

MERITS AND DEMERITS OF DESIGNING HOT-POTATOES MATERIALS FOR EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Teaching materials are needed in teaching-learning activities in the classroom because materials have been considered as the only way to supply enriched input in the language classroom. Nowadays, technology has had a major impact, especially on education. Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), particularly educational software, to facilitate the learning and teaching process has become a more and more popular trend among teachers. The aim of this article is to explore the merits and demerits designing of Hot Potatoes as teaching material in the classroom in order to motivate EFL learners in learning simple past tense towards the interactive exercises. Hot Potatoes is popular software which can be conveniently used to create interactive Web-based educational exercises. Some of the advantages of hot-potatoes are: Enable teachers to create small exercises to practice and it can be linked to a listening or reading text to make a complete comprehension exercise.

Keywords

Hot Potatoes, self-practice, past tense

1 INTRODUCTION

Involving the learners in mastering grammar is an increasingly important area of language teaching. Over the past century, there has been a dramatic increase in studies that examined different suggested theories and techniques in order to engage and help the learners in learning the grammar. Chowdhury (2014) assumes that teaching English Grammar in non-native countries is an arduous task because of a number of factors causing the lack of motivation and concentration of the learner in acquiring the grammar-based inputs in the classroom. In teaching and learning process, teachers need to understand how to make the classroom as a place of learning and not just a classroom for the students to learn during the teaching process. It is important to improve the student participation in the classroom, arise the students' curiosity, improve the pattern of thinking and focus on the students' attention to the problem faced by them.

English teachers should be creative in helping the learners to learn either by providing supplementary materials or find an interesting way to teach the EFL learners especially in teaching the grammar's rule. It is not enough to teach the EFL learners by giving them the materials in workbook or course book. Motteram (2011) suggests that teachers need to be creative in order to give their learners a greater chance of being able to communicate. In this twenty-first century, the role of technology in teaching and learning process is very important and people should

realize its impacts on teaching and learning process and also in globalization. A number of studies have been done concerning the implementation of technology in teaching and learning process. Soleimani & Raeesi (2015) stated that the growing popularity of e-learning and computer-based education has by far manipulated the way pupils learn, teachers teach and testers assess. Moreover, Kervin & Derewianka (2011) presume language classroom has always used technologies of various kinds, from the blackboard through to the language laboratory. Motteram (2011) assumes that teachers try to use technology to supplement language classes because there is very little time for real language use in typical language classes. Halwani (2017) technology has an important role because teachers can introduce the lesson and give it added value with better illustration.

Pham & Nguyen (2017) speculate EFL material producer and curriculum developers have shown interest in including computer-based and electronic materials in their syllabi since technology has completely changed the ways materials are made and use in EFL classrooms. Electronic materials more beneficial and popular in language teaching because they are more accessible than materials used in traditional language teaching courses. Soleimani & Raeesi (2015) Computer-assisted language learning and teaching have also been influenced by the development of new programs and multimedia. Soleimani & Raeesi

(2015) concluded that amongst the very many programs available online *Hot Potatoes* is quite useful and practical. There are some previous research that supports the use of technology highly contribute for teaching, learning, practicing and assessing foreign language has many advantages, particularly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL), because the technology-based instruction effectively leads to accomplishment. The use of technologies in creating materials might increase students' motivation in learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the merits and demerits of designing of hot-potatoes material for EFL Learners students especially in learning English grammar.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teaching Materials

There are many terms to define teaching materials Tomlinson (2011, p.2) defines materials as anything which is deliberately used to facilitate and to increase the learner's knowledge in learning of a language. Materials can be instructional in that they inform learners about the language, can be experiential in that provide exposure to the language in use, can be elicitation in stimulating language use or can be exploratory in facilitating discoveries in language use.

Moreover, Tomlinson (2011, p. 8 - 22) summarizes that teaching materials should achieve impact; help learners to feel at ease; help learners to develop confidence; should be perceived by learners as relevant and useful; require and facilitate learner self-investment; learners must be ready to acquire the points being taught; expose the learners to language in authentic use, the learners' attention should be drawn to linguistic features of the input; provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language; should take into account that learners differ in affective attitudes; permit a silent period at the beginning of instruction; maximize learning potential by encouraging intellectual, aesthetic and emotional involvement; and not rely too much on controlled practice. Textbook materials go out of date quickly, but references on aspects of culture can be quickly updated by adding more recent material from the internet. Motteram (2011, p. 303) assumes that teachers try to use technology to supplement classes because they believe there is very little time for real language use in the typical language. Teachers can supplement what comes with the textbook in a number of different ways to make the material more relevant to the modern learner.

Motteram (2011, p.310) offers the frameworks for designing materials using to support the learning process. The frameworks are:

- 1) Access: how accessible is a particular technology for learners? How flexible is it for a particular target group?
- 2) Costs: what is the cost structure of each technology? Why is the unit cost per student?
- 3) Teaching and learning: what kinds of learning are need? What instructional approaches will best meet these need? What instructional approaches will best

meet these needs? What are the best technologies for supporting this teaching and learning?

- 4) Interactivity and user-friendliness: what kind of interaction does this technology enable? How easy is it to use?
- 5) Organizational issues: what are the organizational requirements, and the barriers to be removed, before this technology can be used successfully? What changes in the organization need to be made?
- 6) Novelty: how new is this technology?
- 7) Speed: how quickly can courses be mounted with this technology how quickly can materials be changed?

Tomlinson (2011, p. 8) Materials designed to be used in addition to the core materials of a course. Materials should achieve impact. The impact can be achieved through Novelty (e.g. unusual topics, illustrations, and activities); Variety (e.g. breaking up the monotony of a unit routine with an unexpected activity, using many different text-types taken from many different sources); Attractive presentation (e.g. use of attractive colors; use photograph); Appealing content (topics of interest to the target learners; engaging stories; universal themes); and Achievable challenge (e.g. tasks which challenge the learners to think).

Derewianka (2007, p. 199) Electronic materials refer to material that has been digitally processed so that the user is able to access it through a single course. Tomlinson (2011) believe the stereotypical image of self-access materials is still of practice exercises which enable the learners to work on what they need in their own time at their own pace without reference to a teacher. Moreover, Pirasteh (2014) divides CALL programs/materials into:

- 1) CALL-specific software: applications designed to develop and facilitate language learning, such as CDROMs, web-based interactive language learning exercises/quizzes.
- 2) Generic software: applications designed for general purposes, such as word-processors (Word), presentation software (PowerPoint), and spreadsheet (Excel), that can be used to support language learning.
- 3) Web-based learning programs: online dictionaries, online encyclopedias, news/magazine sites, e-texts, web-quests, web publishing, blog, wiki, etc.
- 4) Computer-mediated communication (CMC) programs: synchronous - online chat; asynchronous - email, discussion forum, message board.

In considering the use of electronic materials Kervin & Derewianka (2011, p.349-350) give some pedagogical considerations. The considerations are: How the electronics materials fit with the aims, outcomes, and objectives of the proposed learning experience; connections between the electronic materials and student learning theory; connections between the electronic materials and student learning needs; specific pedagogical practices needed to support the use of the electronic material during the language teaching and learning experience.

2.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

ICT is a powerful tool in presenting or representing information in different ways such as texts, pictures, tables, graphs and even multimedia which can make the class more interesting and lively. ICT basically refers to the use of technology in communication, data processing, and data storage to impact the knowledge on learners. Srivastava (2016) ICT helps to achieve the goals of educational programs for several reasons. Srivastava (2016) cited the term ICT encompasses the range of hardware (desktop and portable computers, projection technology calculators, data logging and digital recording equipment), software applications (generic software, multimedia resources) and information systems (Intranet, Internet) available in the teaching learning process. Therefore, the implementation of ICT in teaching and learning process can give many benefits. A number of studies have been done concerning the implementation of ICT in the teaching and learning process. Yunus, Lubis, & Lin (2009) describe the Information and communication technology (ICT) as a force that has changed many aspects of the way people live. ICT can provide lessons for learners to learn grammar and vocabulary at their own pace as a self-study activity. Furthermore, Fu (2013, p. 311-314) mentions some of the benefits of using ICT in education. The benefits are: Assist students in accessing digital information efficiently and effectively; Support student-centered and self-directed learning; Produce a creative learning; Promote collaborative learning in a distance-learning environment; Offer more opportunities to develop critical (higher-order) thinking skills focus on higher-level concepts rather than less meaningful tasks; improve teaching and learning quality; and support teaching by facilitating access to course content. Moreover, according to Motteram (2011, p.305-309), new technology gives many advantages. First, new technology can provide Task and exercises for the learners. As well as providing a way of accessing exercises, the technology provides a useful resource for all kinds of authentic texts. Next, with technology, other real-world tasks can also be set up with authentic materials.

2.3 Hot Potatoes Software

Hot Potatoes is a popular software which can be conveniently used to create interactive Web-based educational exercises. The Hot Potatoes software is comprised of six applications designed by the Research and Development team at the University of Victoria Humanities Computing and Media Center. Through the Hot Potatoes software, web interactive excises and tests can be made only by inputting data, allocating settings and publishing them.

Soleimani & Raeesi (2015) cited that the first version of Hot Potatoes (version 2.0) was released in September 1998, at the *EuroCALL* conference in Leuven, Belgium. Actually, the Hot Potatoes software suite comprises five distinct applications each providing the possibility to create exercises online and offline. After that, a sixth application, called the *Masher* has also been added recently; this allows the user to mix and combine all the Hot Potatoes exercises into one whole unit.

The six componential programs in the software can be used in creating interactive exercises and are especially suitable for foreign language learning. The exercises are created using six programs:

- 1) **JQuiz** is a tool for making question-based exercises. Each quiz consist of an unlimited number of questions. There are four basic question types in J-Quiz. First, multiple-choice questions, the student chooses an answer by clicking on a button. Second, short-answer questions, the students have to type the answer into a text box on the page and press a check button to see if it is correct. Third, a hybrid question is a combination of a multiple-choice question and a short-answer question. Finally, a multi-select question to select several of a specific set of items. JQuiz is quite a complicated application compared with previous versions, and the full interface can be a little intimidating for new users because of the range of features available.
- 2) **JCloze** is used to make gap-fill or cloze exercises. The idea of a gap-fill exercise is the student completes all the answers before checking; in other words, it's a holistic exercise. Correct answers will be inserted into the text; any incorrect answers will be left in text boxes so that they can be corrected. When the student checks an answer that is not completely correct, a penalty is incurred, so the score depends on the number of checks required before the answer is completely correct. In a JCloze exercise, the user can include a Hint button which will give the student one free letter of the answer he or she is currently working on (based on where the cursor is). The user can also include a specific clue for each gap.
- 3) **JMatch** is used to create matching exercises. A list of items appears on one side, and each one must be matched up to an item on the other side. The output of JMatch comes in two types: standard and drag-drop. This is the format to use when the user has more than seven or eight items, and the items on the right are only text; if the user has only a few items, and especially if the items are graphics, the user may want to use the drag-drop format.
- 4) **JMix** is used to make jumble exercises. The user can jumble the words in a sentence or the letters in a word. JMix has two output formats: standard, and drag-drop. Note that the comma and period are also on separate lines in order to make they become separate segments.
- 5) **JCross** is used to make crossword exercises. There are two steps to making an exercise: first, enter your letters in the grid, next add the clues. To enter letters in the grid, the users just click on a square and type a letter.
- 6) **The Masher** is a different kind of application from the others in the Hot Potatoes suite. It's intended to help the user make larger units of materials, linked together. The Masher is also used to upload files which are not Hot Potatoes exercises to the www.hotpotatoes.net server.

Source :

<http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/halfbaked/wintutor6/tutorial.htm>

The exercises designed with Hot Potatoes can be saved in a web format and then imported into the e-learning system with SCORM exercise or practice tests.

These are the primary differences between version 5.5 and version 6.0:

- 1) **Unicode support**, so the user can create exercises in virtually any language or in a mixture of languages. Unicode support is only enabled on Windows 2000 or XP; earlier versions of Windows do not support it.
- 2) **Mixed question types in a quiz**. The old JBC (multiple-choice) application has been combined with JQuiz, and the new application allows the user to create a quiz with a mixture of multiple-choice, short-answer and multi-select questions, along with a new question type ("hybrid").
- 3) **More sophisticated scoring in Jquiz**. Questions can now be weighted, and individual answers can be given a "percentage correct" setting.
- 4) **Simpler output format**. Instead of the old frames-based format, in which the content of exercise pages was written from JavaScript, the new XHTML-based pages are simpler and allow easier editing of the output pages in WYSIWYG editors such as DreamWeaver.
- 5) Exercises and all associated media files can be uploaded automatically to an account on the www.hotpotatoes.net server so that the students can log on and have their results recorded.

3 DISCUSSION

Hot potatoes offers some advantages for the teachers especially in designing the materials for EFL learners. The advantages are: Enable teachers to create small exercises to practice the aspects of grammar especially the simple past tense; Exercise types of this nature are part of many examination systems and the exercises can be created quite quickly and easily. The exercises can also be quickly adapted and changed to keep the exercises up to date. Therefore, hot potatoes material will provide useful practice at least for the exam.

Next, Hot potatoes materials provide the learners with quick and immediate feedback on every single question. Learners are able to see or check and study the test items prior to taking the test, and learners are given the possibility to go online and check the HTML sources of their quizzes and access the right answers. This, in turn, allows for more autonomy and fosters the heuristic abilities on the part of students.

Then, by designing the hot potatoes materials the teachers can also add a reading text. All of the Hot Potatoes programs give the teachers the option to include a reading text in a separate frame next to the quiz. The reading text may be typed directly into the program, or it can be imported from an external Web page.

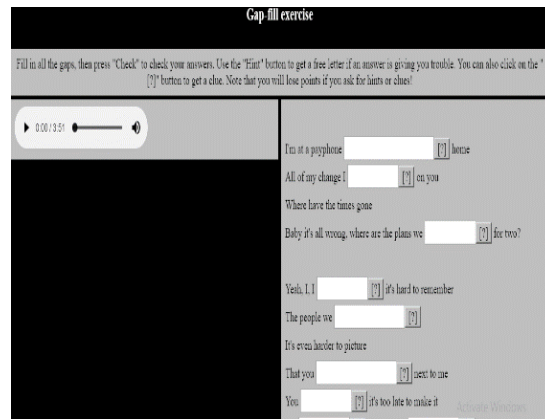


Figure 1. Example of the listening exercise

From the figure above, it can be seen that the completed exercise can also be linked to listening exercise in order to make a complete comprehension exercise.

Then, the teachers can combine pictures, sounds, and links. By combining pictures, sounds and links teachers have the ability to create their own variety of interactive activities and can offer help and feedback to the learners more easily. As a result of these facilities, an attractive learning atmosphere is created in classrooms, they do not need much support from the teacher, and there are plenty of exercises.

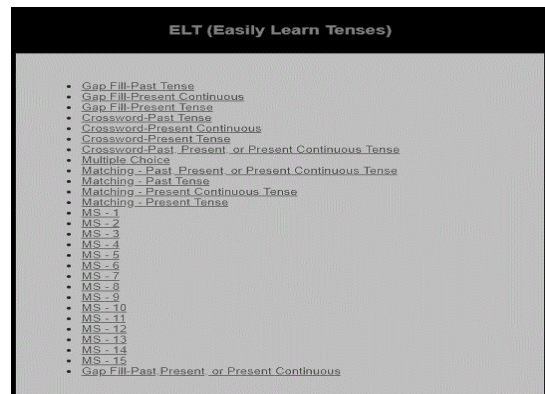


Figure 2. Example of the series of exercise

The figure showed the teachers can create a series of exercises in sequence because there are six componential programs in the software. The teachers can easily do this by creating an Index page, and have students jump to each exercise, then jump back to the index and choose another one. In order to make an achievable challenge, the teachers can add a timer to their exercise. When the timer runs out, the student's work so far will be scored, and the score displayed; after that, no further work on the exercise will be possible.

Moreover, in hot potatoes version 6 the teachers can mixed question types in a quiz by creating a quiz with a mixture of multiple-choice, short answer and multi-select questions, along with a new question type ("hybrid"). In this new version of hot potatoes, the teachers also can give more sophisticated scoring in Jquiz.

Hot potatoes materials also offer a simpler output format. Exercises and all associated media files created by the teachers can be uploaded automatically to an account on the www.hotpotatoes.net server so that the students can log on and have their results recorded. The teachers can even edit the source files used as templates to create the exercises, changing the whole appearance and even the functionality of the Web pages their produce.

From the explanation above it can be concluded that by designing hot potatoes materials the teacher can create unusual topics, illustrations, and activities; breaking up the monotony of a unit routine with an unexpected activity; using many different text-types taken from many different sources; using of attractive colors or photograph; topics of interest to the target learners; and tasks which challenge the learners to think). Therefore, this results in line with material designed proposed by Tomlinson (2011) because hot potatoes material can give the impact to the students through novelty, variety, attractive presentation, appealing content, and an achievable challenge of materials.

In the study of *Developing Hot potatoes-Based Materials For English Teaching and Learning at SMK* by Safer, Salam, & Ikhsanudin (2015) revealed that several aspects were responded on hot potatoes-based materials: Hot potatoes-based materials could be used in students' laptops, Hot potatoes-based materials were easily operated, the students could recognize the objectives and the instructions on hot potatoes-based materials, the students could interact actively with various quiz activities in Hot potatoes-based materials, students could get and learn from the feedbacks or corrections of the quiz activities, students could enjoy the quiz activities in hot potatoes based materials, students could find colorful and attractive displays on hot potatoes-based materials, and students motivated to learn English by using hot potatoes-based materials.

Additionally, Hot potatoes materials appropriate with the framework in designing the material proposed by Motteram (2011) because hot potatoes material is accessible and flexible for the learners, free downloaded, interactivity and user-friendliness, novelty, and the materials can quickly be changed.

In spite of designing hot potatoes materials offer a lot of advantages, the teachers must consider the negative aspect of designing the materials. The negative aspect of designing hot potatoes materials is mostly made form-focused activities in which the degree of "interaction" is limited to interaction between the user and the predetermined feedback created by the program developer. In this case, Hot Potatoes acts like a tool, and thus like all other useful instruments, its value depends on the knowledge and creative skills of the students. Moreover, the biggest drawback of Hot Potatoes concerns with the security of the tests. The program does not include any kind of access control thus it should only be used in unofficial testing contexts and student self-evaluation practices. Furthermore, hot potatoes is considered of a lower standard than its counterparts such as Cyber Exam. Furthermore, in the research conducted by Soleimani & Raeesi (2015) the biggest drawback of

this software is its deficiency in providing synchronous interaction between teacher and learner. Hot Potatoes like many other programs because it acts more like a tool, and thus it can only reach all its potentials once it is being used innovatively by creative teachers.

4 CONCLUSION

Hot potatoes offers some features which are very beneficial for teachers in creating their own material. Hot Potatoes is by far advantageous for its users both in terms of providing exposure to language and promoting autonomy on the part of learners. The teachers have full control over what type of exercises that they wanted to produce. Hot Potatoes version 6.3 is the first freeware release. This release is open for anyone to use for any purpose. Hot potatoes offer user-friendly features which in turn renders test making and test taking easier and more accessible. Teachers can provide their students with more comprehensive feedback while learners can benefit from online access to their teachers' exams at any time during the day. It can be concluded that Hot potatoes materials can give impact through novelty, variety, attractive presentation, appealing content, and achievable challenge. However, the program is not meant to teach the language directly and interactively because the program to be limited to only options and applications which produce tests and exercises.

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