



# Materials Development - How to Make a Reading Class More Effective? Using Tomlinson's 'Text-Driven Approach'

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## Abstract:

This paper takes the position that despite an abundant number and variety, most traditional coursebooks are quite standardized and offer traditional repetitive tasks which almost eliminates an individual or personalized component and a possibility to trigger emotional involvement. This motivates material writers and ELT teachers to adapt teaching materials according to personal needs of their students and increase their exposure to the language in use. As an example, the article analyses teaching reading in the ELT class and the problems teachers and students can face by using traditional coursebooks. It is proposed to apply principles of materials development in order to make students involved in the process of reading and boost their language awareness. The article discusses Tomlinson's framework 'Text-driven approach' which is aimed to help learners move away from their tendency to study texts so that they can engage with the text instead experientially. The sample reading lesson where the framework was applied, is presented and principles of adaptation of the material are highlighted.

**Keywords:** *reading, Text-driven approach, emotional involvement, personalization.*

## Apstrakt:

Rad zastupa stanovište da je većina tradicionalnih udžbenika, uprkos tome što ih ima u ogromnom broju i što su raznovrsni, prilično standardizovani i tradicionalno nude zadatke koji se ponavljaju, to gotovo eliminiše komponentu individualnosti i personalizaciju, kao i mogućnost unošenja emocija u sam proces. Ova činjenica motiviše pisce udžbenika i nastavnike engleskog jezika da prilagođavaju materijal u skladu sa ličnim potrebama svojih učenika, i da povećaju njihovu izloženost jeziku koji je u upotrebi. Kao primer, članak analizira podučavanje veštine čitanja u nastavi engleskog jezika i probleme sa kojima se nastavnici i učenici mogu suočiti prilikom korišćenja tradicionalnih udžbenika. Članak predlaže primenu principa proširivanja materijala u cilju uključivanja učenika u proces čitanja i buđenja njihove jezičke svesti. Članak se zasniva na Tomlinsonovom obrascu „pristupa vođenog tekstem“ koji ima za cilj da pomogne učenicima da se udalje od pukog učenja teksta, i da umesto toga u analizi angažuju sopstveno iskustvo. Predstavljen je uzorak teksta na kome je obrazac primenjen i istaknuti su principi adaptacije materijala.

**Ključne reči:** čitanje, pristup vođen tekstem, emocionalna uključenost, personalizacija

## 1. Introduction

Teaching materials are one of the most important parts of any ELT class. Even the most innovative and experienced teacher is likely to face a challenge when materials

are inappropriate or inadequate for a chosen class. Despite a wide range of course books and additional online and paper materials, one must remember that 'impact is achieved when materials have a noticeable effect on learners, that is when

the learners' curiosity, interests and attention are attracted' (Tomlinson, 2011, p.8). This can only be achieved when teachers take the teaching context which includes students' age, needs, skills, objectives, aptitudes, and learning strategies into consideration. As a result, it is usually quite difficult to find a perfect match as most course books are predominantly generalized and unable to meet all students' needs and, therefore, most teachers have to conduct materials development.

'Materials development is both a field of study and a practical undertaking. As a field, it studies the principles and procedures of the design, implementation and evaluation of language teaching materials' (Tomlinson, 2011, p.66). Regarding its effective representation, materials development includes what can be done to materials through adaptation, supplementation, editing, rewriting in order to facilitate the students' learning process and make a class most beneficial. One of the main teachers' objectives is to teach their students how to communicate in the foreign language. When we talk about communication, we usually assume four main skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. In this article, the author would like to discuss one of the four main skills – reading and how teachers can

adapt reading activities to make them enjoyable and more effective for students.

### **1. Difficulties associated with reading in ELT classes**

Reading is one of the two receptive skills which usually involves a great effort that readers have to make as they strive to interpret information and fit the new information into what they already know. It is primarily linked to decoding isolated words and understanding of texts which requires two types of processing – 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'. Carter and Nunan (2001, p.227) define the former as 'using background knowledge and expectations about what is being written to understand a message'. In other words, students may not have enough background knowledge about the topic which might cause difficulties with text understanding. By 'bottom-up' Carter and Nunan mean 'processing using phonological and verbal clues from the input to attend to micro-features of a text such as the form of individual words and grapheme connections' (ibid.). This may involve problems with recognising and understanding grammar or vocabulary as well as conjunctive ties in the text. Moreover, readers constantly have to switch from one to another which proves to be mentally challenging and requires much concentration and pressure. This

has also been proved by a number of studies, such as Koda (1999), Chikamatsu (1996), and Shimron & Savon (1994), which showed that the process of reading comprises cognitively complex tasks.

The second difficulty most ELT teachers may face is how to encourage students to read. Teaching reading can be questioned on the grounds that most learners can already read in the first language and, therefore, can read in the foreign language (Swan, 1985). Consequently, some students, especially young learners whose motivation primarily depends on whether the class is interesting and relaxing, do not usually understand the necessity to improve various reading skills and may even find them inappropriate and ineffective. However, second language acquisition shows the contrary results. L1 reading skills do not positively transfer into L2 reading skills when writing codes differ in L1 and L2 (Birch, 2002; Ediger, 2001; Koda, 1999, 2005). Therefore, teaching reading skills in L2 is of primary importance in order to gain a full language and communicative competence.

Finally, the last issue concerns texts themselves and follow-up reading activities. Most course books usually present texts related to general topics (sport, relationships, food, culture, history, adventures, fashion) with traditional multiple-choice questions, matching tasks,

analyzing pictures as a warm-up, and language awareness tasks such as guessing highlighted words or structures. In other words, these tasks are aimed to make students merely understand the factual content of the text with some focus on new vocabulary rather than engage students effectively and cognitively in the language experience (Tomlinson, 2003). As a result, these activities prove a common students' opinion that reading is boring or difficult, and usually, a 'must-do' task rather than a 'want to do' one.

To conclude, we have identified main difficulties associated with reading such as: a) reading is mentally challenging for students; b) topics can be generalized and not personalized; c) activities preceding or following texts are usually repetitive and not engaging. With the aim to overcome these problems and bring novelty and variety in the reading class, the author would like to look at the innovative framework of material writing "Text-driven Approach" created by Tomlinson and present a sample reading class using the analysed approach.

## **2. Tomlinson's framework**

Tomlinson's framework for developing material is aimed to expose students to an original, engaging text and read it experientially. His idea is based on the principles that materials should maximize

learning potential by encouraging intellectual, aesthetic and emotional involvement which stimulates both left and right brain activities and at the same time help learners feel at ease (Tomlinson, 2011). His framework can be divided into three parts. First is a preparatory stage where the teacher has to find or create a text with the potential for useful engagement for the target learners. The second stage consists of a range of activities to engage the learners with the text. They are designed to help learners access the emotions and feelings that the developer experienced when choosing the text for the class and to help the learner engage with the language of the text. Tomlinson (2003) differentiates activities according to five types as following:

1. Readiness activities (aimed to help the learners achieve mental readiness for experiencing the text through sensory imaging, inner speech and the establishment of affective and cognitive connections);
2. Experiential activities (devised to help learners move away from their tendency to study texts so that they can engage with the text instead experientially);
3. Intake response activities (aimed to help learners articulate and develop their mental representations of the text which

makes them more relaxed and confident in response to texts);

4. Development activities (devised to express themselves in the target language intelligently creatively);
5. Input response activities (made to get the learners to develop their analytical skills and their ability to make discoveries about the target language for themselves).

The final part of the framework is devoted to evaluation and improvement of the activities. Tomlinson supported Jolly and Bolitho (1998) who believed that material writing is a dynamic process, which requires trialling, evaluating and revision. Teachers can use questionnaires or interviews to find out what effect the material had on students, which will show the students that they are respected. To this end, Tomlinson's framework highlights an importance of thorough preparation and following evaluation of the material which enables the teacher to adapt and improve the materials in order to gain the most of students' intellectual and emotional involvement in the activities which ultimately leads to the better learning and boost of motivation.

### **3. Sample of reading activities**

In this section, the author will show how ELT teachers can adopt Tomlinson's Text-

driven approach in order to solve the problems of teaching reading, which were analysed in the previous section, facilitate students' learning process and make reading more effective. As an example, the author has taken a reading activity called 'The Night in the Hotel' from the coursebook *Language in Use Pre-Intermediate (2000)* by Doff A. and Jones C. (see the Appendix). This sample represents a typical reading activity which includes a story, questions to check text understanding and a short opinion task. Despite an interesting content and inspiring ideas contained in the text, the very reading activity in its controlled way without a hint of creativity and personalization might contribute to decreasing of learners' performance as what is only achieved by these tasks is mechanical processing that cannot help learners maximize their exposure to language (Tomlinson, 2011). Bearing this in mind, the author rewrote this reading activity and created the lesson plan which is suitable for 90 minutes' class and aimed at maximizing learning potential by encouraging intellectual and emotional involvement.

### **LESSON PLAN. The Night in the Hotel**

#### **AIMS**

- To expose students to an original, engaging text and read it experientially;
- To do activities devised to help students develop their mental representation of the text.
- To practice the language of feeling and emotions.
- To produce a story.

#### **LEARNING OUTCOME**

When students have completed this lesson, they should get the experience of a text as a multidimensional process involving sensory imaging. Students should get affective and cognitive connections with the text which is expected to inspire them to use the target language of emotions.

#### **ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS**

- Initially, students might find reading activities unmotivating.
- Students might have insufficient knowledge of personality and feelings adjectives.

#### **SOLUTIONS**

- Prepare students mentally and emotionally to the text. Motivate students to read a text in a new experiential way.

Accompany tasks with the vocabulary input.

Type of activity	Teacher's procedures	Students' activities
1, 2 Readiness activities	<p><b><u>Lead-in</u></b>                      T personalizes the topic by means of asking sts about their last experience of waving.                      Ask sts about the concept of waving (Ex 1)                      T conducts feedback</p>	<p><b>1. Think about waving.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● When was the last time you waved?</li> <li>● What does it express?</li> <li>● Under what circumstances do we usually wave?</li> <li>● Do you normally wave at someone or does someone wave you back?</li> <li>● Why is it important to wave back?</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Pre-task</u></b>                      T checks sts' mental readiness to do a reading task                      Ask sts to look at the title.                      Ask sts to predict what the text will be about.</p>	<p><b>2. Look at the title. What do you think the story will be about?</b></p>
3. Experiential activities	<p><b><u>Task 1. Reading for gist</u></b>                      T tells sts they are going to read the text. (Ex.3)</p>	<p><b>3. Read the text 'The Night in the Hotel'</b></p>
4, 5 Intake response activities	<p><b><u>Post reading task 1</u></b>                      T helps sts get engaged with the text by means of sensory imagining (Ex.4)                      T conducts feedback</p> <p><b><u>Post reading task 2</u></b>                      T helps sts articulate and develop their emotional representation of the text by asking about the feelings sts have during the reading. (Ex.5)                      T conducts feedback</p>	<p><b>4. Close your eyes. Try to see the pictures of the hotel.</b>                      What does it look like?</p> <p><b>5. Think about the feelings you had when you were reading the text.</b>                      How did they change during the reading?                      What did you feel in the end?                      What are you feeling while reading the story?</p>
6. Development activity	<p><b><u>Post reading task 3</u></b>                      T checks sts' mental understanding of the text by asking about the main idea of the text (Ex.6).                      T conducts feedback</p>	<p><b>6. Now, think about the main idea of the story.</b>                      What lesson can be learned?                      Why do you think this happened?                      What were the reasons behind it?                      Do you think this is still true about our contemporary society? Why (Why not)?</p>

<p>7. Input response activities (Awareness activities)</p>	<p><b><u>Reading for details</u></b> T checks understanding of some words by asking sts to deduce their meaning from the context and who they refer to (Ex. 7) T conducts feedback</p>	<p><b>7. Read the text again and find what the following words mean?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a crutch</li> <li>- a soul of glass</li> <li>- a rascal</li> <li>- sensitive</li> <li>- despondent</li> </ul> <p><b>Who do these words refer to?</b></p>																								
<p>8-10. Intake response activities</p>	<p><b><u>Pre vocabulary task</u></b> T asks sts to imagine the main characters and discuss their personality (Ex.8)</p> <p><b><u>Focus on vocabulary</u></b> T introduces a list of adjectives and asks sts to refer them to the main characters. Some unknown words are defined by the teacher. (Ex. 9) T conducts feedback</p> <p><b><u>Focus on vocabulary 2</u></b> T asks sts to describe feelings the characters have at different stages of the story (Ex.10) T conducts feedback</p>	<p><b>8. What do you think about main characters – Mr. Schwamm, Stranger, Son? How do you imagine them? Can you describe the characters' personalities? What are their key features?</b></p> <p><b>9. Look at the list of adjectives. Which adjectives can you refer to Mr. Schwamm, Stranger, and Son?</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td>affable</td> <td>aggressive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>affectionate</td> <td>polite</td> </tr> <tr> <td>energetic</td> <td>creative</td> </tr> <tr> <td>arrogant</td> <td>decisive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>careless</td> <td>determined</td> </tr> <tr> <td>harsh</td> <td>easy-going</td> </tr> <tr> <td>emotional</td> <td>nervous</td> </tr> <tr> <td>pessimistic</td> <td>irritated</td> </tr> <tr> <td>miserable</td> <td>energetic</td> </tr> <tr> <td>reserved</td> <td>enthusiastic</td> </tr> <tr> <td>faithful</td> <td>sensitive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>warm hearted</td> <td>helpful</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>10. What did they feel at different stages of the story?</b></p>	affable	aggressive	affectionate	polite	energetic	creative	arrogant	decisive	careless	determined	harsh	easy-going	emotional	nervous	pessimistic	irritated	miserable	energetic	reserved	enthusiastic	faithful	sensitive	warm hearted	helpful
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	<p><b><u>Production stage</u></b> T tells sts to choose one character and write a story from his perspective by using the target language of feelings and emotions (Ex.11) T conducts feedback</p>	<p><b>11. Choose one character and reproduce a story from his perspective.</b></p>																								
<p>Evaluation and revision</p>	<p><b><u>Recap and evaluation</u></b> T recaps on the session and asks sts evaluative questions.</p>	<p>Did you enjoy the reading? Did you find imagining helpful? What did you learn?</p>																								

The lesson plan presented above can be applied flexibly in accordance with students' different needs, aptitude, learning strategies and language proficiency. Initially, this text was allocated to a pre-intermediate level (A2). However, the author's teaching experience proved that the lesson plan could be used with students of different levels and abilities. Some activities can be swapped or even omitted if the teacher feels this activity will not be beneficial for their class context. In order to make a lesson interesting and bring more challenges to the class, the teacher can include input tasks into the reading class to bring some additional language related to the topic and make students feel confident to use it appropriately. Including language awareness tasks in a reading class was also supported by Nation (2005) and Hulstijn (2001) who claim that merely deducing new words from the context is insufficient for learning and what leads to revising vocabulary is deliberate attention to alienated words. In this particular text, the teacher can focus on adjectives related to feelings, as the characters' emotions change throughout the text and play an important role in understanding the message of the text (see task 9 above). This task can be modified in various ways (e.g. changing it into multiple choice or

matching definitions and adjectives or even putting all adjectives in the Wordle in order to trigger cognitive connections).

#### **4. Adaptation of learning material**

As the author pointed out before, it is vital for ELT teachers to understand their teaching context and students' profile. While adapting, editing or even rewriting teaching materials, teacher must remember why they do it, what outcomes they are aiming to gain and what learners' needs are. As McDonough and Shaw (2003:74) noted 'it is difficult to see how the dependent activity of adaptation can take place ... unless we are clear about what it is we are changing'. The reasons behind supplementing the materials can vary from insufficient coverage of particular language unit to intellectual or cultural unacceptability. McGrath (2002:74) designed five principles motivating adaptation of the teaching material. They include:

1. Localisation (materials may work well in one country and not another);
2. Personalisation (increasing the relevance of content in relation to learners' interests and their needs);
3. Individualisation (addressing learning styles of individuals and



the class members working together);

4. Modernisation (changing any instances of language that may seem out of date);
5. Simplification (procedures designed to make things easier or more accessible to the learners; e.g. editing texts or reducing the linguistic or conceptual difficulty and modifications to tasks).

This list was enlarged by Islam and Mares (2003:89) who proposed additional principles such as “providing learners with real choice, catering for all sensory learning styles, providing for more learner autonomy, encouraging higher level cognitive skills, making the language input more accessible, making the language input more engaging”. Thus, these principles can explain a teaching paradox when a perfect material for one group can turn into a disaster for another one, as each group and each individual vary and the teacher must take into consideration the features and needs of the target class. Through the whole process of materials development, we must remember our teaching context and what principles are of the highest priority for the particular situation.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite an abundant number of different books and online materials, most teachers have to supplement their lessons with extra materials in order to meet all students' needs and targets. The article attempted to analyse problems associated with teaching reading in the ELT class and the ways in which they can be overcome. As Gilmore (2007) and Mishan (2005) noted, reading should be aimed to provide examples of targeted language in use, focus on forms and function as well as the context of situations. In reality, however, many students associate it with boring, complicated texts with a lot of complex vocabulary and repetitive comprehensive tasks. In order to make the reading process interesting, enjoyable and effective, the article proposed to apply principles of materials development which comprise understanding students' needs, personality, teaching context. As an example of successful adaptation of reading class, the article discussed Tomlinson's framework 'Text-driven approach', which helps students learn through experiencing and emotional involvement, and presented a sample lesson plan based on the proposed framework. The main aim of the adaptation was to make tasks more engaging and simultaneously cognitively challenging. "Thinking while experiencing language in use helps to achieve the deep

processing required for effective and durable learning” (Craik & Lockhart, 1972, cited in Tomlinson, 2010, p.88). Moreover, it might help to achieve not just pedagogical (increasing a level of language) and educational outcomes (students’ awareness, critical thinking, problem-solving), but also psycho-social ones (increasing self-esteem, confidence, building positive attitudes toward learning) (Maley, 2003). Deploying this approach would make the insight of the teaching process broader and more complex. As a result, it might contribute not just to short-term outcomes (passing exams) but also to long-term ones that will be effective and beneficial for students further in their lives.

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**Appendix**

The original reading activity

## 4 The Night in the Hotel

Reading and listening activity

### READING

Read the story in your own time. Focus on these questions:

- What does the porter tell Schwamm?
- What happens when Schwamm enters his room?
- Why has Schwamm come to the city?
- What does the stranger tell Schwamm?
- What does Schwamm do the next day?
- What does the stranger do the next day?

## THE NIGHT IN THE HOTEL

by Siegfried Lenz



The night porter shrugged his shoulders. 'That's all there is,' he said. 'One free bed in a double room. At this time of night you won't find a single room anywhere.'

'Very well,' said Schwamm. 'I'll take the bed, only ... well, I'd like to know with whom I have to share the room. Is my ... partner - is he already there?'

'Yes he is and he's already asleep.'

'Asleep,' Schwamm repeated.

Taking the registration form he filled it in and handed it back to the porter. Then he went upstairs. Schwamm slowed his step as he saw the door with the correct room number, held his breath in the hope that he could hear the stranger, and bent down over the keyhole. The room was dark.

Schwamm pressed the door handle down, closed the door behind him and felt for the light-switch with a flat hand. There he stopped. Nearby someone spoke: 'Stop! Please leave the light off. You would do me a great favour if you left the room dark.'

'Were you waiting for me?' asked Schwamm, shaken. But he received no reply. Instead the stranger carried on:

'Don't trip over my crutches, and watch you don't fall over my suitcase; it's lying roughly in the middle of the room. I'll direct you safely to your bed: take three steps along the wall, then turn left, and when you've taken another three steps you'll be able to touch the bedpost.'

Schwamm obeyed. He reached the bed, took off his clothes and slid under the covers. He heard the soft breaths of the stranger and knew that he would never be able to get to sleep.

'By the way,' he said hesitantly, after a while. 'My name is Schwamm.'

'Uh-huh,' said the stranger.

'Yes.'

'Did you come here for a conference?'

'No, and you?'

'No.'

'On business?' asked Schwamm.

'Not really.'

'I've probably got the most remarkable reason a man could have for travelling to this city,' said Schwamm.

In the railway station a train started to move. The ground trembled and the beds on which the two men lay vibrated.

'Do you want to commit suicide in the city?' asked the stranger.

'No!' Schwamm replied. 'Do I look like it?'

'I don't know how you look,' said the other man. 'It's dark in here.'

'God forbid, no,' Schwamm explained. 'I have a son, mister ... er ... (the stranger didn't give his name) ... a little rascal, and I came here because of him.'

'Is he in hospital?'

'Heavens no, why do you say that? He's quite healthy. But he's exceptionally sensitive you see. He even reacts when a shadow falls on him.'

'Ah, so he is in a hospital.'

'No!' cried Schwamm. 'I've already told you that he's healthy in every respect, but he's in danger. The little rascal has a soul of glass - that's the problem.'

'So why doesn't he commit suicide?' asked the stranger.



70 'What do you mean? A child like that, at his age; how can you say such a thing? No. I'll tell you why my son is in danger. Each morning as he goes to school – he always goes alone, by the way – each morning he has to stand by a level crossing and wait until the early train has passed. The little fellow just stands there and waves and waves like mad, so happy and yet despondent.'

75 'So?'  
 'Then,' Schwamm continued, 'he goes to school, and when he comes back he's disturbed and confused, and sometimes even weeping. He can't do his schoolwork, he doesn't want to play or even speak. 80 This has been going on for months now, every blasted day!'

'What got him into this state?'  
 'Well,' said Schwamm, 'it's peculiar really: the boy waves and – you should see his sad little face – and none of the passengers wave back at him. And he takes it to heart so much that we – my wife and I – are afraid something might happen. He waves, and no-one waves back.'

90 'So you, mister Schwamm, want to help your son by taking the early train so you can wave at him?'

'Yes,' said Schwamm, 'Yes.'

'For myself,' said the stranger, 'I can't bear children. I hate them and avoid them at all costs. I lost my wife because of children. She died in childbirth – our first.'

'I'm sorry,' said Schwamm. A cosy warmth flooded his body; he felt that at last he would be able to sleep. 95

The stranger asked: 'You're going to Kurzbach, right?'

'Yes.'

'And you're not at all worried about what you're about to do? Aren't you ashamed of cheating your son?'

Schwamm retorted:

'Where on earth did you get that idea from?' He sank back into the bed and pulled the covers over his head, lay for a while thinking, and fell asleep. 105

When he woke the next morning Schwamm realised that he was alone in the room. He glanced at his watch and started. The early train was due to go in five minutes. There was no way he could catch it.


110 That afternoon – he couldn't bear to spend another day in the city – he arrived back home depressed and disappointed. His son opened the door and threw himself against Schwamm and hammered on his thighs with his fists.

'Someone waved! Someone waved for ages and ages!'

'Who?' asked Schwamm ... 'A man with a crutch?'

'Yes, yes. He waved his stick, then he tied a hankie to it and held it out the window until I couldn't see it any more!' 120

## LISTENING

 Listen to the story and follow the text.

Is there anything that is strange or unexpected in the story?

Do you think this is a good story? Why (or why not)?

From

Doff A. and Jones C. (2000). *Language in Use Pre-intermediate*. Cambridge University Press

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