

Research Paper

Principled Benefits: Student Perceptions of Teacher-Developed English for Academic Purposes Materials

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Abstract

While there are a wide range of English for academic purposes (EAP) programs and plentiful teaching materials published for the EAP classroom, teachers still are faced with the task of developing their own materials as well as adapting materials created by others. Limited research has been carried out on the development and use of EAP materials, particularly in the Canadian context. This study was carried out to investigate student perceptions related to a set of EAP listening and speaking materials developed according to a set of principles grounded in research and theory related to how additional languages are taught and learned. EAP students used the materials as part of their regular classroom activities, and were then invited to take part in an online questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The data were coded and the codes gathered into themes related to students' perceptions of the materials. The results point to improved listening skills, autonomy, interactions, speaking skills, motivation, video learning, cognitive skills, and relevance as key themes related to principle-informed and teacher-developed EAP materials. These themes underscore the importance of principles in materials development and provide a basis for future research related to writing materials for EAP students.

Introduction

Language-learning materials are anything used by a teacher or a student to learn an additional language (Tomlinson, 2011). Language learning materials should be grounded in additional language acquisition theories, general education theories, and current additional language learning materials development principles. Ensuring language-learning materials are efficient and foster additional language learning is a continuous responsibility and process of being an English as an additional language (EAL) teacher.

There are an abundance of language learning materials available for learners and teachers, but despite this abundance, materials development is still a core part of being an additional language teacher (Tomlinson, 2014). Teachers adapt or create new materials for their learners; rarely do they use the materials completely as is. While it is common for EAL teachers to develop their own materials based on pre-existing materials or from scratch, questions might remain regarding the effectiveness of these materials and the process for creating, adapting, and choosing these materials. Despite the common task of creating and adapting materials for the EAL classroom, little research has been carried out investigating materials development for English for academic purposes (EAP) programs, particularly in the Canadian context. This research will pave the way for materials developers and language instructors in a variety of ways, particularly those working in post-secondary contexts.

This qualitative research project aims to identify what EAL learners consider are the impacts of using a set of EAP materials that have been developed according to a theoretical framework informed by a set of principles based on materials development, additional language acquisition, and general education theories as well as my own personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985). The overarching research question for this study is: How do EAP students perceive the benefits of using English language teaching (ELT) materials developed according to a set of predetermined principles related to effective EAL teaching and learning?

Background

As it is clear there is no one correct way to learn an additional language or learn in general, three combined areas of learning can provide an efficient and effective blueprint for additional language learning materials development: additional language acquisition, general education, and materials development theories. This study is guided by the concept of principled eclecticism which is a pluralistic view of language teaching and learning that allows materials developers to blend various methods, approaches, and traditions in a principled way that is informed by theory and research (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The framework for this study borrows from sociocultural, socio-cognitive, and constructivist approaches to learning.

Exposure to language can help students acquire an additional language, but anxiety can lead students to reaching an affective filter that prevents them from acquiring that language (Krashen, 1981, 2009). According to Krashen (1981, 2009), people can acquire an additional language when they receive comprehensible input. The input learners receive consists of input that a learner understands and also contains language that is just a little bit beyond the learners' level of understanding. However, if learners are experiencing anxiety or high emotions, an affective filter can block this comprehensible input and impede additional language acquisition. It is important to note that just because students are exposed to an additional language, it does not necessarily mean additional language learning will take place (Lightbown & Spada, 2015). The input has to be meaningful for students as well as comprehensible (Krashen, 2009).

The framework for this study also incorporates the controlled and free production of language. The controlled and free production of language, such as communicative speech, is vital to acquiring an additional language (Swain, 1993, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Moreover, with communicative speech the students should be more equipped to become a valued member of the community, which is typically one goal of learning English for newcomers (Riley & Douglas, 2016). While Krashen (2009) has hypothesized that people learn additional languages when they are exposed to language they understand in low anxiety situations, it has been argued that there also needs to be comprehensible output (Swain, 1993, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) and interaction (Long, 1996). When students engage in communicative speech with their peers or members of the public, they are being exposed to the additional language in an authentic and natural way, and it may also lead to noticing (Schmidt, 1990) or negotiation for meaning (Ellis, 2003; Long, 1996). By borrowing from these additional language learning theories for the development of additional language learning materials, materials writers can create materials which provide rich opportunities to foster additional language learning.

The content of ELT materials should be relevant to students as making classroom content relevant will help students acquire an additional language, stay engaged, and be more motivated (Knowles, 1980; Lightbown & Spada, 2015). To do this, there are various schools of thought related to language learning materials development; for example, Tomlinson (2018) proposed a text-driven approach to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (for more on TBLT see Ellis, 2003). In addition to a text-driven approach, Pinnard (2014) proposed a combination of a text-driven approach to TBLT woven with a metacognitive approach to language learning materials development. In addition to EAL teaching and learning in general, TBLT approaches have also been identified as beneficial for the EAP classroom (Douglas & Kim, 2014).

Aside from materials development and additional language acquisition theories, general educational theories also play a role in the development of ELT materials. Particularly the work of Dewey (1897), Freire (2000), and hooks (1994, 2003) are informative to ELT materials writers. Good learning experiences embody a push for a classroom democracy (Dewey, 1897), with students having an autonomy that does not always encourage immediate affirmation (hooks, 1994). Furthermore, positive learning experiences promote critical thinking and encourage a problem-posing approach that fosters knowledge creation (Freire, 2000).

Drawing on the above understandings of additional language, materials development, and general learning theories, the following set of additional language learning materials development principles were created for this study:

1. Good materials are as authentic as possible.
2. Good materials reduce classroom anxiety.
3. Good materials use language just slightly beyond what students can do on their own.
4. Good materials help students become valued members of the community.
5. Good materials promote controlled and free production of communicative speech.
6. Good materials provide a rich recycled exposure to the target language.
7. Good materials foster critical thinking, empowerment, and motivation.
8. Good materials utilize engaging and relevant content and objectives.
9. Good materials include assessments with several relevant options for completion.
10. Good materials are based on the course curriculum or associated guidelines.

Method

Research Setting

The EAP program at Pacific Interior University (PIU) (name changed for anonymity) combines English language learning and academic courses while also connecting to campus life. EAP is an academic discipline that generally aims to develop the EAL skills of multilingual students for post-secondary or graduate-level studies in English (Douglas & Landry, 2021). The EAP program at PIU is a credit-bearing program which provides university admission for a wide range of programs for students who are still working towards meeting PIU's English language proficiency requirements. The EAP program at PIU is made up of two courses, EAP 99 and EAP 100. The EAP program at PIU adopts content as a vehicle for EAL teaching and learning.

Each EAP course is worth three credits. Course content is scheduled for 20 hours per week across 12 weeks. At the time of this study, students had 7.5 hours of reading and writing and 7.5 hours of listening and speaking per week. In addition, there were also five hours of language learning labs. The labs gave students the opportunity to work one-on-one or in groups with EAP teaching assistants in order to help them boost their comprehension of the content and concepts covered in class. Students were also able to enrol in one or two additional academic courses. PIU's EAP program is designed to help students engage in activities that increase their English language skills, successful academic study, intercultural communication, and integration into university life.

Also at the time of this study, the EAP courses were offered online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the core reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, students had a total of between four and six hours of synchronous class time per week, with the remaining time made up asynchronously. Students also had two hours of language labs per week, with the other three hours offered as needed. As my research was carried out during the pandemic, many of the participants for this project were not living in British Columbia at the time of the study.

The Language Learning Materials

Grounded in the set of material development principles presented above, the materials created for this research project were a 12-hour speaking and listening unit of instruction designed for multilingual students who were enrolled in the EAP pathway program at PIU. The materials were aimed at students with a Canadian Language Benchmarks level of 7/8 (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2012). The overarching theme of the EAL learning materials was ecology and ecological issues. The unit used a text-driven approach (Tomlinson, 2011) to TBLT and learning (Ellis, 2003). The use of authentic texts was chosen to expose students to comprehensible input (Krashen, 2009) and because they were thought to be interesting for the students and relevant to academic English (Knowles, 1980; Lightbown and Spada, 2015).

The unit included several activities which promoted independence, critical thinking, and the development of classroom community (hooks, 2003). The activities also promoted the production of student output (Swain, 1993), collaborative dialogue (Swain, 2000), and interactions (Long, 1995). The inclusion of interactions and output was an essential feature designed to lead to noticing (Schmidt, 1990) or negotiating for meaning (Long, 1996). Several parts of the unit further involved problem-based learning (Freire, 2000), as this was another way to promote content and additional language learning. Furthermore, the use of productive vocabulary and grammar structures was embedded throughout the unit. These aspects were chosen as they were not only relevant to learners (Lightbown & Spada, 2015), but they also reflected what students hear and need to use during their post-secondary studies. Another key feature of these materials was that they were useable on all digital formats (tablets, smartphones, computers, laptops).

The Participants

The participants for this study consisted of students registered in the EAP program at PIU who had recently used the EAL learning materials created with the principled framework. Eight

students took the online questionnaire. They were all in EAP 100 at the time of this study. Of those eight students, seven gave permission for their information to be used, four gave permission to be contacted for an online semi-structured interview, and two students attended the semi-structured interview.

All of the questionnaire participants had been studying English for five or more years when they took the questionnaire. Four participants identified as male, two participants identified as female, and one student chose “prefer not to say.” All of the participants were born on or after the year 2000. One participant was born in 2000, two were born in 2001, and four were born in 2002. One participant spoke Spanish as a first language, whilst the rest of the participants spoke Chinese or Mandarin. One participant was from Mexico and the other six were from China. One of the participants were living in Canada at the time of the study, one participant was living in Mexico, and the rest of the participants were living in China.

Data Collection

Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data related to a particular phenomenon (Mills & Gay, 2016), and this research study was created to qualitatively investigate the students’ perceptions of ELT materials designed with a principled theoretical framework. There were two main research instruments used in this study: an online questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The online questionnaire gathered background information from the participants, data related to the perceived benefits of the EAP materials, and an invitation to an interview. The interview questions were created to gather information from the participants related to their opinions, thoughts, criticisms, and feelings about the EAP materials they had recently used as well ELT materials in general.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, a process of writing and reflecting to further understand the data was conducted. Following the initial analysis, the questionnaires and interviews were coded. To promote reliability, a subsection of the codes were double-checked by a second researcher and a consensus approach was taken to agree on the codes. Rossman and Rallis (2017) have stated that coding is the formal representation of analytic thinking. It is a complex and iterative task which involves thinking through what can be evidence supporting a theme. Important data were recorded on a Microsoft Word table, and as I read and reread the data, the data were coded with descriptive labels and then compiled into themes. I approached the data with no clear sense of what the findings would be and without preconceived codes. Mills and Gay (2016) provided the framework for the coding and data analysis. To ensure credibility in the study, I consistently asked myself the six questions posed by Dey (1993), which were related to observation or hearsay, motivations of the participants, biases of the researchers, the reliability of the data, the circumstances, and corroboration of observations. For data interpretations I followed techniques described by Wolcott (1994) and Stringer (1996) (as cited in Mills & Gay, 2016) to further the analysis when needed, connect what I was finding with my own experience, seek input from others, connect to the literature, relate to theory; and know when the analysis was complete.

Results

The overall aim of this research project was to investigate the perceived benefits, according to the participants, of using principled-informed EAL learning materials. Based on the participant responses in the questionnaire and interviews, the use of principle-informed materials improved listening skills, fostered autonomy, increased interactions, improved speaking skills, increased motivation, took advantage of video learning, activated cognitive skills, and increased relevance.

Improved Listening Skills

The materials which were developed using the principles helped the participants with their listening skills in English. When asked if these materials helped him in improving his English skills, Rodrigo said:

Yeah, sure. It helped me with the listening part. Because there were parts in English, I didn't really couldn't understand that well. But because of this, this book had a lot of video and stuff that I have to hear, I get a little more used to it, to understand it.

Then, when asked directly if the videos helped him with his listening skills, he responded "Sure." Yanjin's listening skills also benefited from using the materials as he said, "if I going to answer the question correctly, I going to listen three or four times. And eh, I can get some details and improve my listening and speaking." He went on say to say that it was "very useful" for him. Furthermore, Yanjin said he listened to the Ted Talks (one of the listening components of the unit) "so many times" and tried to identify individual words. Yanjin also tried to mimic the accents he heard in the content of the videos. He felt that this was the "most important one" when referring to listening skills.

Rodrigo also gave the impression that his listening skills improved when he was in communication with his classmates. Similar to Yanjin, who said he was able to improve his listening and understanding of accents with these materials, Rodrigo stated that "it was fun, talking with them", referring to his classmates. One participant on the questionnaire identified the listening materials as an example of something which helped him improve his English skills in the online questionnaire and another questionnaire participant wrote, "I learned a lot from cooperation with my classmates." Rodrigo also stated that the materials helped him with his listening skills as he was more engaged with the listening material and he was not just "hearing, hearing, and hearing." He attributed this engagement to the content of the listening which included "good information." Yanjin also said that he thought the Ted Talk listening was "very useful" when describing how he improved his listening skills with these materials. Listening skills were improved with the use of video-based media, and when Yanjin was asked if the listenings from the videos were useful and helpful, he responded with "Yes, absolutely. I watch them so many times and even I can... I can recite."

Student Autonomy

Another general benefit of these EAL learning materials created for this research project is that they promoted student autonomy. Student autonomy is when students take ownership of their

learning and become more independent without direction from the instructor (Landry, 2019), and evidence of student autonomy was identified several times in both semi-structured interviews and the online questionnaire. When discussing the final project of the materials, Rodrigo said he really “wanted to give a good speech about it [the topic]. So, I will look it up and keep thinking” until he was satisfied with the information and “I deliver something I was really proud of.” He also said how before he would not have really paid attention to the topic, but this topic was interesting and thus he took “full responsibility and it makes it really interesting.” Rodrigo wanted to do well in the final assignment and thus put more effort and work into it.

Yanjin also found a benefit of the materials was helping him become an independent learner as he said he would examine the content “three or four times” in his own time. Yanjin’s first impression of the materials would also suggest he became an independent learner and took responsibility for his own learning because when asked what he liked specifically about these materials he said, “I think it’s the pictures. When I going to go through a book the first impression is pictures, for me. I going to look through all the pictures and find out which one I am interested in.” Yanjin did not wait to be told to look at a certain page or a certain picture, rather he took it on himself to explore the book independently. Moreover, Yanjin did not just watch the videos and content once, he watched them “so many times and even I can... I can recite.” Another example of the materials being beneficial in fostering student autonomy emerged when Yanjin spoke about the final project, and he was “searching so many information” online. He was searching “so much information about ecological issues.” In contrast to Rodrigo, Yanjin stated that he completed the final project by himself and his friends “didn’t help me for this.” A decision which he enjoyed as he enjoys working by himself. Furthermore, Yanjin compared working with classmates and working by himself. He specifically said “I prefer to study by myself” and when asked if these materials were beneficial to studying by himself he said “I think for me it’s easier because I realize the information in this eBook.”

The theme of student autonomy also came up in the online questionnaire when a participant stated the materials “help me to find information” and they specifically enjoyed the videos which they would have watched independently. Another instance of student autonomy was identified when Rodrigo spoke about how he enjoyed the note taking activity which required students to draw pictures. Rodrigo said, “I was drawing, so, it kind of made it a little fun if add something funny in my drawings, and it kind of makes it more enjoyable.” In addition to the drawing exercise, Rodrigo mentioned how he took “full responsibility” for his final project.

In the online questionnaire the theme of student autonomy was identified when an online questionnaire participant answered that the materials helped them “identify information” and another student participant wrote that the materials helped them “give more attention to what I read.” In addition to those two examples of student autonomy another student participant stated that they enjoyed the “English book” and the “dictionary,” which were two supplementary documents accompanying the main unit of materials. The idea of these supplementary documents was for students to study autonomously and use these as support or reference to the main materials. These two answers from the online questionnaire are linked to student autonomy as they are examples where the students are learning by themselves and not in a group or under the guidance of a teacher.

Interactions

Increased interactions also came up several times as a benefit throughout the semi-structured interviews and the online questionnaire. In the online questionnaire, when asked how the materials helped students improve their English skills answers included “I also learned a lot from cooperation with my classmates” and “talk to others.” When the students participating in this study were asked what they liked specifically about the listening and speaking materials, answers ranged across “group learning,” having “conversation,” and liking “asking questions to student for upgrade the thoughts.” In the semi-structured interview, Yanjin said when he could not find words in the dictionary: “I going to ask my friends, we’re going to pull together and finish homework.” When asked directly if these materials were beneficial to fostering interactions between him and his classmates, Rodrigo replied, “Eh yeah, my classmates have been a little silent from the couple of classes. But this gave us like, gave us a reason to talk, you know? ... it was fun, talking with them.” Overall, these materials appeared to be beneficial to learning as they promoted interactions between students.

Improved Speaking Skills

Similar to listening skills, speaking skills are one of the pillars for acquiring or learning an additional language. Based on the responses from the participants, these EAL learning materials appear to help students improve their speaking skills. The first question in the online questionnaire, which related to how the listening and speaking materials helped students in improving their English skills, elicited answers connected to improved speaking skills, such as “Improved pronunciation of English words,” and “Improved speech ability.” Following that, one student cited the final activity as a way in which an activity helped improve their speaking skills when they wrote “I improved my speaking ability by giving ten-minute speech.” Improved speaking was also connected to when a participant wrote about how their “vocabulary has increased” and answered “fluency” when asked about how they have improved their English skills through the use of the materials.

In the two semi-structured interviews Yanjin and Rodrigo both gave answers related to improved speaking skills. Yanjin explained how he had listened to the videos many times in an attempt to “follow their accent” which he believed is the “most important one [skill].” In addition, after watching the videos many times, he noted an improvement in speaking skills when he said “I can recite.” Rodrigo explained how these language learning materials “Gave us a reason to talk,” thus fostering opportunities for output and opportunities for improved speaking.

Increased Motivation

Motivation was another key theme associated with using the listening and speaking materials. The materials were “more interesting than other books I have read” according to a participant in the online questionnaire, which is connecting interest and motivation. Yanjin also had several examples of the materials being motivating as he watched the videos “three or four times.” Yanjin also said how he was “searching so much information about ecological issues” in order to complete his final project.

Motivation was also evident when Rodrigo was completing some activities, namely the activities which included more creativity than others. He said that the activity which included drawing gave him “a lot more interest” and that he was engaged when “he drew something funny in my drawing and it kind of makes it more enjoyable and that makes me more interesting in that.” When asked directly about motivation and the materials Rodrigo said that he was more motivated to study “for example, in the final project. I also want to know more about how water used and stuff because I want to give a good speech about it.” He went on to say “I will look it up and keep thinking like, keep thinking until I was satisfied with the information and I deliver something I was really proud of.” He then said “it was really kind of fun.” Rodrigo also felt motivated because the content was interesting and something he could relate to. He mentioned how he was taking a “full responsibility” for the tasks and how that made it “really interesting” for him. In addition, Rodrigo also attributed engagement and motivation to the content because it “felt like something new, I haven’t seen that, I’m really interesting in some more about it.”

Motivation was again identified by Yanjin when he said that he would “look though all the pictures and find out which one I’m interested in.” The pictures motivated Yanjin to explore the book. Another key factor for engagement and motivation was when Yanjin said how the information in the book was not difficult to find. He compared other textbooks that “there are so much information and you can not find some details” to this unit of materials where “it’s easy to find the details or the information that I want.” Motivation was further identified when Rodrigo stated the materials helped him have interactions with his classmates stating, “this gave us like, gave us a reason to talk, you know?” Several students identified how the materials motivated them to have more interactions with their classmates in the online questionnaire with answers such as “talk to others,” “group learning,” and “asking students to upgrade the thoughts.”

Cognitive Skills

Another important theme which was identified in relation to using the listening and speaking materials was the engagement of cognitive skills. The materials were designed to utilize a full range of cognitive resources, and this focus on cognitive engagement was evident in the answers provided through the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. The theme of cognitive engagement was evident in the online questionnaire when one participant said they were “getting used to thinking by using English.” This statement was supported by Rodrigo who mentioned that the note taking activity helped him a lot. For Rodrigo, drawing pictures helped create a “mental map” and thus helped him remember the information and content more efficiently. When Rodrigo was asked if drawing a picture helped him remember the information more he responded with “Yeah.” In addition, he was an active learner when he was watching the video due to the fact that they were short and concise and not “20 minutes with lots of information but nothing you can relate to.” The videos were engaging cognitively because he “feel like you were still doing an activity... not just hearing and hearing and hearing.” Rodrigo also spoke in depth about a benefit of these materials were that they helped him “organize all my projects and everything so I can draw and make mental maps and thing like that that make me get a little better organizing.”

Moreover, in relation to the final project Rodrigo said he kept “thinking until he was satisfied with the information” until he had created a project he was “proud of.” The theme of

cognitive skills was identified when students in the survey reported they enjoyed the engagements with other students. One student participant wrote that they liked “asking question to students to upgrade the thoughts” and another said that they “learned a lot from cooperation with my classmates.” Cognitive skills were also found in the data as a participant said they found the materials helped them “identify information” and that their “vocabulary had increased.”

Cognitive engagement was again identified when Yanjin mentioned how he specifically liked the pictures stating “I think it’s the pictures. When I going to go through a book the first impression is pictures, for me. I going to look through all the pictures and find out which one I am interested in.” The pictures in the materials were also mentioned in the online questionnaire by several students who wrote “Beautiful pictures,” “Detailed graphic explanation,” and “Text and pictures for explanation” when asked what they specifically liked about the listening and speaking materials.

The theme of cognitive skills was identified by students who were critically thinking or critically engaged with the materials. Examples of critical thinking were found several times throughout both the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. Critical thinking was evident when Rodrigo spoke about the interactions he had with his classmates, and how they were working together trying to identify the difference “between an opinion and a fact.” Furthermore, critical thinking was identified when Rodrigo was connecting the content of the materials [the wildfires and water issues] to his own lived experience in Mexico saying “Because it’s something that is kinda recent because, from the Australian fires and the water, actually because there is a problem with that in Mexico here. It was a little close. So you can feel the topic here”.

Video Learning

Learning through videos was another theme in the data related to the listening and speaking materials. The unit of materials came with short educational videos as well as links to two different Ted Talks. The educational videos were created as a way to support learning and possibly aid the teacher as they covered relevant content and educational objectives. The theme of engaging videos rose up when Rodrigo first mentioned that the videos helped him “understand it [the topic]” and they helped him “get used to it [the content].” Rodrigo also answered “Sure” when asked if the video-based instruction helped him. Yanjin indicated how the Ted Talk videos were engaging and that he listened “so, so many times.” The videos were also thought to be engaging as Yanjin mentioned how he watched them in his own time until he was able to “recite” the videos. The theme of videos was also prevalent in the online questionnaire where a student mentioned the “perfect Ted Talks” when asked what they specifically liked about the materials. The same question also generated answers like “course videos” or just “videos.”

The length of the videos was also an indicator to how engaging and relevant they were. When Rodrigo replied to the follow up question “What did you enjoy about the videos?” he stated that:

Well, most of them was like do have information. You know? Sometimes there are videos they record for like 20 minutes with lots of information but nothing you can relate

to. But this was like short videos with good information and it kind of feel like you were still doing an activity, you know? Not just hearing and hearing and hearing.

This appreciation for the length of the videos was also confirmed in the online questionnaire when a student responded, “the video is not too long so I will not get boring.” When asked if his engagement was attributed to the short length of the videos he responded “Yeah, that’s right.” Furthermore, Rodrigo also said that the videos helped him with his listening skills. Yanjin found the videos to be engaging because of the convenience of access to the videos, “I just click it and I don’t have to go search for it.” This ease of use was an integral part of the materials, making them more engaging by making them more accessible.

Relevance

Relevant content and activities made the EAL learning materials more engaging for the students. The content was identified to be relevant for Yanjin when he said they were “very useful” when referring to the Ted Talks that were linked to the materials and the other videos. Rodrigo mentioned how the content was engaging and how he was able to connect to his own life because it was relevant and relatable when he said:

Yeah, I really enjoy. Because it’s something that is kind of recent because, from the Australian fires and the water, actually because there is a problem that in Mexico here, too. It was a little close. So you can feel the topic here.

He mentioned how he was more interested in this unit of materials as the content was something new and that “I haven’t seen that, I’m really interested in some more about it.” The idea of relevant content is supported by Rodrigo by saying how the final activities were relevant because “everyone can approach in any way.” The questions were not closed; they were more open ended. Yanjin also made several comments about how the content was relevant because the unit of materials did not contain too much extra unimportant information. He said “our textbook there so much information and you can not find some details. This book is better for me. It’s easy to find the details or the information that I want.” The theme of relevant content was supported in the online questionnaire by several participants who said they specifically liked the “course videos” and that the materials were “more interesting than other books I have read.”

The content was not the only thing to be relevant in the materials. The activities also proved to be relevant for student because they helped the students develop necessary skills for post-secondary education in Canada. One participant wrote in the online questionnaire that the materials helped them develop their writing skills: “through the writing of this unit, I learned a new composition structure,” and several students identified how their note taking skills had improved which would be beneficial for other courses. Another student mentioned how they were able to “identify information” easier now and that they also benefited from the fact that materials gave them opportunities to learn from “cooperation with my classmates.” Rodrigo was fond of an activity which helped him develop a “mental map” of the content and thus helped him remember the content easier. In addition to the mental map, Rodrigo’s overall organizing skills improved by using these materials. Rodrigo also stated that the final question was “really helpful,

especially the third one because it got like a really big question that everyone can approach in any way.”

Discussion

Students felt that their listening skills, speaking skills, and autonomy all grew because of the materials used in this study. The theme of improved listening skills was identified several times, including interactive listening skills, independent listening skills, extensive listening skills, increased comprehensible input, and low affective filters. When combined, these listening-related factors all seem to play a role in successful additional language learning. The materials created for this study provided students with the rich recycled exposure they needed to develop their listening skills (Tomlinson, 2008) and fulfilled a much needed area of support in EAP curriculum programming (Douglas et al., 2022). Improved speaking skills were also a key theme related to the benefits of using principle-informed EAL materials, supporting the articulation of ideas and refinement of thought. Fluent speaking skills can aid students when they attend post-secondary education in Canada, and improved speaking skills, such as pronunciation, have the potential to build more confidence in students. The activities in the materials further seemed to support the development of fluency (Ellis, 2018) and encouraged speaking output (Swain, 2006). The theme of student autonomy was also identified when it was evident that the students who used the materials had become more independent learners and did not associate learning with just the teacher, an important part of hooks' (1994) understanding of pedagogy and Landry's (2019) understanding of independent learning taking place without the explicit direction of the teacher.

Interaction and motivation were two more key themes related to the EAP materials developed for this study. Some of the participants reported that the EAL learning materials generated interactions, a benefit of using principle-informed EAL learning materials. The theme of interaction touches on many theories of learning, including the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996) and sociocultural theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). When participants indicated interactions had taken place when using the materials, it can be determined that meaning negotiation, noticing, output production, collaborative dialogue, and social relationship formation were taking place during those interactions. All the mentioned features are cogs in the wheel of interactions, with interactions as one cog in the colossal wheel of additional language acquisition. In addition, from the data collected, it was evident that students had enhanced motivation throughout the use of the principle-informed EAL learning materials. Enhanced motivation is important for additional language acquisition because it can contribute to students not activating their affective filters (Krashen, 2009) and promote student interactions (Long, 1996). Motivation can also increase the opportunities for successful additional language acquisition through the seeking of comprehensible input (Krashen, 2009), which will in turn, increase motivation further and promote investment in the learning process (Norton, 2010).

Technology can be used as a basis for teaching materials or resources to provide enhanced learning experiences (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Schmid et al., 2014). In addition, the video-based materials students used also proved to be an effective method of teaching. Overall, the videos were cognitively engaging because they did not include irrelevant information and their duration was short. This combination promoted a light cognitive load for the students, which can free up cognitive resources for learning and the development of

automaticity by being exposed to the target language and grammar structures through the videos several times. The language learning materials were effective in fostering learning and additional language acquisition partly in relation to video-based learning. Video-based learning as a theme is related to accessing the *i+1* area of the students' linguistic and cognitive engagement.

The student participants' cognitive skills were activated when using the principle-informed EAL learning materials to foster critical thinking (Freire, 2000). Cognitive skills are brain-based skills which are utilized and necessary for knowledge, manipulation of information, and reasoning acquisition. As a result, cognitive skills are extremely important in the acquisition of language. Creating materials that can activate cognitive skills is a necessary responsibility of an ELT materials writer. The language learning materials in this study fostered cognitive skills through the promotion of critical thinking skills and the use of images. Cognitive skills are important for the acquisition of knowledge and additional language skills. When using these EAL learning materials, students were engaged in critical thinking. In particular, through the use of images in these materials, the students activated cognitive processes that can help foster additional language acquisition (Douglas et al., 2021; Harper, 2002).

The relevance of the EAL learning materials was another key theme in the data, particularly in relation to relevant content and activities and related skills development (Crabbie, 1993; Knowles, 1989; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Due to the relevant content and activities, students were thought to be more engaged, and thus more effective learning appeared to take place. By focusing on the content and not the language, the materials created could foster additional language acquisition and increase a student's overall knowledge of the content. This acquisition of both language and content is vital for programs like the EAP program at PIU, where a goal is to prepare students for post-secondary education in Canada. It is important to note that the students at PIU benefit from learning about Canadian issues and content, and this content and language learning can be achieved through a content-based approach that increases relevance. Additionally, this approach of teaching through content, which was utilized in the materials, aligns with the teaching and learning approach adopted in the EAP program at PIU whereby content-based teaching or thematic teaching is utilized to foster student learning of both EAL and general content knowledge. Overall, the language learning materials were thought to utilize relevant content and activities and develop related academic skills, which are both beneficial to fostering effective additional language acquisition and general education.

Implications

Before setting out to create EAL learning materials, writers should have a set of principles to guide them. For this research project, a set of 10 principles for EAL materials development were created. These principles were created based on my own personal practical knowledge of what helps students learn (Clandinin, 1985), additional language acquisition theories, general education theories, and current material development principles. By utilizing a set of principles, I found it extremely beneficial as I was able to analyze my own work with a critical eye. Furthermore, by relating the principles to theory, materials writers can easily defend the inclusion of a certain activity or process. Prior to developing a set of principles, I had created many EAL learning materials; however, these materials were created based only on my lived experiences. Based on the results from this study, it is clear that creating materials according to a

set of principles is more effective than relying purely on one's own instinct or experience. By following principles of materials development, a materials writer can supply the teacher with materials which sufficiently tackle key skills needed to find the content and language meaningful. As a result, the materials writer can help the teacher spend more time focusing on the language learning process for the student.

It can be argued that creating resources for language learners should be a core part of additional language programs. These programs could put policies in place to create timetables and schedules where instructors have paid time to create materials for their individual classes or students. This inclusion of set aside time for materials development is something that is not generally afforded to all teachers in Canada, depending on their status and where they work. However, these principled materials were created for the EAP program at PIU, and they are part of the program's commitment to developing open educational resources for students. The outcomes and skills developed were directly related to the goals of PIU. When generic or commercially produced EAL learning materials are chosen by teachers or directors for a particular class, the language learning materials are generally not created specifically for this class. As a result, these commercially produced textbooks can be over saturated with irrelevant content and information which can inhibit focused additional language acquisition for students. For programs without a policy that supports teacher-created materials, if teachers or instructors in these programs had more time dedicated to planning or prepping, they would be able to create EAL learning materials for their own class where the content and activities were all relevant.

Given that one of the implications is that teachers or instructors should have their own time to create language learning materials for their own students, these newcomers to materials writing would also benefit from targeted support in the form of professional development related to materials writing. In order for language teachers or instructors to create reliable and effective language learning materials, they should have professional development sessions dedicated to EAL learning materials development. Furthermore, English language teacher education programs such as the Certificate in Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) should include more information on EAL learning materials development. Both English language teacher education programs and public and private language intuitions should foster the creation of effective language learning materials through useful and relevant professional development opportunities.

Future Studies and Limitations

In reference to future studies, it is hoped that a multiple or collective case study will be replicated in the future. It would also be possible and interesting to recreate this study with the same principles of EAL learning materials development or another set of EAL learning materials development principles tailored for a specific context. It needs to be understood that my own personal bias did play a role in the development of the EAL learning materials and the principles. It would be beneficial to see how other EAL instructors would approach this type of study. Additionally, if more participants had taken part, the research would have been stronger. When this research was carried out, COVID-19 prevented face-to-face instruction and all the participants were in their home countries. There is no doubt that this impacted the study. I would be keen to redo this study and include classroom observations once face-to-face classes are again

possible. I also believe that if the data collection were carried out in a face-to-face environment rather than online, more students would take part. It would also be of interest to see this kind of study, using these principles or new principles, conducted in other universities in Canada.

Conclusion

This research focused on EAL learning materials development and the effectiveness of principle-informed EAL learning materials for students in an EAP program. The results of this research showed that utilizing a set of principles for EAL materials development prior to creating EAL learning materials is beneficial. As more and more students are coming to Canada to not only study English but to relocate as permanent residents, it is important they are given the best possible chance of succeeding. In order to succeed, students can benefit from knowing the local language and culture (Douglas & Rosvold, 2018). This development can be achieved by creating effective EAL learning materials which focus not only on language but also on content. By utilizing a content-based approach to materials development and by employing principles of materials development connected to additional language acquisition theory as well as cognitive and constructivist learning theories, the materials writer can develop meaningful materials that expose students to a higher levels of English, help students engage with each other, and encourage students to produce more output. By being engaged in their learning, students increase their opportunities for noticing and the negotiation of meaning. These kinds of materials also give students opportunities to connect them to their own lives. The experience produces a more democratic and social method for learning. ELT materials can create a space for voices to be heard and recognized in a non-judgemental and safe way. Good materials create community.

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