

# Teaching English as a foreign or second Language

## Chapters Summary

By  
Assist.lect. Batool A.M. Al-shawi

### Chapter 6 Summary

#### EFL/ESL Materials, Media, and Technology

##### Who Creates the Materials Available to EFL/ESL Teachers?

Basically, materials used in EFL/ESL classrooms are created by four groups of people: publishing companies, government agencies, curriculum development teams at the school level, and classroom teachers

**Publishing companies:** materials used in a private language school, ESL K-12 program business, or other settings, such as EFL/ESL texts, audiotapes, a disk with accompanying word books, videotapes with worksheets for students, and computer programs. In fact, a large number of commercially made texts and other materials are on the market for teaching reading, writing, listening speaking, grammar, survival English, K-12, vocabulary building cross-cultural communication, pronunciation, English for business TOEFL preparation, vocational skills, literature, and more. In addition, publishing companies are producing full series of texts beginner through advanced proficiency levels.

**Government agencies:** used in a public school in a country with a centralized educational system, where material produced (or selected) by a government education agency. Some countries establish special committees that either produced their own texts or solicit proposals from teachers to produce text. After being approved by this central committee, these texts are produced and used in the schools.

**Curriculum development teams at the school level:** used in certain universities, well-established private language schools, some ESL K-12 schools, and corporations with language programs. They are local designed texts and materials. Teachers who have some EFL/ESL teaching experience usually produce these in-house materials. Some times the writers of the materials are also members of a team who design the curriculum for the language program. As a result, classroom teachers are sometimes given a day-by-day lesson plan, which includes goals of each lesson, steps in implementing it, and the materials needed to teach it.

**Classroom teachers:** If you are among the teachers who are not completely satisfied with the textbook, you probably adapt the text or design entire lessons with materials you create yourself.

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### What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Commercial Materials?

#### Advantages

Using commercial teaching materials **saves time**. Another advantage, especially for those new to teaching, is that **well-organized** commercial materials can systematically guide the teacher and students step- by-step through a series of lessons. Accompanying teaching manuals or companion websites also **provide lesson plans with some useful suggestions or techniques**.

#### Disadvantages

However, there can be disadvantages associated with using commercial materials, especially if the teacher can't select the text to be used.

1. First, there is the possible problem of ideological conflict in teaching beliefs. Texts are usually based on the author's or publisher's ideas about teaching. For example, some text writers believe students should memorize words and grammar rules before they practice speaking, writing, or reading; others think lots of practice in meaningful contexts is significantly more important. Given a pre- scribed text, teachers feel as if they have to accept the beliefs of the author/publisher. This conflict can have negative consequences on what goes on in the classroom.
2. Second, when teachers blindly follow their assigned texts, they might be trivializing the experience for the students. And if we teachers accept our role as simply taking students step-by-step through a book, "the teacher's role is marginalized to that of little more than a technician and the level at which we are engaged in teaching is reduced to a very superficial one."<sup>1</sup>
3. Finally, commercially made textbooks are prepared for a wide audience that is culturally diverse and geographically dissimilar. As such, the "qualities which give teacher-made and audience-specific materials their authenticity and relevance are usually removed. Teachers should read the introduction of the textbooks and determine who the books were written for. Many ESL textbooks shouldn't be used in EFL settings, and the reverse is also true.

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### **What Are Authentic Materials? What Types Are Available?**

**Definition:** Basically, authentic materials include anything that is used to communicate.

#### **Types:**

1. Authentic Listening/Viewing Materials such as Silent films; TV commercials, quiz shows, cartoons, news, ...etc.
2. Authentic Visual Materials such as Slides; photographs; paintings; sketches; drawings by children; stick-figure drawings..etc.
3. Authentic Printed Materials: for example Newspaper articles, cartoons, advertisements, movie advertisements, astrology columns, to name just few.
4. Realia Used in EFL/ESL Classrooms as in Dolls, puppets, currency, key rings, scissors, folded paper, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, stuffed and toy animals, ...etc.

### **What Are the Disadvantages and Advantages of Using Authentic Materials and Media?**

#### **Disadvantages**

1. it takes time and effort to locate authentic materials. It is also difficult to make authentic materials and media comprehensible to the students.
2. some students will not accept authentic materials and media as being a valuable learning source. For example, students will sometimes reject TV comedy or games as a learning source because they consider them entertainment but view learning as a serious enterprise.

#### **Advantages**

1. they can reinforce for students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world."
2. they offer a way to contextualize language learning. When lessons are centered on comprehending a repair manual, a menu, a TV weather report, a documentary, or anything that is used in the real world, students tend to focus more on content and meaning than on language.
3. They offer students a valuable source of language input, since they can be exposed to more than just the language presented by the teacher and the text.

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### **How Do EFL/ESL Teachers Use Authentic Materials and Media?**

Some teachers use authentic materials to get beyond the limitations of a text. Here are some examples

1. While engaged in a reading activity about food, teacher had students in groups study a photocopy of an authentic menu, and match the pictures of items to some of those listed in the menu. Or then had them create their own menus, including pictures of food items they cut out of magazines. The students next wrote their own dialogues about ordering food in a restaurant; they practiced the dialogues and took turns presenting them in front of the class.
2. Using authentic video as a means to have students in their English as a foreign language classes write and produce their own commentaries. They prepared four five-minute video segments on everyday themes, showed them to the students without a soundtrack, and asked them to write a commentary based on the video segment of their choice. The commentaries were corrected by the teachers and audiotaped by the students. After more teacher feedback, students rerecorded their soundtracks. They then watched the original video segments with sound and compared their versions with the original.
3. Another way to use authentic materials is to include them on reading boards. A reading board looks similar to a bulletin board, but it is purposefully designed to promote interaction between the reader and the text. It can include quick quizzes, problems to solve, Quotes from famous people, cartoons and jokes, and news items.

### **What Kinds of Technology Do EFL/ESL Teachers Use?**

Technology is scientific and industrial know-how or expertise. Some teachers have access to high technology, such as computers that can surf the Internet at lightening speed, while other teachers will only have access to chalk and a blackboard. it is important to emphasize that technology is only one aspect of culture. In addition to having a technological system, every culture has a social system, a human communication system, and an ideological system. Even though people in a culture might not have (or want) access to advanced technology, they can still be a highly developed culture in other ways. EFL/ESL teachers use Both low and high technology. At the one end is some of the most

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basic technology-those things naturally around us that can serve as teaching tools such as Sticks, Earth, Air, Clouds . Moving across the continuum to such usual items as chalk, blackboards, paper, and pencils, most teachers simply smile. These are familiar to all experienced teachers. However, teachers are often surprised to learn that they use the board in quite limited ways.

1. One useful technology that is sometimes overlooked by teachers is the radio. However, as a group of elementary school children in Israel discovered, learning to be amateur radio operators cannot only open up our understanding of the world, but also can be an interesting way to develop speaking skills in English.
2. Another technology sometimes overlooked is the telephone.
3. Digital technology is developing at a fast rate, and there are some very exciting and creative uses for this relatively new technology. For example, digital video camera in hand, to collect authentic oral materials that students at a beginning level could use to prepare them to travel abroad.

### What Problems Do Some EFL/ESL Teachers Have with Materials, Media, and Technology?

Problems some EFL/ESL teachers face include the following:

1. The "I am forced to teach from the book" problem

**Problem:** The "I Am Forced to Teach from the Book" Problem Some EFL/ESL teachers are required to follow a particular text, and they find that the administration's policy is stringent. Sometimes, actual lesson plans are provided, and supervisors make sure they are followed. When this happens, teachers can feel helpless in the face of being creative with materials and media. Unfortunately, some teachers give in under the pressure and simply follow the prescribed lessons.

**Solutions:** However, other teachers find ways to incorporate additional materials while adapting to the prescribed lesson. They might bring in photos or pictures that correspond to the required reading to make it more vivid. They might have friends record a one-minute natural conversation based on language in a dialogue in the text. Or they might have students spend the last ten minutes of class using Scrabble letters to spell out words found in their text and make up original sentences from these words. Some teachers also negotiate an "authentic English" day with the students, providing them with a lesson based on authentic materials and media each week. Whether adapting a lesson or creating a special day every so often, the possibilities for making small changes are endless, and the changes

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can ultimately have big consequences on the way students interact with each other and the teacher in English.

### 2. The "Let the textbook do the teaching problem

*Following a text has certain advantages. It saves time, and novice teachers can learn something about teaching from following a text, studying the accompanying teaching manual, and using materials from companion websites.*

**Problem:** But adhering to a text without considering the effects on the students-for example, whether or not they are negotiating meaning with each other and the teacher-can trivialize the experience for the students.

**Solution:** Of course, not all teachers accept the constraints imposed on them by the text. Some teachers want to be more than technicians, doing more than mindlessly following a text and its accompanying materials. They realize that texts are not meant to be blindly plodded through and that teaching guides are only other teachers' ways to teach lessons, which might not be appropriate for their own students. They also realize that much can be gained from exposing students to authentic language materials and media, and they want to make their own informed decisions about how to teach a particular, always unique, group of students.

### 3. The "How do I locate useful websites for my students?" problem

**Problem:** There are so many websites that some teachers find it almost overwhelming to know which ones they can recommend to EFL/ESL students.

**Solution:** teachers and EFL/ESL students find some websites to be the most useful. These websites might be useful to teachers and students alike:

1. [www.eslworldland.com](http://www.eslworldland.com) (The ESL Wonderland)-A "jump- ing off point for ESL teachers and students who want to find resources for teaching or learning English. It has a multimedia content presented in a learner-friendly man- ner (text, photos, interactive quizzes). [www.eslbee.com](http://www.eslbee.com) (Advanced Composition for Non-Native
2. Speakers of English)-For EFL/ESL students who want to learn to write academic papers in American schools. The material in this site aims toward high-intermediate to advanced English learners who have never taken a formal English writing course.