaged in preparing culture-centered teaching materials for the National textbooks and at the tertiary level (private universities) teachers are encouraged to prepare self-designed and adapted materials with a touch of innovation.

THE CONCEPT OF DESIGNING / ADAPTATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE:

By adaptation we simply mean adjusting / fitting in something (text or activity) with a view to make it more comprehensive and acceptable. Adaptation should not be a total denial of the course book as teachers need to follow the course curriculum provided by the institution for academic purpose. Block (1991) explains ... supplementing or replacing part of the course book with their own contributions allows teachers to respond to the geographical and cultural context of the learners, draw upon the topical in referring to current events, and provide a personal touch. Allwright's (1990) views are that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction /learning , and that they should give teachers rationales for what they do. From Allwright's point of view, text books are too inflexible to be used directly as instructional

material. On the contrary, O'Neill (1990), argues that materials may be suitable for students' needs, even if they are not designed specifically for them, that textbooks make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons, that textbooks are efficient in terms of time and money, and that textbooks can and should allow for adaption and improvisation.

From the above discussion it is however relevant that for preparing course materials the course book which is recommended and used by the students & teacher could be the most authentic, identifiable and accessible teaching aid and as a language teacher, using the course book as a basis I have tried to tailor some teaching materials that might be considered more effective and sustainable in the context of Bangladesh.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES:

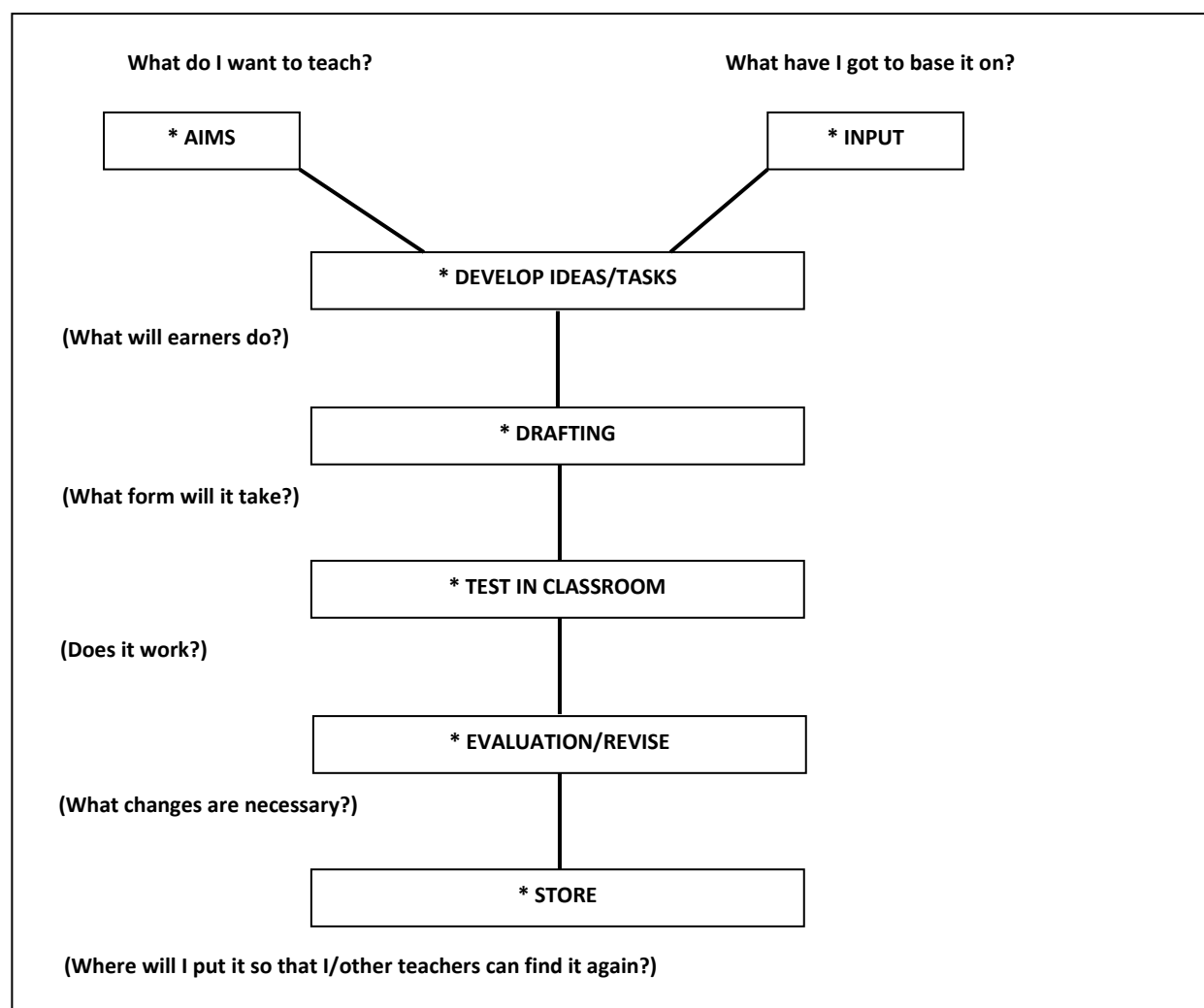
This research is a frame work of practical knowledge and experience of one of the ELT classrooms at the tertiary level of a prestigious private university in Bangladesh. The research was conducted on the students of ENG 101 titled 'English Speaking and Listening Comprehension'. The number of students in this course varied from 25/30 (in each section) in every semester. The course is of three (3 credit hours) per week. The group is heterogeneous and belonged to the 18- 21 years of age group. The objective of this action research was to ensure as to how self designed and adapted course materials proved to be more innovative and utilitarian to the students.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE:

The objective of the course (ENG 101) is the development of the integrated skills with emphasis on speaking and listening. It enables students to understand and communicate more effectively in English in the academic and social environment.

The Research Plan:

As a language teacher, I tend to use and adapt varied/diverse teaching materials and occasionally design my own classroom materials, task and activities keeping in connection with the course book to help focus more closely to the 'needs of the learners' and in doing so, I personally maintain the following frame work for planning and material designing.



'A frame work for planning and material designing' from Allan (1997).

MODELS OF MATERIALS DESIGN/ADAPTATION:

MODEL 1: SOCIAL INTERACTION:





1. Pre listening task: (a short video)
 - a. What do you think the students are talking about?
 - b. What does their “body language” say?
2. Listening for main ideas: Listen to the conversation of the students at the university (CIU) campus and answer the following questions.
 - a. Who does Jeshad introduce to Abir?
 - b. Are Jeshad and Abir close friends?
 - c. Where did Sneha come from?
 - d. What does Jeshad propose to Abir?
 - e. Why will the three students probably see each other soon?


MODEL 2: EXPERIENCING NATURE



- A. Pre listening & speaking task: Discuss the following questions with your partner.
 1. How many seasons do you have in your country?
 2. Describe the weather in each season.
 3. What activities do people enjoy doing in each season?
 4. How many seasons do people experience in other countries?
- B. Listen to the text on the description of different seasons of your country and enlist the name of the seasons. (tape script/ teacher reads out the text)
- C. Reading task: Match the pictures to the relevant description of different seasons from your reading of the text.
- D. Writing task: Describe the season you like best in your own words. Use words/phrases from the text if necessary.
- E. Speaking task: Read aloud the description of the season you like best.
- F. Vocabulary Activity: Write down the meanings of the underlined words from the text.

Text	Picture
<p>The Spring (Bashanta) consists of the two months <u>Falgun</u> and <u>Chaitra</u>. In this season the gentle breeze blows from the south and brings life to almost everything. Nature puts on her seasonal glory of the flowers of many kinds and color. The <u>Krishnachura</u> blooms in this season and the trees are full with green leaves. The weather is <u>calm</u> and fair. It is known as the queen of seasons in Bangladesh.</p>	

Text	Picture
<p>The Rainy season (Borsha) consists of Ashar and Sravan. It is a season of <u>profuse</u> rainfall, the season of <u>monsoon</u> and the season of vegetation all around. The sky remains overcast with clouds in this season and due to heavy rain the <u>miseries</u> of people know no bounds. This season causes much hardship to the <u>livestock</u> and other domestic animals. But, despite all inconveniences, the rainy season is much helpful for agriculture.</p>	
<p>Summer (Grissha) is the first season in Bangladesh. Bishak and Jaista are known as Summer season. During this season the <u>scorching</u> heat of summer dries up the lands for <u>cultivation</u>. But again the heat of this season <u>evaporates</u> the sea water and vapor being cooled down transforms into clouds and brings in rain. Many fruits like mango, jackfruit, liches etc. grow in this season in Bangladesh.</p>	
<p>Autumn (Shoroth) is the season when the <u>Kash</u> blooms. Bhadro-Asshin mark the Autumn season in Bangladesh. In this season the skies are blue and a cool wind blows; The land turns into a carpet of bright green rice. It is a step between Winter and Summer. It can be a mixed scenario of warm by days and cold at nights. The weather is <u>unpredictable</u> during Autumn in our country.</p>	
<p>Late Autumn (Hemonta) is the time of harvesting the '<u>golden corn</u>' (paddy) in Bangladesh. It fills the hearts of the farmers with joy and happiness as they bring their harvest to their homes. Different types of rice-cakes and pastries are prepared in this season. The '<u>Nabarna Utyshab</u>' a thanks giving festival is observed by the people in this season. The mornings turn to become foggy and people experience a <u>contrast</u> between the night and day.</p>	

Text	Picture
<p>The Bangla months of Poush and Magh mark the arrival of Winter (Sheiet). In this season the <u>environment</u> is dull and <u>dismal</u>. It is covered with mist and fog. Everything looks <u>hazy</u> especially at a distance. People put on warm clothing to protect themselves from the cold bite of Winter. The specialty of this season is <u>date- juice</u> which is collected from the date trees in pots and pitchers.</p>	

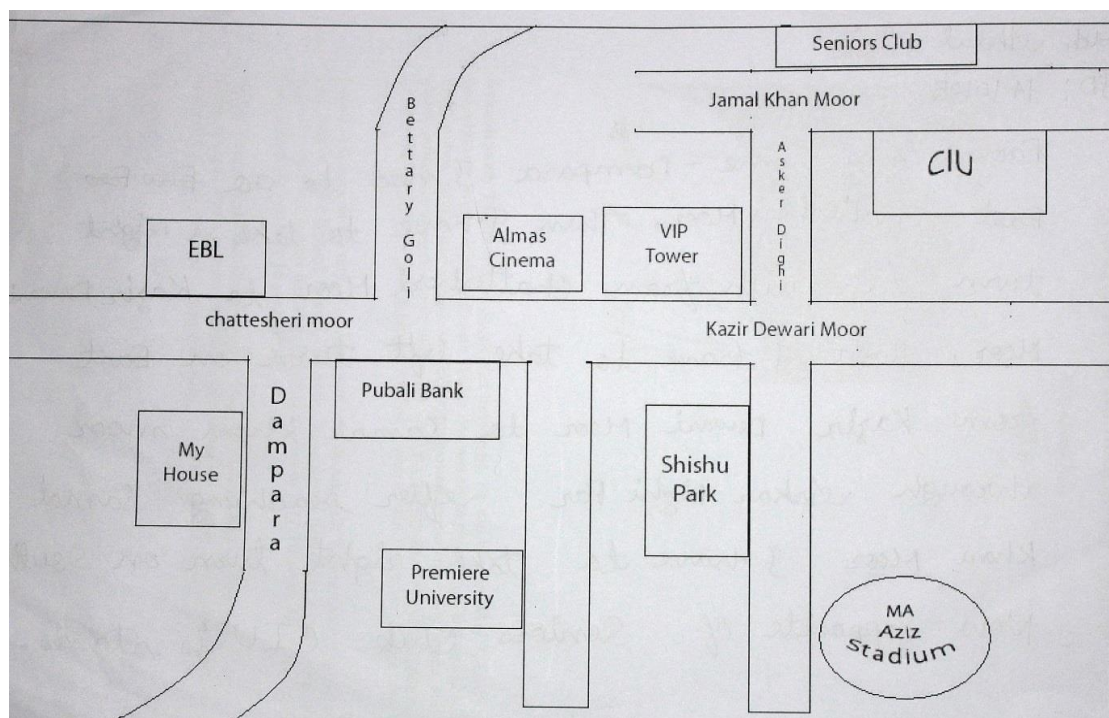
MODEL 3: DIRECTIONS

The following expressions are often used for asking and giving directions.

Asking for Directions	Giving Directions
<p>Could you tell me where is? Where is? Do you know how to get to? How do I get to? I'm looking for I'm trying to find</p>	<p>Go straight. Go straight for two blocks on Go past (the market). Go north / south / east / west. Turn right / left. Make a right / left. Cross the street. You'll see it on your right.</p>

Source: Interactons 1, 4th ed.

1. Reading a map: Look at the map below. Using the above expressions write down the directions from EBL to MA Aziz Stadium.



Drawn by Md. Azizul Huq

2. Look at the map below. Work with a partner and ask for directions to the different places on the map.

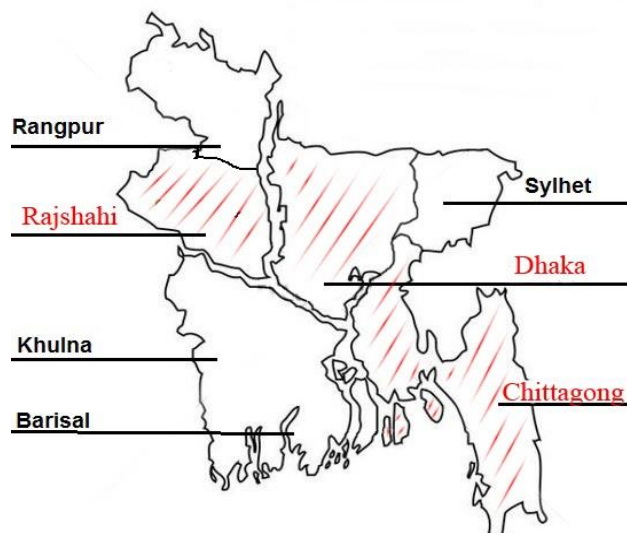


Drawn by: Brinty Das

Example: How do I go from Rahmatgong to Chittagong Independent University (CIU)?

MODEL 4: REGIONAL FOODS OF BANGLADESH

1. Look at the map of Bangladesh. As you listen to the recording write down the names of the regional foods in the places they are popular.
2. Discuss with your partner which of these regional foods is your favorite.



The Map of Bangladesh

RESEARCH PROBLEMS:

The research being done in a small scale intervention in the real world (here classroom) a close observation and monitoring could be done by the teacher (researcher). But the task was quite painstaking and time consuming. She had to plan ahead what changes were to be made keeping attune with the objectives of the course, methodology etc. so that in no way teaching is tampered and hampered.

Finally, at the end of the semester the researcher welcomed 'direct feedback' from the target group of students through a questionnaire which has been mentioned in the appendix. (See appendix, pg 10).

FEEDBACK (LEARNERS' POINT OF VIEW):

- It was useful and comprehensive but could have been more structured with some grammar practice
- It was interesting and innovative
- It widened our outlook by connecting national and global topics
- It was more engaging
- Listening materials were sometimes difficult to understand
- The level of the materials were not always standardized
- Instructions were sometimes not very clear
- It was fun
- Too much to take in including the materials of the course book itself

Reflecting on the students' feedback the researcher considered it of pivot importance to take the 'views of teachers' too, because practically speaking, it is the teachers who are/can implement teaching materials in their classrooms. Appertain to, the views and opinions of teachers at the tertiary level of some institutions in Chittagong, (Bangladesh) were taken which have been depicted below. Worth mentioning here is that some teachers were already implementing self- designed course materials in their respective classrooms and the most acute problem while doing this research was that, a good majority of colleagues were quite reluctant and preferred to stick to the course books only because of various constraints.

FEEDBACK (TEACHERS' POINT OF VIEW):

- Students might try to avoid the main text/course book
- Students might become more interested in participating in activities (practical) and pay less importance to theoretical learning
- Innovation boosts the students' self- confidence
- Preparing materials are/ could be pain staking and troublesome
- It is time consuming and laborious
- Teachers face / could face problem in preparing standardized materials
- Some teachers were not interested or willing to perform extra task
- Teachers might have grown a tendency to adopt short-cuts in teaching by paying less or no attention at all to the recommended text/ course book
- Testing and evaluating problem
- Teachers at times violate or might violate the copyright laws/ rules
- Students felt / might feel the materials to be sustainable and innovative

SUGGESTIONS/ PROPOSALS:

The above 'feedbacks' from both students and teachers give us a mixed understanding of the importance of innovative material design / adaption. From the 'feedback' of the teachers we can analyze that preparing innovative materials for the classroom at times may sound difficult but its outcome is utilitarian. 'Teachers without any formal teacher training can also develop teaching materials for their English classes.' (S. Shaila. Harvest. Vol.21. 2006). In preparing materials all that a teacher needs is self-interest/motivation to sacrifice some time in collecting authentic, identifiable, accessible materials and innovating them to meet the needs and interest of the students. Teachers should also be sincere in not violating the copy –right laws and find out ways in evaluating students not only being based on their textbooks/course books but also through the use of a variety of teaching materials. These additional materials should be prepared in accordance with the standard of a particular course and the level of the students enrolled in that course. Teachers also need to be open –minded, flexible and above prejudice in accepting both 'negative and positive feedback from peers and students. They should often administer achievement test/s after the use of such materials. Teachers can share their materials amongst peers and through feedbacks can improve these materials. In this regard, they can maintain a feedback note-book or prepare a questionnaire. Thus, ELT will receive more attention and sustainability. Finally, Teachers need to be devoted towards their profession despite limitations, stress and financial discomforts and not be reluctant towards extra academic responsibilities especially where teaching is concerned. 'It is true that teachers, most of the time have to follow syllabuses strictly and many of them don't have enough time and access to high –tech gadgets for writing their own materials. On the other hand, they don't need much technical backup for developing teaching materials' (S. Shaila). Self- interest/motivation govern teachers in preparing innovative teaching materials with very simple things and in a very interesting and lucid manner.

Finally, to suggest, in using innovative materials (additional) above the main text/ course book students too, need to be more engaging, diligent, smart and interested.

CONCLUSION:

To sustain ELT in Bangladesh there is no other better option than to comprehend the importance of innovative material designing/adaption. As ELT has become an important area or topic of language intellectuals all over the world no matter whatever contextual, institutional, personal and financial constraints one might have to face in order to meet the 'needs' of the 'time' and 'student', the language teacher must initiate innovative, practical learning and thinking which undoubtedly will make the students effective learners. Thus, as stated by Tomlinson, 'there are limitations in the ways of designing and adapting materials but at the same time these limitations should not stop us from applying what we do know about second and foreign language learning to the development of materials designed to facilitate the process of ELT' (Brian Tomlinson). However,

allowing teachers to use varied and additional materials above the main text/ course book will undoubtedly make more practical learners and hence ensure sustainable ELT.

Appendix

A Sample questionnaire for students

Course Id & name:

Feed back on class activities:

Day:

Date:

(Tick your answers only. You don't need to mention your id or name).

1. Was the task/activity easy to do?

a. Very easy b. quite easy c. only with difficulty

2. How enjoyable did you find the task /activity?

a. Very enjoyable b. quite enjoyable c. not enjoyable

3. Did you find the task /activity innovative?

a. Very b. quite c. not at all

4. Did the task /activity help you in learning the language (English)?

a. Yes b. to some extent c. not at all

5. Did you face any problem/s working on the additional innovative materials along with your course book?

a. Yes b. to some extent c. not at all

6. Do you prefer working on the additional innovative materials along with your course book?

a. Yes b. sometimes c. no

7. What could have improved in the materials?

Comment -

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