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DEVELOPING SUPPORT MATERIALS FOR MASS MEDIA COURSE IN ELT

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Abstract

The research outlined in this paper explores the potential of the ELT classroom as a venue for developing students' media literacy with the help of the support materials designed within the project of Dostoevsky Omsk State University. It is a part of a larger body research that investigates the idea of mass media studies incorporated into the regular ELT course of this University. The perspective is based on the idea of including media literacy development into the program. The modular structure of the course book designed within the project provides a model for creating support materials on the basis of authentic British and American mass media multi-media sources. Classroom observations and interviews conducted with instructors and students examine perceived pros and cons of the studying/teaching with the help of these support materials identify undisputed, sincere interest, delight, and acceptance. This provides evidence that multi-media used to constitute the core of the support materials designed as a course book, might provide invaluable help for teachers in the media-oriented classroom. What is more, most course instructors participating in the project valued the efficiency of the support materials not only in terms of media literacy, considering them to be a noteworthy factor in enhancing students' language performance. Analysis and interpretation of multimedia texts via tasks from the course book allow students to update their mass media awareness and to access, analyse various kinds of mass media. The paper is accompanied by numerous tasks from the mass media included in the suggested book.

1.   Introduction

1.1. The field of English language teaching has noticeably changed over the last decade as language teaching has undergone various changes. The challenge English teachers currently face is unprecedented: they are supposed to reduce the difference between long-established teaching, designed for promoting four students' basic language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing), and communicative teaching.

1.2. A growing emphasis on the shift from developing linguistic competence to communicative teaching and modern trends in teaching English focused on contextualizing the language, made it absolutely inevitable for the teachers to have a quality and concept curriculum that encourages students with relevant and applicable tasks. The present paper highlights the issue and specifies the problem. It is centered around the idea of including British as well as American mass media into the ELT classroom, developing students' critical thinking as well as their media literacy. Both Russian and foreign scholars have made efforts to encourage ELT trainers to modernize their classroom arrangements and management in the field of media literacy. Among them we would like to mention   Fedorov (2015), Kamerer (2013), Lagarde and Hudgings (2018), Lidawan and Gabayno (2018), Lidawan (2019), Mahesh and Khatik (2016), Lee and Drajati (2019), Owen (2016), Shameem (2017), Yazdanpanah (2019), and others.

2.   Problem Statement

2.1. The work with mass media in the ELT classroom can hardly be considered an innovative technique. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the idea of providing mass media courses with proper support materials is still something of a novelty and presents an urgent problem recognized by anyone who dares to design them properly and on the regular basis. Is there a model for developing a course book based on analysing and interpreting authentic mass media in the ELT classroom?

2.2. Does the course book stand in the way of the syllabus? Are the materials compatible with it? Which language skills do the materials cover? The authors of the article share their experience from developing learner-centred, task-based, and problem-oriented support materials at Dostoevsky Omsk State University.

3.   Research Questions

3.1. The research supports the *Core Principles for Media Literacy Education* in the United States of America, suggested by the National Association for Media Literacy Education. In accordance with this document, media literacy education presupposes active study and critical approach to the media messages we get and produce. It broadens the notions of literacy (i.e., writing, speaking, listening, reading) to add numerous types of media; forms and improves skills for the majority of students. It also states that, like conventional education, mastering these skills: require unified, interconnected practice, develop knowledgeable members essential for a democratic society and state that people use their beliefs and experiences to create their own meanings from media messages.

3.2. *Mass media* is "the knowledge, skills, and competencies required in order to use and interpret media" (Buckingham, 2003, p. 36). Hobbs states that "most conceptualizations of media literacy now

involve a type of 'critical' literacy based on reflection, analysis, and evaluation, not only of the content and structural elements of specific media texts but of the social, economic, political, and historical contexts in which messages are created, disseminated, and used by audiences" (Hobbs, 2005, p. 866). There is no standard for how large the audience needs to be before communication becomes 'mass' communication. ELT defines media broadly, including books, newspapers, magazines, videos, movies, recorded music, and other resources available via Internet. Special emphasis, though, within the present project is to be put on multimedia.

3.3. It should be noted that teaching media literacy is especially important in university classrooms because students, as media consumers, tend to be more influenced in subtle but far-reaching ways by the media they encounter than adults. Media literate students are supposed to have a better understanding of the information that they receive and are more likely to consider its quality and assumptions. This occurs partly because media consumers, who have limited time and attention, automatically process the bulk of the messages that they encounter rather than expanding the effort that would be required to evaluate them.

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. **The research is aimed at:**

▪ designing a model for creating support materials and course books for quality English curriculum in order to include media education into the basic ELT content;

▪ assessing the effectiveness of the suggested model of course book for teaching media literacy, as used in both conventional classrooms and for students' self-instruction (or a mixture of these two delivery models), empowering teachers with substantial help, giving them confidence to take up challenges of selecting media sources as well as designing tasks for the media literacy classroom.

4.2. In more detail, our research dealt with a number of questions:

▪ Do teachers consider the suggested approach provides invaluable help in designing media-oriented ELT courses that provide them with required activities?

▪ After completing a mass media course with the support materials designed within the project, do students display enhanced media literacy, developed analytical mind, awareness of how mass media form culture and nation and awareness of the practical bias, spin and misinformation in the media?

▪ Do the support materials in any way affect the students' language performance?

5. Research Methods

5.1. Research methods and approaches described in the paper presuppose the idea of the content-based approach. We aimed at designing a learner-centred, task-based, and problem-oriented model for creating support materials course books for practical English curriculum, with the aim of introducing media literacy into core ELT content (Zuniga, 2016). In accordance with this approach, language is seen as a means of achieving something else and not as an end in itself. In our case, the model turns out to be quite sensible because students attending the content course acquired sufficient English.

To be more specific, we devised a course book *Mass Media for Students of English* on the base of the model developed within the research (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017). The course book is intended for language students as well as for non-language students with upper-intermediate – advanced level of English (Dvorghets & Shaturnaya, 2015).

5.2. While developing materials, one has to go through several steps like: selecting, grading, sequencing, implementing, and evaluating them (Shameem, 2017, p.195). The following principles were involved in development of the course –book:

▪ materials should be connected with culture, values, issues and cases mostly with powerful visual support;

▪ they should contain controversial, various topics and problems that reflect modern state of events in society as well as students'concerns and passions;

▪ they should address language as well as media literacy areas and skills development;

▪ the linguistic items of the study materials (certain grammar structures, language functions, and conversational forms) introduced in the classroom as well as their speech delivery (speech rate, clarity of speech, and accent) and density of language should be an important factor taken into account when choosing mass media for classroom discussion/analysis/interpretation;

▪ they should be versatile, thought-provoking, and inspiring to students in order to provide students' interest.

Before going further into the subject, we would like to illustrate the aforementioned approach with some examples of materials chosen for the course book (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017, p. 9, 29; 32, 56):

▪ *Mass Media*. URL: http://study. com/academy/lesson/what-is-mass-media-definition-types-influence- examples.html.

▪ Dangers of Tolerance. URL: https://youtu.be/_0SFZqoT9Os.

▪ The Truth about Immigration. URL: What They Won't Tell You! URL: https://youtu.be/QV7JILRugOg.

▪ *What is the Future of Language?* URL: https://youtu. be/rUU8pLEk6nk.

▪ *Will English Always Be the Global Language?* URL: https://youtu.be/5Kvs8SxN8mc.

▪ *Who's fighting whom in Syria? Explained in 90 seconds*. URL: https://youtu.be/z_ily8CjDXc.

▪ Who is fighting and why? URL: https:// youtu.be/NKb9GVU8bHE.

5.3. In modern times, it is universally accepted that language teacher should be flexible. From among the various definitions of this term, in the context of methods and ways used when designing the course book, we mean that one should be conscious of the necessity to take not only the material that was selected for the course, but also students' needs and preferable ways for consideration. The reason for this is evident – students' feelings and attitudes can stimulate or discourage learning. Hence, we attempted to create the kind of environment in which the negative effect is minimized and the positive effect might be advanced.

Whenever possible, we took into account the fact that students have different cognitive styles. The tasks in the course were designed in a way such that students might feel that learning is purposeful and

that their needs are being addressed. Moreover, many kinds of various activities are used to ensure that various students' needs might be met.

The teaching strategies suggested within the project and used for the course book follow the classical standard of activities to perform before watching, while watching and after watching some video. The examples below are borrowed from the course – book designed within the research (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017).

Pre-viewing discussion is designed in the format of warm-up activities or lead-ins. The pre-viewing tasks may initiate discussion, or provide students with background information concerning the topic under discussion, if applicable. The students may be asked to keep this information in mind and then revisit their initial notes after covering all the tasks to see if their views about the issue changed. The tasks are typically introduced as information gap activities/brainstorming, then followed by information from the printed text and group discussion to prepare for viewing.

These are predictably headed by "Do you know…." questions concerning the appropriate topic, completing the word webs, vocabulary consultations, etc. The discussion questions introducing the topic *Global Issues*, for instance, include "Do you know any top-level issues that can be treated as global ones/the difference between international affairs and global issues/which global issues seem to be the most pressing ones/any global organizations to address global issues /any global issues that shaped the world in recent years/world initiatives to cope with global challenges?"

While-viewing mode keeps students on tasks based on several authentic multi-media tests covering certain topics borrowed from American or British multi-media ranging from global issues, challenges, and large-scale changes like Brexit to relationship or language problems. Multi-media texts borrowed from various sources within this mode undoubtedly change learning beyond current practice, contextualize the language, and add an authentic flavour to the learning as well as the teaching process. Among other factors, when selecting multi-media for while-viewing activities the authors of the paper consider introducing controversy as a crucial factor, since conflicting attitudes in the media may be valuable for further discussion. Irrespective of any section of the course book, the activities inevitably aim at the gist of the multi-media texts, as well as specify their facts and details of their context. Ideally, it is already within the while-viewing mode that students may contribute to the discussion of disputable issues. Let us illustrate the point by the example below:

▪ Task 6. Watch the video *Brexit: A catastrophically stupid decision with Alistair Campbell.* URL: https://youtu.be/UysJY2p0p78). An official discusses the situation in Britain after the decision to leave the EU. Compare his views with the ones expressed by the Eurosceptic Martin Durkin in the movie *Brexit*. Whose side of the controversy would you take? Complete the list of advantages and disadvantages for the countries to be members of the EU. Consider several issues: economic costs, trade, bureaucracy, immigration, workers' rights (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017, p. 22)

Effective after-viewing strategies suggest tasks designed to stimulate discussion. They should be done to help engage students in developing their language competence as well as critical thinking and media literacy. These activities help students make their own decisions and create their own points of view. Similarly, the boundless diversity of after-viewing activities requires students to consider issues concerning various contexts and sociolinguistic aspects of English that may influence its meaning.

The following is an illustration of the after-viewing activity for the topic *Brexit* (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017, p. 23):

▪ Task 8. Role play Mini-debate: advantages and disadvantages of staying in the EU: Brexiters vs Remainers. Public opinion was divided between the two camps – those in favor of leaving ... and those who wanted to remain.

The video for help:

▪ *4 Reasons to Vote Leave &. Remain in The UR EU Referendum* URL: https://youtu.be/bvnmAjev5oE.

▪ David Cameron's Speech on Brexit: *David Cameron resigns as UK votes to leave.* URL: https://youtu.be/fXNV3Ad0qQ0.

6.   Findings

The course – book *Mass Media for Students of English* (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017) designed within the research as well as the model for creating it may be considered to be the finding of the project. Its model is based on the topic-oriented structure with a modular approach to content creation, wherein the content is structured around certain topics that can typically be mixed and revised in the linear structure of a course book. A topic is a discrete piece of content that is about a specific subject, has an identifiable purpose, and does not need to be presented in context for the end-user to make sense of the content. Language is seen as a means of achieving something else and not an end in itself. The novelty, though, differentiating it from the common approach, lies in the fact that all the material for the course is based exclusively on the authentic multi-media content of the section. Apart from focussing on improving students' linguistic competence, with emphasis on their listening and speaking skills, the varied and flexible resources as well as the task design strategies are built around the idea of providing students with media literacy skills. Hence, all the material of the course book as well as the entire course are considered to be both media literacy/language oriented.

The course book is just one component in a set of support materials, another being a CD-ROM. It is shown that there should be a concern with copyright issued throughout the compilation of pertinent where video-recording of broadcast materials is concerned. However, the appreciation of the potential value of authentic video-recorded material is especially strong. Within the present research, we tried to overcome this problem by including links to the necessary media resources on the CD-ROM, so as to simplify the search for the resources for the students without having to type them out. The video recordings of the media resources are not included on the CD-ROM.

Among the topics covered in the course book *Mass Media for Students of English* there are: global issues and global changes, immigration crisis, dangers of tolerance, brain drain, relationships, language in the changing world, breaking news, etc. The mass media included in Section I titled *What in the World*, are varied and flexible – there are British and American TV news programs, talk shows, documentaries on various TV channels (CNN, CBS, BBC), as well as video sequences from You Tube. The tasks in Section II, titled *Hard Talks* deal with the well-known program *Hard Talk* on BBC. These are in-depth interviews with a wide range of questions on the sensitive topics, conducted with famous people as they talk about the ups and downs in their lives. Among the interviewees are Nickolas Burns, Noam Chomsky,

Radek Sikorsky, Mikhail Zygar, Malcolm Turnbill, Dmitri Peskov, and others. In Section III, titled Words of Wisdom, the authors of the course book included copious, amazing quotes sourced from commencement speeches.

Let us cite an example illustrating the selection of media texts centred around the topic *Global Issues* (Dvorghets & Tomkiv, 2017, p.17):

▪ *The United Nation – Year in Review*. URL: https://youtu.be/M0_kxsCFZOQ.

▪ Euro news No Comment TV. URL: http://eurone.ws/yDXQ7c.

▪ *8 Breakthrough Technologies That Will Change The World in 2016*. URL: https://youtu.be/ vyIBxbLimlc.

▪ Highlights of Trump – Clinton US presidential debate. URL: https://youtu.be/Qq4rlVF3Ags.

7. Conclusion

7.1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the support materials designed for the present research (see the questions in 4.2), surveys were conducted among several groups of students in mass media classes incorporated into the regular ELT course at the Foreign Languages Department and International Business Department of Dostoevsky Omsk State University. In addition, a research conference was held a month after completion of the course to review the results.

Instructors of all groups participating in the survey were given the privilege of using the support materials – the course book *Mass Media for Students of English* and the CD-ROM.

According to their opinion:

1) with carefully selected media resources from the course book, you save time not looking through authentic materials yourself; otherwise you have to review hours of media resources to find a few hours of useable material;

2) possessing thoroughly designed media-oriented and language-oriented activities, you are free from the obligation to develop such tasks yourself;

3) being in constant need of teaching with authentic resources that are supplied with pertinent tasks and provide a wide range of engaging classroom activities, you get the required teaching tool.

Hence, we got affirmative response to the first question of 4.2 of the present paper. Teachers reported that the suggested approach helped in designing media-oriented ELT course and provided them with required activities. Regarding the second question which concerns the students' achievements in enhanced media literacy, improved language performance after completing the mass media course with the support materials designed within the research, the answer was affirmative as well.

The students were assessed as media watchers/interpreters participating in debates. In the initial and exit surveys, the main criteria used for evaluating students' media literacy and language performance were as follows:

▪ awareness of the media formats and types;

▪ profound understanding of the basic issues;

▪ identification of the problem(s);

▪ ability to make reasonable conclusions;

▪ enhanced English language performance;

▪ presentation of strong problem solving skills.

7.2. The research has shown notable improvement of the students' problem solving skills as well as their critical judgement and knowledge of media. Of the 107 students in the mass media class within the project, 102 filled in the questionnaires. On the basis of enhanced English language performance, 88 showed considerable progress in their understanding of all kinds of English–speaking environment media as well as profound understanding of the currently discussed issues and problems. As compared to the initial surveys, they showed their growing ability to make reasonable conclusions, presented stronger problem solving skills as media viewers and participants in the role plays and mini-debates. The other 14 students didn't show similar results on the survey. In our view, to some extent it could be justified by two reasons: missing classes and/or the inability to do home tasks aimed at watching mass media outside the class. After completing the preplanned program, all the students demostrated they were by far more relaxed in their reasoning than the students who were not participants of the research. Both students and instructors appreciated the role and quality of the support material in the context of media literacy development. However, according to the students, the main drawback of the research is the home assignment policy which prescribes excessive amount of mass media viewing outside the class. Additionally, the links to mass media texts in the support materials in some cases had to be updated or were not available.

Similarly, most course instructors participating in the research confessed they would prefer preparation for the course not to be so time-consuming, considering that they had to spend long hours updating their mass media awareness.

Unmistakeably, we have the answer to the third question of our research, concerning the improvement of students' language performance with the help of the support materials. Benefits in terms of their speaking and listening skills are obvious, though the assessment strategies used for measuring students' performance are beyond the present research boundaries.

7.3. Developing support materials for mass(multi) media-oriented ELT classroom is a challenging, demanding task for the language teacher who must possess interdisciplinary knowledge and keep developing it alongside with the students. Among the numerous benefits afforded by possessing the right mix of media resources to enrich a mass media course are appropriateness, reliability, and motivation-enhanced viewing. The results confirm that not only the course book and CD-ROM created within the research might provide invaluable help for holding classes in the media-oriented ELT classroom, but that the approach suggested within the research might also provide ideas, and serve as a model for designing materials, and thus could be employed in practical English courses across a wide range of English levels. It should be noted that like most specialists in the field, we consider heavy dependence on a single course book to be damaging to students' needs. Additionally, in discussing what is available to be learned in the classroom, as well as to what is taught is not always predictable. Although a course book may assist in many ways, it cannot determine the over-all content of a language program.

Acknowledgments

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