



Teaching materials in spanish as a foreign language (ELE): Theory, classification, and pedagogical use

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Abstract

The classroom can be understood as a space where teachers, students and teaching materials interact in the teaching-learning process. This paper focuses on the role of teaching materials in Spanish as a foreign language (ELE) and highlights the importance of language learning through appropriate teaching materials. The study presents theoretical perspectives on pedagogical resources and explains the various forms teaching materials may take, depending on the methods and approaches used in language teaching. The article aims to explain important theoretical concepts related to teaching materials, analyze the types of materials used in different teaching methods and approaches, describe criteria for selecting authentic texts, and classify different categories of pedagogical resources. It concludes that well-selected and context-appropriate materials play a fundamental role in creating meaningful and effective learning experiences in ELE classrooms.

Keywords: Teaching materials, spanish as a foreign language, authentic texts, communicative approach, pedagogical resources

Introduction

These days, we are experiencing a rise in the production of teaching materials, with publishers competing to produce the best textbooks and sell as many copies as possible. The market offers a wide variety of options, making it difficult to select a textbook or relevant supplementary material. Similarly, advances in technology create new opportunities for both students and teachers. Given this situation, we believe it is essential to be aware of these alternatives, understand them thoroughly, and be able to reflect on their advantages and disadvantages.

The classroom can be conceived as the space in which three components interact: teacher, students, and materials. In this work, we will focus on the third element: we will present some theoretical considerations on pedagogical resources, a description of the various ways in which these can take shape, and some guidelines for their analysis.

Our objectives are to explain some important theoretical concepts related to teaching materials, analyze types of teaching materials used in different methods and approaches of language teaching, describe some criteria to follow for selecting the authentic texts and to categorize different types of teaching materials.

Role of materials in the Spanish as a foreign language (ELE) class

Today, teachers of ELE have a wide variety of options when choosing teaching materials for their classes. Therefore, it is crucial that they know how to select a quality textbook, choose appropriate supplementary materials, and adapt these tools for their students. The role of materials in a teaching method or system reflects the decisions concerning the materials primary objective, their form and teachers skills.

Teaching involves decisions related to the essential purpose of the materials, their configuration, their relationship to the teacher's abilities, and other sources of information. A particular educational system design may entail a series of functions that the material resources must fulfill to support the program, the teachers, and the students.

According to Richards and Rodgers (1998) ^[9], the role of materials in a personalized learning system can encompass the following technical details:

- The materials will enable students to progress at their own pace.
- The resources will facilitate diverse learning methods.
- The materials will provide opportunities for independent use and study.
- The materials will provide the possibility of independent assessment and learning progression.

On the other hand, Martín Peris (2008) ^[7] proposes that manuals should possess the following attributes:

Adaptable and evolving manuals (as opposed to inflexible manuals)

To connect with potential users and adapt to their learning environments, the manual must be flexible and adaptable.

Manuals as a toolbox (as opposed to manuals seen as a template)

Since users employ different learning strategies, manuals should not be uniform; rather, they should function as a toolbox. This way, each person can choose the tools that are most useful to them at any given time.

Manual-map (as opposed to a recipe-based manual)

If education is understood as the creation of learning opportunities, it's important not to establish overly rigid paths. We need manuals that are suggestive and orienting, enabling us to explore different avenues to learning.

Manuals that can be opened to other types of learning (as opposed to manuals that are closed in on themselves)

Manuals are not the definitive resource, but rather should allow us to open ourselves to other forms of linguistic learning and experience. For this reason, it is essential to refer to the presence of other strong sources, encourage research, and seek out all learning opportunities and ways to personalize teaching as much as possible.

History of materials used in different teaching methods and approaches

In recent years, various approaches and models have been developed that place students at the centre of the learning process. In reality, all elements—such as teachers, curriculum, materials, and assessment—should be centred on students' needs. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the crucial role of materials as instructional objects. Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers (2014, p. 20) ^[10] emphasize that “language teaching materials are closely linked to teaching methods and reflect broader theories of language and learning.

The following is an overview of the role these materials have played in the most prominent models and approaches throughout the history of foreign language teaching.

1. Role of Materials in the Oral/Situational Approach of Teaching

Teaching relies on both texts and visual aids. The book contains lessons closely organized around various grammatical structures. Teachers can create visual aids or use pre-made resources; these include posters, flashcards, illustrations, and more. Meticulously graded grammar programming, along with the visual element, is an essential component of this approach. This explains the relevance of the textbook. However, it is expected that the teacher will use it appropriately.

2. Role of Materials in the Audiolingual Method

The teaching materials in the audiolingual method assist the teacher in helping students learn the language. These materials are generally teacher-centred. At the basic levels of the course, a student book is not typically used; instead, students listen, repeat, and respond. Recordings and audiovisual equipment are usually key elements in an audiolingual course. A language lab can be considered essential, as it provides the opportunity to work more extensively on exercises and listen to basic structures in a controlled and error-free environment.

3. Role of Materials in the Silent Way

This approach is known due to the fact that the teacher is silent and the materials used for teaching are quite unique. To demonstrate the relationship between sound and its meaning in the target language, the teacher uses the resources mentioned here: a pointer, reading and writing exercises, coloured rods, and colourful murals to address pronunciation and vocabulary. The materials are designed for use by the teacher and students, individually or together, with the aim of promoting language acquisition through direct association.

4. Role of Materials in Community Language Learning

Given the fact that the textbook is not considered essential for a course based on Community Language Learning, this approach is a product of group interactions. A textbook would force students to grapple with specific linguistic content, hindering their development and interaction. The teacher has the option to create materials as the course progresses, even if these are mostly summaries from the board or overhead projector, supplemented with some linguistic elements from student conversations. It is also permissible to transcribe and distribute conversations for study and analysis, while students can collaborate in groups to develop their own materials, such as dialogue texts or

short dramatic pieces. Furthermore, it is possible to transcribe and share conversations for analysis and study.

5. Role of Materials in Suggestopedia

Materials are classified into two fundamental types: direct support materials, which are primarily text and audio recordings, and indirect support materials, which include music and classroom elements. The guide text should feature interesting characters, literary quality, and a strong emotional impact. From this perspective, the materials themselves do not play a significant role; rather, the most prominent components are the environment (indirect support materials), the classroom's appearance (bright and cheerful), the furniture, and the music.

6. Role of Materials in Total Physical Response

There is no single core textbook in a course using the Total Physical Response method. However, in later stages of instruction, objects and materials become increasingly important. For beginners, classes may not require materials. The voice, gestures and movements can be enough in order to carry out activities in the classroom by the teacher. However, with the advancement of the course, the teacher will be required to create materials so that a particular aspect of instruction is followed by the students.

7. Role of Materials in the Natural Approach

The main objective of teaching materials in this Approach is to make activities done in the classroom as meaningful as possible. This is achieved by providing extralinguistic context, which helps students understand and connect classroom activities to real-world situations, while also promoting authentic communication among students. The materials draw more from real-world examples than from textbooks. Their main objective is to foster communication and understanding. If reading is incorporated into the course, it is recommended to use authentic materials, including books, maps, advertisements, catalogues, and timetables, at appropriate levels for the students.

8. Role of Materials in Communicative Approach

A variety of materials are used to support the communicative approach of language instruction. H. Douglas Brown (2007, p. 69) ^[2] highlights that “successful language teaching materials should encourage communicative competence and learner participation”. Communicative teaching approach, unlike some contemporary approaches, view materials as a means to influence classroom interaction and language use. Consequently, materials play a crucial role in fostering communicative language use. This approach employs three types of materials: text-centered, task-centered, and authentic.

Diversity in teaching resources

Today, no one can deny that languages are realities in constant change and variation. Linguistic variety refers to the diversity in the use of a given language across geographical, communicative, or historical contexts, as well as the speaker's level of linguistic knowledge. The Dictionary of Key Terms for Spanish as a Foreign Language (Centro Virtual Cervantes) classifies four varieties: diachronic variation (which depends on the historical context), diastratic variation (which depends on the

sociocultural level of the speakers), diaphasic variation (which depends on the communicative environment), and diatopic variation (which depends on the geographical region where it is spoken).

One of the questions that experts in teaching Spanish often ask themselves regarding this matter: Which variant(s) of Spanish, among the many that exist, should we teach and therefore add to the materials? Martín Peris (2001) maintains that students must engage with the reality of the language in all its varied expressions. Regarding geographical varieties, he advises facilitating the understanding of as many as possible, although it would be best to select one as the guiding thread of the course.

Regarding social varieties, it is recommended that those that are highly pronounced be eliminated from general courses. However, students should be provided with tools to understand and use them if they meet their needs. Finally, with reference to diaphasic or situational varieties, it is noted that students must be able to identify the different types of register and use the rules that govern the various text types and discourse practices.

Authenticity of teaching materials

According to Pozzobon and Pérez (2010), authentic materials are intended for native speakers and possess characteristics that make them original, genuine, and unique. The authenticity of teaching materials used to support learning activities, according to the Dictionary of Key Terms for Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) of the Instituto Cervantes, will be affected by multiple factors.

Authenticity is not only related to the level of the sentence and syntax; it is also linked to the textual level ("the texts will be representative of model texts that actually exist in the society whose language is being learned, and will fulfil the functions that correspond to them in their multiple contexts of use") and to the sociocultural level ("the texts will reflect models of linguistic use related to cultural and social conventions specific to their field of use and the user's profile").

However, it is important to note that the concept of authenticity is not limited to materials. Anaya and Martín Peris (2005-2006) ^[1] identify four forms of authenticity that teachers encounter, as shown below.

- a. **Authenticity of the texts:** For texts to be authentic, they must meet the following conditions:
 - **Formal elements:** The writings must reflect the linguistic reality (maintaining the characteristics of oral and written usage, text format, etc.).
 - **Content-related elements:** The texts must be relevant to the students' world of knowledge and experiences.
 - **Usage-related aspects:** Texts must be usable for the same purposes for which they were created outside the classroom.
 - **Sociocultural elements:** Texts must reflect the social norms and conventions related to language use.
- b. **Authenticity of textual interpretations:** Texts must be connected to a context of use (through images, instructions, etc.) and provide the information necessary for their interpretation (such as who participates and where the scene takes place).

c. **Authenticity of tasks:** Activities must guide students toward learning and communication.

d. **Authenticity of the social situation in the language class:** It is necessary to provide students with the opportunity to share, both publicly and interpersonally, the various contents that are learned in a language.

Because the content of published educational materials is fixed, updating them is not easy. This often results in outdated textbook content. Therefore, some teachers are beginning to recognize the opportunities offered by materials that are not constrained by the format limitations of textbooks and that can be used as supplementary resources for a variety of learning objectives and tasks. Any resource that can be used to facilitate language acquisition can be considered a learning material; this can be auditory, visual, linguistic, etc., and can be in print or even online (Tomlison in Pozzobon and Pérez, 2010).

However, the number of authentic texts is vast and infinite. How to choose them? Martín Peris (no date) has established three criteria for selecting authentic documents:

First criterion: Function of texts in the classroom

Documents have an extralinguistic function outside the classroom: their creators produce them so that the recipients acquire specific information they lack. However, in the classroom, authentic documents also fulfill another essential function: they are used as models of linguistic usage for students' writing.

When selecting authentic documents for the classroom, we can ask ourselves the following questions:

- Is it a text that students can use as an example for their linguistic production (morphosyntactic structure, text structure, or vocabulary)?
- Is it a document that allows us to easily plan stimulating activities for our students?

Brian Tomlinson (2011, p. 8) ^[12] argues that "effective language teaching materials should engage learners emotionally, cognitively, and communicatively." As teachers, our task will be to choose texts based on their ability to motivate and engage students, and to link them as sources or stimuli for activities that promote students' linguistic production.

Criterion number two: From activities to language

The common method used by textbook authors and educators to create educational activities has been to follow the "from language to activities" approach. However, this is not the only way; we also have the option of moving from activities to language.

The activities carried out in the classroom are interesting not only because of the learning objectives established in the curriculum, but often also in and of themselves. In fact, if we consider activities in relation to language when choosing materials, the range of texts available for our classes will increase.

Criterion number 3: Characteristics of the texts

To select text types, it is crucial to consider the following properties:

- **Relevance to students' experiences and interests:** Texts that are relevant to students' experiences and interests will not only support the selection but will also establish the necessary context for their presentation.

- **Comprehensibility for students:** In addition to the text's linguistic features and its presentation style, it is necessary to consider other elements that are not strictly linguistic (such as the subject matter, for example).
- **The opportunity for students to express themselves or act in relation to the text's content:** it is not enough to select a text that is interesting and easy to understand. It is also important to offer our students an incentive to take action in some way.

Authentic materials allow us to carry out classroom activities that are similar to those that take place outside of it. In this way, students find themselves in situations where they use the language they are learning to achieve certain extralinguistic objectives, which allows them to advance their language proficiency in both its receptive components (reading and listening comprehension) and its productive components (oral and written expression).

Furthermore, we can affirm that the authenticity of teaching materials contributes to students improving their communication skills. Therefore, when choosing materials, teachers should ensure that they have a communicative objective and that they take into account the needs and interests of the students.

Varieties of educational materials

Teachers can use a wide variety of teaching materials in the classroom. In its most specific sense, materials consist of textbooks and supplementary content. We can define "textbook" as follows:

By manuals, we mean the working tools, (whether inside or outside the classroom, for self-taught learners), that address all the elements related to language acquisition: lexical, grammatical, phonetic, and phonological aspects; the various communicative situations in which communication can occur and their particularities; and, therefore, the varied linguistic skills or abilities. All of this is considered according to the different levels of the language learning process (Fernández 2004: 724)^[4].

The manual can be described as the complete set of materials that constitute a teaching package and are sold as a single unit. This package is presented in various formats: print, audio, digital, visual, audiovisual, and multimedia. It may contain a student book, a workbook, a teacher's guide, an audio CD, and a DVD; sometimes even an application for teaching a specific subject on an interactive whiteboard. The textbook or student book is usually the core of the entire package.

Supplementary materials can be defined as follows:

These materials refer to auxiliary tools created to provide additional theoretical or practical support to students and teachers regarding a particular and specific aspect of language learning (Fernández 2004: 724)^[4].

There are many different materials that aid the teaching and learning process, which can be used both inside and outside the classroom. Some examples of supplementary materials are: exam preparation books, theoretical and methodological articles for teachers, posters, games, flashcards, reading books, grammar books, and exercise books. Fernández (2004)^[4] categorizes them according to their field or area of application:

1. Grammar Support Materials:

- Grammars
- Materials Focusing on Grammar Problems
- Practice Books

2. Resources for Written Expression and Comprehension:

- Reading Comprehension and Writing
- Reading Materials

3. Resources for Expanding Vocabulary

- Materials for Practicing Phonetics
- Materials for Oral Expression and Comprehension
- Materials for Specific Purposes
- Materials with Audiovisual Support
- Materials Supported by Computer Technology

4. Other:

- Publication of Independent Assignments and Activities
- Resources for Studying for the DELE Exam
- Methodology

5. Materials focussing on the teaching of literature and culture

We could also consider, in its broadest sense, the numerous and diverse resources that the internet provides as materials. Many publishers support their products (grammar books, skills practice books, manuals, etc.) on their websites, where teachers and students can find activity suggestions, authentic texts for classroom use, exercises, teaching units, and links. In addition, there are other websites not created by publishers, but by public or private entities, universities or educational institutions, groups of teachers, students, and so on. These sites are used to exchange ideas and activities, discuss topics of interest, debate teaching materials, clarify doubts collaboratively, publish news and useful information, among other things.

Among these resources, we can cite:

- **Blogs:** This English term originates from the words "web" (network) and "log" (diary). It refers to a website that is updated regularly, compiling articles or texts from one or more authors chronologically, starting with the most recent. In this space, the author always has the freedom to publish whatever they deem necessary.
- **Podcasts:** Podcasting is the distribution of multimedia files through a redistribution system that allows users to subscribe and use a program to download them so they can listen to them at their convenience. The term podcasting originates from the combination of the iPod device and the concept of streaming.
- **Digital communities:** This is a community where people with similar interests come together. Interactive and relational interactions don't occur in a physical space, but rather in a virtual one like the internet.
- **Discussion forums:** Discussion forums facilitate debates in which people contribute their opinions on a specific topic. They also enable communication, the exchange of experiences and information, as well as consultations on a variety of subjects and the posing of questions among the general public.
- **Other resources**
 - Digital newspapers**
Online exercises, activities, and learning units
 - Online dictionaries**
Websites about Hispanic culture and language

Publisher websites

Finally, we want to emphasize that an observant teacher can find authentic resources and texts in their daily life that can be used in the classroom, such as advertisements, plays, songs, films, radio or television programs, interviews, and more. Furthermore, the significant benefit of using realia cannot be overlooked. This concept refers to real-life objects used in the teaching and learning process to make the abstract concrete. Some examples include bus tickets, instruction manuals, photographs brought in by students, packaged food, classroom materials, and others.

Conclusion

The current era in the evolution of foreign language teaching techniques is characterized by the growing interest shown by educators and researchers in textbooks. This is because teaching materials, an essential tool for learning, are a key element of the teaching/learning process and play a crucial role both in the classroom and in the student's independent work. It cannot be said that there is a single, predetermined role for teaching resources in the Spanish as a Foreign Language classroom. On the contrary, these roles have changed and continue to evolve in line with the historical evolution of the proposed methodologies and pedagogical perspectives. According to Jack C. Richards (2001, p. 2) ^[11], "teaching materials should be designed in relation to learners' needs, objectives and classroom contexts in order to support effective language learning". What is clear is that the student and their needs should not be overlooked.

We believe it is essential to be aware of the different types of teaching materials available and to consider their potential applications, benefits, and drawbacks. The textbook is not the only educational resource available: there is a wide range of additional materials, both published and downloadable online. Technological and computer tools offer extensive opportunities, but they require teachers to be proficient in their use.

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