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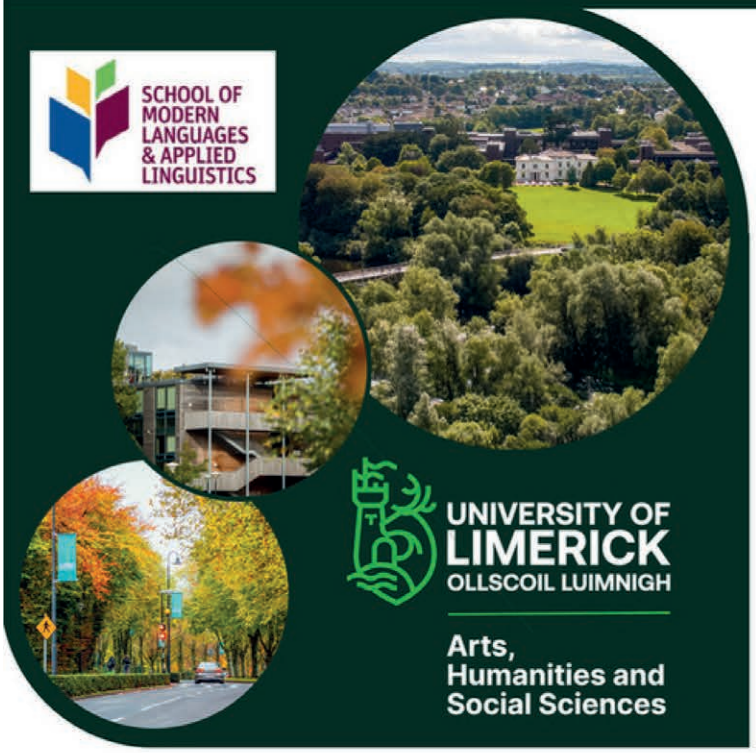
Book Review: Developing Intercultural Language Materials

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (TESOL) MASTER OF ARTS (FULL TIME)



The University of Limerick undertakes programmes of education and research to doctorate level in the following areas: business, computing, dance, education, engineering, humanities, mathematics, music, social science and science. The extensive modern campus of the University is located on the banks of the River Shannon at the heart of the 640 acre National Technological Park, approximately 3 miles from the centre of Limerick city. The University has excellent educational, cultural, sporting and residential facilities and accommodates some 13,000 students.

INTRODUCTION

This one-year full-time MA in Teaching English to Speakers Of Other Languages (TESOL) provides teacher education for those wishing to become teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). It is also designed for experienced teachers who wish to update their knowledge and skills. The programme allows teachers to develop and reflect upon their understanding of the various theoretical and practical issues that impact upon the field of language teaching. It places particular emphasis on the notion of informed and critical teaching and the need for teachers to mediate between theory and practice in constructing pedagogies according to specific teaching/learning contexts in line with the most recent approaches in the field. Language technology, and corpus-based approaches to the study of language feature strongly in the programme. A balance is maintained between linguistic content, pedagogic content, and teaching-related research. The programme concludes with a 15,000 word dissertation giving students the opportunity to engage in empirical research, or with an internship allowing students to directly apply the theoretical and practical knowledge they learned on the programme. An alternative graduate diploma exit route is available for those who choose not to do the dissertation or internship.

SAMPLE MODULES

- Language Systems
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- Linguistics for Language Teaching
- Language Pedagogy for ELT
- Technology & Language Studies
- Blended Learning
- Internship

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Students graduating from this course have followed a number of career paths in the past. These include: teaching at various levels (including university) at home and oversees, school management, publishing, materials' development, technical writing, adult education and support, further study at PhD level.

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APPLICATIONS

The programme commences in September of each year.
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FURTHER INFORMATION

Applicants who wish to discuss detailed elements of the programme may contact the Course Director: Elaine Vaughan School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics.
Email: Elaine.Vaughan@ul.ie

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For advertising and contributions please contact Freda Mishan, *Folio* Editor, email freda.mishan@ul.ie

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From the Editor

Freda Mishan, University of Limerick

Folio 24.1. presents the broad range of ideas and innovation from international contributors that readers have come to expect of the MATSDA journal. As learning, like so many areas of life, moves into the digital, it is not unexpected that all but one of the contributions describe multimodal, online materials.

The first article offers an account of an ambitious 'bottom up' collaborative materials development project conducted at a third level institution in Japan, contributed by its developers Tim Stewart, Sara Schipper, Tanya McCarthy, David Lees and Catherine LeBlanc. From Brazil we have Alessandra Belletti Figueira Mülling and Peter Watkins' description of another innovative project, self-access (online) 'instruction-free' reading materials for A1/A2 level learners, which harnessed the 'reading for pleasure' principle with very positive results.

The next four articles originated as presentations at the MATSDA/Universidade de NOVA Lisboa conference in June of this year. The first of these, by Fausto Caels, Flávia Coelho and Ana Catarina Castro, describes a project based learning (PBL) initiative involving a collaboration between Chinese learners of Portuguese and Portuguese students learning Chinese, in the creation of video tutorials for the institutional website. Frequent and most welcome contributors to *Folio*, Diana McCray, Aziza Yunusova and Kamola Muradkasimova, bring us up to date on Academic English resources in Uzbekistan, describing a comprehensive online AE resource for language teachers and learners. Our materials spots this year come from Italy and from Portugal. Jonathon Paul White presents a framework for the use of multimodal Academic English materials, devised to reflect the way learners process information, and to encourage engagement and creativity. Gianna Merki's materials, *Ease in Portuguese*, describe lively and accessible digital materials for beginner learners of Portuguese. Our book review this year is *Developing Intercultural Language Materials* (2024), by Freda Mishan and Tamas Kiss, reviewed by Erzsébet Ágnes Békés.

Contributors to this issue range from early-stage researchers and post-graduate students, to seasoned researchers and language teachers/trainers, thus fulfilling one of the mandates of MATSDA; to encourage practitioners at every stage of their career to disseminate their work. It is a tribute to the success of this ambition, that practitioners from all over the world are keen to share their products and the thought and process that go into their creation. As ever, on behalf of MATSDA and *Folio*, I would like to thank this year's contributors for their generosity in disseminating their work and I hope that others will be inspired to do so as well.

Freda Mishan, Editor
Limerick
September 2024

Greetings from the President

Brian Tomlinson, MATSDA President

Welcome to another issue of *Folio* and to the prospect of another successful MATSDA Conference.

Conferences

A very successful MATSDA Conference was held in Lisbon from June 5th-6th, 2024. The theme of the conference was *Materials for Developing Communicative Ability* and it was co-hosted by Universidade de NOVA Lisboa. We enjoyed 54 presentations from 24 countries on materials for developing communicative ability in English, Catalan, Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish.

The plenary speakers were Rod Ellis, Nicky Hockly, Alan Maley, Hitomi Masuhara, Scott Thornbury and Brian Tomlinson.

The next MATSDA conference will be co-hosted by the International Graduate School of English (IGSE) in Seoul, South Korea from June 6-7, 2025. The theme will be *Humanising Materials for Language Learning* and the plenary speakers will include Rod Ellis, Alan Maley, Hitomi Masuhara and Brian Tomlinson. Details of the conference will soon appear on the MATSDA website www.matsda.org

The 2026 MATSDA Conference will be held in June 2026 at Universidade de Hidalgo in Mexico and the 2027 MATSDA Conference will be held at the University of Limerick in Ireland.

Publications

In August 2023 the third edition of *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* was published by Bloomsbury and is now available. The Editor of the book is me (Brian Tomlinson, the President and Founder of MATSDA) and there are chapters by many contributors to MATSDA conferences and to Folio. The publication includes updated and revised versions of chapters from the second edition, numerous new chapters on, for example, digital materials and multimodal materials, readers' tasks at the end of each chapter and a web supplement containing additional tasks and three new chapters on materials for teacher development.

We are continuing our connection with Cambridge Scholars and are about to publish a book of proceedings from our 2023 Conference in Rufina, Italy. It is called *Materials for Assessment* and it will be edited by Asma Aftab, one of the speakers from the MATSDA Conference in Rufina.

Bloomsbury will be publishing a book of chapters based on presentations at our 2024 MATSDA Conference in Lisbon. It will be called *Materials for Helping L2 Learners to Develop Communicative Ability*, it will be edited by myself and Hitomi Masuhara (the Secretary of MATSDA) and it will be published in 2025.

Bloomsbury will also be publishing a second edition of the book I edited in 2013 called *Applied Linguistics and Materials Development*. This is a book of chapters based on presentations at the MATSDA Conference in 2012 at the University of Limerick on Applied Linguistics and Materials Development.

The MATSDA Materials Writing Competition

MATSDA is inviting submissions for a materials writing competition in which entrants will be asked to produce a complete unit of humanistic material for L2 learners. The unit should appear as it would in a published course and should:

- be designed to provide about three hours of activities for the learners following the course
- be addressed to the learners
- be designed to facilitate clarity and engagement through the use of spacing, staging, colour, choice of typeface, headings, symbols, illustrations etc.
- be learner centred.

The target learners can be of any age and of any level and be learning the target language for any purpose in any context.

The material should be humanistic in that it is learner-centred and 'respects its users as intelligent and individual human beings with ... experience of language use and life and which helps them to exploit their capacity for learning through meaningful

experience'. It should include 'activities which make the language learning process a more affective experience, finding ways to help learners to connect what is in the unit to what is in their minds and making the experience of using the unit rich, meaningful, personal and enjoyable' (Tomlinson, 2023, p. 129).

Together with the unit, entrants should submit a rationale for the materials which provides information about:

1. their name and affiliation
2. the learners' age(s), level, reason(s) for learning the L2 and context of learning
3. the objectives of the materials
4. the theories which have been applied in the development of the materials
5. the sources of any references, quotations and texts.

Entrants can be individuals, pairs or teams and each developer should provide a brief bio of about 100 words. Anybody can enter but bots are banned.

The closing date for entries is December 31st 2024 and entries should be sent as attachments to me at *brianjohntomlinson@gmail.com* and copied to Hitomi Masuhara at *hitomi.masuhara@gmail.com*

The prizes for the winners will be presented at the MATSDA 2025 Conference and will consist of:

First Prize: £150 + an invitation to give a plenary presentation at the conference + signed copies of books published by the plenary speakers.

Second Prize: £100 + signed copies of books published by the plenary speakers.

Third Prize: £50 + signed copies of books published by the plenary speakers.

All entrants will receive priority status for:

- presenting at MATSDA 2025
- publication in *Folio* (the MATSDA journal)
- publication in a possible book of humanistic units of material.

Reference

Tomlinson, B. (2023). Humanizing the coursebook. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.). *Developing materials for language teaching.* (3rd edn, p. 128-149). London: Bloomsbury.

Further Reading

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Prabhavathy, P. & Mahalakshmi, S. N. (2016). The development of the humanistic approach in the English language. *Pune Research: An International Journal in English*, 2(3), 1-9.

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Hope to see you in Seoul in June 2025.

Brian Tomlinson
President of MATSDA

FOLIO 24/1

An atypical case of materials development: Reflections on a bottom-up process of teacher leadership

Tim Stewart, Sara Schipper, Tanya McCarthy, David Lees and Catherine LeBlanc

Introduction

This paper explores an unusual case of materials development not tasked by the institution, but instead initiated by classroom teachers from the bottom-up. It details the process led by a group of five English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers at a major research university in Japan as they took it upon themselves to develop new academic writing textbooks for a first-year English course. The course takes place over one academic year (two semesters) so the materials needed a significant degree of standardisation to build up target knowledge and skills. All students must successfully complete this course for credit. The administrative culture is quite conservative and since it is a mandatory general education course, the university required that the new textbooks be reviewed and approved by all ten faculties at the university. In addition to this, changes to the curriculum must be vetted by an elaborate hierarchy of five committees. With ultimate approval being uncertain, voluntarily initiating such a laborious task was very risky for the writing team. This article tells the story of the creation of two course books and teacher's guides with a focus on how the team (authors of this article) successfully collaborated to meet numerous challenges. The story offers potential lessons for English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners interested in collaborating on materials development.

Textbooks have been the centrepiece of ELT courses for many years. The spread of English around the world due to expansion of economic networks has created a global market for ELT materials. Commercial publishers have increased their textbook sales as a result. Akbari's 2008 (p. 647) critique, 'What the majority of teachers teach and how they teach are now determined by textbooks', confirmed that many teachers depended on them, and this is still true today. However, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) recognized that textbooks can deliver the dual benefit of helping to initiate change while also offering teachers needed support during times of curricular renewal.

Researchers and teachers in the field have long noted many advantages and disadvantages of using commercial textbooks (e.g., Richards, 2001, pp. 254-256). Some noted advantages include: having an internal syllabus that structures a course; providing a degree of standardisation across courses; and saving time on lesson preparation. There are, of course, disadvantages, which tend to stem from difference in objectives between classroom practitioners and editors situated in distant publishing houses (Tomlinson, 2016) such as: commercial textbooks might not reflect the course curriculum well, nor fit within the operational realities of the educational context; they are commonly targeted at mass audiences so might not adequately address specific student needs, and tend to oversimplify cultural concepts (Canale, 2016; Hilliard, 2014); and textbooks can certainly be expensive (Littlejohn, 2012). In the final analysis, as Richards noted, one's opinion of textbooks depends upon how the books are used and the context in which they are used.

Institutional context

The context for this account of materials development is a required general academic purposes course in English academic writing taught at a Japanese university to approximately 3,000 first-year students across ten faculties. The idea for the innovation emerged when the university's administration initiated a broad renewal of the EFL curriculum in 2015 that resulted in three major modifications. First, unified syllabi were written for two new writing courses, one in the spring semester and one in the fall. Second, the number of students in writing classes was halved from 40 to 20 to allow for more individualised student feedback. Third, textbook selection was limited to a vetted shortlist that each faculty was invited to choose from for their students taking the course. In that process, busy faculty members engaged in a somewhat convoluted version of the 'flick test' (Tomlinson, 1998), wherein selections were largely made based on

scans of textbooks that were quickly flicked through. The result was that three different sets of books were chosen (i.e., six books in total for two semesters) by each faculty for the teachers of the writing course to use; clearly demonstrating the control that the discipline-area faculties hold over English courses. The three selected sets of textbooks, from publishers in the US and UK, focused on academic writing, beginning at the paragraph level and expanding to general essay writing. All three books introduced steps to the writing process and different rhetorical styles with some variation in approaches and labelling. The greatest discrepancy between the books was the amount of information and number of exercises targeting language accuracy, such as vocabulary development or grammar patterns.

For curriculum development purposes, course surveys are distributed to all students and teachers twice a year at the end of each semester. Items on the teacher surveys cover classroom management, learning activities, and course materials. Comments on the surveys and at teacher feedback meetings consistently revealed dissatisfaction amongst teachers with the selected commercial textbooks. A persistent complaint of teachers was that one of the book series did not have enough content to achieve the objectives of the unified course syllabi. In contrast, many teachers said that the other books, designed for intensive English courses in the United States, contained far too much material. Perhaps the most crucial issue stated by course instructors regarding the number of books in use was the burden this added to lesson preparation. Teachers who taught several sections of the writing course to students in different faculties had to use different textbooks to meet the same curricular goals. A significant number of students complained that they had difficulty understanding the wording of directions for exercises in the commercial books. In addition, many survey comments from students expressed frustration when their instructors did not use the purchased textbooks to the extent they had expected. Such consistent student and teacher feedback between 2016 and 2018, in just the first three years of using the textbooks selected by each faculty, encouraged the full-time English instructors to take the lead and voluntarily produce two in-house academic writing textbooks designed to better match curricular goals and student needs (see LeBlanc et al., 2023 for more details).

As can be seen, this initiative follows what Tomlinson (2013) has noted as an important innovation in ELT materials development. That is, when institutions recruit teams of teachers to write materials and

> *replace 'irrelevant' global coursebooks .... The advantages of materials developed by large teams of local teachers are considerable. Such teams are able to localise the materials, to pool resources, to stimulate each other, to deliver materials quickly and to sustain the creative energy needed to develop engaging materials. (pp. 210-211)*

Promoting professional learning

The principal team of five material writers authoring this article, and indeed the larger group of full-time EFL faculty, resemble Tomlinson's description above and can be called a community of practice. Communities of practice are defined as 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). In essence, they are knowledge-based social structures found everywhere that form as families, for work, hobbies, study, general interests, or to solve specific problems.

A similar concept more specifically related to teacher collaboration for professional development is the Professional Learning Community (PLC): 'a group of teachers focused on collaborative learning by sharing experiences and critical reflection' (Binkhorst et al., 2015, p. 213). One type of PLC particularly relevant for materials production is the Teacher Design Team (TDT). Binkhorst et al. (p. 214) define a TDT as 'a type of PLC with a specific focus on (re)designing educational materials' that has significant potential for teacher learning. Their model for the TDT includes desired characteristics of teachers, team characteristics, as well as contextual characteristics. Teacher characteristics include: motivation to participate in innovation; attitude toward the innovation; experience with curriculum and materials design; and teaching experience. As for context, the institution needs to have: clear goals for innovation; involvement of teachers; and enough support for teachers to complete the task. Finally, effective teams need open interaction, shared goals and a leader ('team coach') who structures the process and stimulates group interaction.

In this case, the eventual members of the writing team began collaboration on materials production in 2017 when all 14 of the full-time EFL instructors were tasked by the administration to produce scripts, audio recordings, and exercises for online academic listening practice modules (see LeBlanc, 2023 for further details). That e-learning project was also coordinated by the lead author (Stewart). Over the nearly three years of that material development collaboration, a PLC emerged naturally. Camaraderie strengthened as faculty members took ownership of the listening materials and gained trust in one another, and in the project leader. This sense of trust was vital for the team to voluntarily initiate the in-house development of original writing textbooks.

Directing the innovation

Within the larger group of 14 full-time EFL faculty teaching and managing the writing course, the project began simply as a casual exploration about the feasibility of creating original course materials. Several months of intermittent discussion in 2018 confirmed that all 14 full-time teachers responsible for the course, and a majority of the 40 part-time instructors on the course, were dissatisfied with the status quo (as described above), wherein six different textbooks had been selected by various faculties for teachers to use in the course over two semesters. Emboldened by the successful collaboration that produced online listening course materials, the project leader decided to officially propose to colleagues that the group take on the task of writing original in-house textbooks for the first-year academic writing course.

The textbook development project was a complex effort. First, as a bottom-up innovation, the production of two coursebooks and teacher's guides required the formation of a TDT and broad faculty collaboration. Logistically, it was necessary to coordinate the project by negotiating a shared vision, organising meetings, delegating tasks, setting deadlines, and gaining approval from the wider university community. Indeed, as the three sets of commercial textbooks had been chosen by each of the ten faculties across the university community just three years prior, winning approval for the new books would prove more pertinent as the project progressed. Consistent with the TDT model (Binkhorst et al., 2015), all of these factors necessitated that someone lead the effort and take responsibility for coordinating the work. Research by Binkhorst et al. identified several key tasks of a 'coach' when leading a group of teachers developing pedagogical materials: regulate the team's interactions, align team goals, and provide structure to carry out activities. The remainder of this article describes the process of managing this team-based writing project. *Table 1* (overleaf) presents an overview of the process.

The first formal meeting for this project occurred in early 2019 and involved all 14 full-time EFL faculty. At that meeting, the leader suggested trying to limit the workload by creating a number of small writing teams to draft sections of the books. However, it quickly became apparent that this approach, intended to allow maximum collegial involvement, was not feasible. The group also discussed recruiting instructors from other faculties, however, it was not easy to find willing volunteer participants who were familiar with the requirements of the writing course. The discussion during the first formal meeting convinced the project leader that the authors of the material would need to create a core framework to guide the planning and design of the materials. To mitigate the degree of content drift likely to occur if busy instructors wrote chapters on their own, it was decided that all of the authors would need to write or be involved in the writing/editing of every chapter. The consensus within the larger group of 14 full-time EFL faculty was to base the development of each new chapter in the books on what had been covered in the previous chapters; that is, the materials would be written more or less sequentially (see *Table 1* overleaf).

Confirming the approach and assembling the team

To start aligning goals, the project leader produced a rationale, a production timeline, and a rough outline for a chapter format. He also prepared a first draft of a table of contents, together with a sample chapter, and distributed these documents ahead of the next formal meeting in April 2019. Before the meeting began, he wrote out the objectives for the first few chapters on the large whiteboard wall with some suggested exercises summarised, as well as expected outcomes. The goal was to have an open discussion and encourage colleagues to come to the board to write suggestions; some suggestions were quickly added, while other ideas would be discussed and either rejected or accepted. Naturally, there were varying opinions about the direction of the new textbooks, but the meeting ended with general approval for the approach presented by the project leader. In addition, there was agreement that a small team should be formed to draft materials that could later be commented on by the larger group of EFL-faculty members. Thus, the leader ended the meeting by asking people who were interested in authoring the materials to contact him. Three colleagues eagerly volunteered.

Since all of the teaching staff were experienced instructors, had taught the course for a few years, and had experience writing ELT materials, no person who volunteered was denied. For the first book, the leader worked with three colleagues. The writing team was expanded to five members during the development of the second-semester book to include a colleague who was enthusiastically contributing exercises. As Binkhorst et al. (2015) found, motivation to participate is a primary characteristic necessary for individual TDT members. Also, teams should be small enough to know everyone and large enough to bring in a diversity of knowledge and ideas. Furthermore, they state that in order to be successful, it is important for members of the TDT to acknowledge their interdependence, to enjoy working together, and to possess the ability to inspire each other. These points echo Tomlinson (2013) who believes that local teacher teams of material writers are effective because their insider positioning bestows them with invaluable contextual knowledge. This knowledge enables them to pool course-specific resources and sustain creative energy, as they are writing materials they can use in their classes. Based on our experience,

Process	Details/Procedure	Primary Actors	Feedback Channels
Initiation (2018)	- Proposed project to immediate colleagues and wider community	- Leader	- Faculty colleagues - English Committee (approval)
Select team/Approach (1/2019-4/2019)	- Held meetings to discuss approach and assemble team	- Leader; Faculty colleagues	- Faculty colleagues (approval)
Plan (11/2018-5/2019)	- Wrote course description, chapter template, scope and sequence for book - Wrote definitions of essay parts and processes	-TDT*	- Faculty colleagues (approval)
Design & Production (5/2019-6/2020)	- Invited submissions of writing/exercises (online shared folder) - Shared drafts of books online - Held meetings to review TDT work	- TDT	- Faculty colleagues
Review (7/2020-11/2020)	- Gained approval from English Standing Committee - Distributed draft texts to all 10 faculties - Reviewed comments from all faculties and revised textbooks	- TDT; members of all faculties	- English Committee - University faculties (approval)
Pilot (4/2021-1/2022)	- Tested new books in two faculties - Gathered comments from students and teachers	- TDT; Faculty colleagues teaching select faculties	- Teachers (shared form online; meetings) - Students (real time and online survey)
Revise (2/2022~)	- Revised books (ongoing)	- TDT	- Teachers (online forum, survey and feedback meetings) - Students (real time and online survey)

*Note: TDT includes Leader

Table 1. Textbook development process

a key element that should be added to this list is having team members with a range of skills. TDT members for this project (three female and two male) came from Canada, Jamaica, the USA, the UK and had diverse educational backgrounds, technical skills and research interests. In summary, the writing team has all of the characteristics noted above and continues to work together refining the material five years later, in 2024.

Planning

To ensure effective course alignment, the framework for the new books was necessarily adapted from the unified syllabi for the course. The syllabi include lists of institutional can-do statements for academic writing (see Appendix). These official statements were originally negotiated by faculty members involved in

English teaching institution-wide and subsequently approved by the administrative English Standing Committee that oversees all of the English courses taught at the university. Therefore, the textbooks were designed to address the writing achievement benchmarks listed in the syllabi as can-do statements.

The textbook authors knew the student body well, had been teaching based on the syllabi for three years, and were well aware of the course objectives. The writing team's goal was to create materials that better met the needs of the students and matched the course syllabi more accurately than the selection of commercial textbooks in use at the time. Recalling Akbari's (2008) critique of dependence on textbooks, teachers often 'assume the textbook is the syllabus' (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 311), and when a textbook does not align with the actual course syllabus, the types of problems and complaints which prompted the materials development project described in this article tend to arise.

Crucially, TDT members were united in their desire for reform and were able to sustain their effort as a result. Immediately following the formation of the writing team, the leader created a folder in Google Drive that was shared with all 14 full-time EFL colleagues. He also spent a few weeks drafting a number of foundational documents to guide the team which were saved in the shared folder to encourage comments from the entire group of full-time EFL faculty colleagues. For example, a course description document was produced that listed tasks aligned with course goals and objectives. After several revisions, this document was eventually approved by all 14 full-time EFL teachers in the group. In addition, members of the TDT worked together on numerous drafts of a scope and sequence for the first-semester book that included the following categories: goals, strategies, tasks, models and awareness building. As deliberations proceeded, colleagues suggested that detailed definitions for main essay parts (e.g., paragraph, topic sentence, thesis statement) and key processes (e.g., paraphrase, citation, achieving coherence and unity) were needed. The leader drafted this document based on the lists of can-do statements in the course syllabi (see Appendix). It was subsequently shared online with all 14 members of the larger faculty group for revision.

Design and production

Over two years, between 2019-2020, the small TDT met weekly to plan, write, and revise the new materials. Care was taken throughout the material development process to involve all 14 full-time members of the faculty group in this important project and ensure that all voices were heard. To deepen the collaborative effort, all colleagues were encouraged to submit writing models and exercises to the shared online folder. In addition, regular meetings of the full EFL group were held each semester to update colleagues on the status of the writing project, solicit input, and obtain group approval for the contents. Furthermore, the original drafts of the new textbooks were stored online and all 14 members were given access privileges to read and comment on the material throughout the writing process. In other words, colleagues were able to read and comment on all of the main documents throughout the development process. Such a transparent approach to material development is vital to have colleagues not directly involved in writing the materials feel they are part of the process and have input.

It is also important for material writers to get input from students as soon as possible. In our case, the textbook authors gained valuable insight into material mediation (LaScotte et al., 2022) during actual lessons, while classroom testing individual exercises over the two years of the initial writing process (and beyond). The TDT was particularly concerned with the wording of directions for the exercises since many students indicated difficulty comprehending those written in the commercial textbooks. Because we were simultaneously teaching the academic writing course while authoring the new books, TDT members were able to trial test early drafts of material, refine the wording of directions, and adjust the content of exercises to meet the needs and preferences of the learners.

Based primarily on Hill's (2013) caution to not merely add attractive space-filling illustrations to materials, as well as acknowledging the limits of time and faculty labour, the TDT decided to opt for a simple text design. The text is all in black and white employing large font size, bold, italic, and underline where appropriate. Some shading is used, but there are no photographs. The illustrations included are aids to clarify core concepts. This design is sensitive to recent concerns about diverse students with difficulty focusing their attention and the potentially distracting effects of colourful text layout. Yet, even with this basic design, standardising the layout of chapters proved to be tedious. In addition, having multiple writers meant a great deal of patience was needed to standardise the wording of activities, exercise directions (as detailed above), spelling, and punctuation. A decision was made by the writing team, and later approved by the university, to provide students with a PDF of the textbooks, rather than printed books, that they could download free of charge. The PDFs of the textbooks and teacher's guides have both internal and external hyperlinks for easy navigation. Finally, since the PDFs are open access texts, the TDT decided to protect the materials under a Creative Commons licence (see Stewart, 2022a, 2022b for links to the books).

Reviewing

As the manuscripts were being drafted, colleagues in the larger group of EFL faculty were able to read and comment on the materials directly by accessing the shared online folder. During the initial manuscript drafting, nine versions of the first-semester book and seven versions of the second-semester book were produced by the writing team. The first major review of the manuscripts by members of the wider university community occurred early in 2020, initially by members of the influential English Standing Committee. After receiving crucial provisional approval from the English Standing Committee, PDF as well as print copies of the textbooks were distributed to all ten faculties across the university for further review. Professors representing each faculty were invited to submit written comments and revision suggestions. To clarify the suggestions of discipline-area colleagues from across the university, online meetings were held over the summer of 2020 with representatives of each faculty. This process generated 35 revision suggestions to the manuscript for the first-semester book and 34 for the second-semester book, including comments about format, layout, clarity of wording, citation/referencing styles, punctuation, and the variety of rhetorical modes modelled in the books. The TDT later met to discuss these suggestions and attempted to accommodate all feasible changes. After clearing this extensive review by the university community at large, the leader felt confident that the TDT could begin creating teacher's guides for the two volumes.

The comprehensive review process created feedback loops that incorporated all immediate colleagues, as well as English teachers across the campus, administrators, and interested professors from various disciplines. This type of open process is essential for success because: 'stakeholders in the materials for language teaching must have a channel to provide feedback at significant milestones in the development process so that their feedback can be considered and incorporated into the materials meaningfully and in time' (Wala, 2003, p. 141). In addition, materials developers 'must be aware of classroom realities ... be prepared to put the materials constantly to the test in classroom situations and ... allow flexibility to make revisions' (ibid., p. 142). This point introduces the next step in the material development process: classroom piloting.

Piloting

At the end of 2020, the new unified textbooks were approved for use by the university's English Standing Committee, as well as senior administrative committees. In addition, the English Standing Committee determined that the new books should first be piloted in 2021 in a limited way before introducing the material in all courses from April 2022. To make the piloting of the materials manageable, the first implementation of the new textbooks was done in the two faculties with the fewest number of students. During the trialling process, the teachers (both Japanese L1 and English L1) added comments about chapter exercises into a shared spreadsheet each week. At the midway-point and end of each semester, the TDT met to consider the suggested revisions.

The localised, inclusive process described above contrasts sharply with typical piloting of commercial materials, wherein: 'the original authors of the material are frequently physically distanced from the piloting event' and 'the piloters may not directly need the pilot materials' (Donovan, 1998, pp. 149-150) to teach their lessons. Donovan further explains that the usual process followed by publishers foments a lack of communication and understanding between commercial editors, textbook authors, and teachers who use the textbooks. In our case, there was immediate feedback on the material from teachers and students (from real time use and via online surveys) that quickly resulted in refinements.

Revising

Colleagues outside of the TDT volunteered a great deal of their time proofreading and commenting on the new materials. Time is always a major concern for busy teachers and more so for those who take on the additional responsibility of developing learning materials. Using online file-sharing was crucial for allowing participants to review the materials and make suggestions in a timely fashion. This collaborative work cycle significantly improved the quality of the manuscripts. Finally, our experience proved that rendering the materials in PDF gave us a great deal of flexibility in the revision process; we now refine the material annually.

While commercial textbook authors can be dismissive of the feedback they receive from editorial staff and reviewers located far away (Donovan, 1998), the TDT has a great deal of trust in the feedback from local instructors using the books in context. To learn more about the materials in use (LaScotte et al., 2022), especially from the 40 part-time teachers on the course, a new online forum was created allowing teachers to make comments and suggestions about the unified textbooks (LeBlanc, 2023). While the TDT welcomes all feedback, the original group of authors naturally has a strong feeling of responsibility for the materials and is the final arbiter of revisions. Through end-of-semester questionnaires, teacher feedback meetings, and the online teacher forum, the TDT continues to monitor how the materials are being used because:

> *No matter what form of materials teachers make use of ... the materials represent plans for teaching. They do not represent the process*

> *of teaching itself. As teachers use materials they adapt and transform them to suit the needs of particular groups of learners and their own teaching styles. These processes of transformation are at the heart of teaching and enable good teachers to create effective lessons out of the resources they make use of. It is useful, therefore, to collect information on how teachers use course books. (Richards, 2001, p. 270)*

Lessons learnt

Insight 1: Garnering support

Teachers must be informed about and engaged in reforms because 'they are the ones who put reform ideas into practice. Successful implementation of reforms depends on teachers' ownership of and their knowledge about reform ideas' (Huizinga et al., 2014, p. 33). For educators interested in initiating reform, having the respect of colleagues and administrators is crucial. Not surprisingly, 'bottom-up innovations rarely sustain themselves without the support of the administration' (Stoller, 2009, p. 75). For us, EFL faculty situated in a large research university, it was essential to gain the support of faculty leaders and key administrators for the reform effort we initiated; producing in-house textbooks for an academic writing course. Although the TDT leader took great care to introduce this major endeavour in the appropriate committees well in advance, he was not the only person in a position of authority responsible for the project. He depended heavily on the support of Japanese colleagues to help get approval for the project at a number of administrative levels. Gaining ultimate approval of the materials was a major concern at the outset since those with the authority of final approval for the books lacked expertise in foreign language education. In our large research university the three highest-level committees are all chaired by professors from the sciences and engineering. In short, institutional politics matter when seeking curricular reforms, and in our university power resides with the science and engineering faculties. Garnering the support of administrators and fellow teachers for any reform initiative requires strategic planning, careful groundwork, and patience.

Insight 2: Effective collaboration

Concerning collaborative group writing, it is true that engaging in a TDT with colleagues can be seen as personally risky. We managed to complete the long process of writing two textbooks and teacher's guides without significant internal conflict. Perhaps the team worked well because of familiarity with the curriculum and a shared sense that we could improve the teaching situation, which in turn may have been fostered by the fact that members had earlier completed an extensive e-learning materials development project (described above) led by the same colleague. As a result, strengths of team members were already known to others on the TDT and, fortunately, the group chemistry was very positive. This level of familiarity and confidence takes time to cultivate. Despite our good working relationship, group writing was challenging because of differences in writing styles, vocabulary use, and teaching preferences. There were disagreements along the way, but these were resolved through extensive deliberation and classroom testing of exercises. A great deal of time is needed to draft, trial, proofread, and revise materials. To guide a team of material writers effectively, realistic timelines, clearly negotiated goals, and inclusive processes are necessary. One of our advantages was that we set our own deadlines since the project was not tasked from above as an assignment.

Insight 3: Sustaining motivation

An institution is only as good as its people. Hiring quality people and keeping them on staff is crucial for the success of any programme in academia. Obviously, having motivated teachers is a key determinant for successful learning and teaching, as well as educational reform (see Han & Yin, 2016). This suggests the need to empower teachers through involvement in major reforms (Huizinga et al., 2014). Unfortunately, ELT educators have a marginalised status in many schools and colleges (Breshears, 2019; Porter-Szucs, 2017; TESOL, 2008). This lack of recognition has resulted in the trend of deprofessionalization and adjunctification or gigification in the field (Kouritzin, 2023), which has become pronounced enough that the term 'precarity' is now recognized as a key concept in ELT (see Walsh, 2019). In the Japanese educational context, teachers in the field of ELT are often faced with short-term, fixed-remuneration contracts (Burrows, 2007), and a heavier teaching-load than discipline-area faculty (Leachtenauer, 2015), balanced against a lack of representation at the administrative level due to their peripheral positioning in the institution (Rivers, 2013). In other words, there is certainly a lack of recognition of ELT faculty from administrators and colleagues in the disciplines since research (grant money in particular) is valued much more than pedagogical prowess.

This is the case at our large research university. Indeed, we were partially motivated by the desire to demonstrate to the wider university community our commitment to high quality instruction, despite notable risks in initiating this major bottom-up reform. What sustained our motivation for constant writing and revision over the initial years of this uncertain process, was a belief that we could produce materials more appropriate for our students and more manageable for instructors. Because of the new unified textbooks, lesson preparation is now simpler, thus reducing workload stress for busy teachers. Furthermore, the basic design of the books and variety

of exercises allows teachers ample flexibility to work with the material in ways that fit their individual teaching styles thus increasing teacher agency and motivation. Finally, because the textbooks are used by all undergraduate students in the first year, our group of EFL faculty has managed to garner recognition and appreciation from colleagues and administrators across the campus. In short, by taking a risk to set the agenda and lead our colleagues, we were able to showcase our expert knowledge and assert our position as committed EFL professionals, while regaining control over the teaching approach and course content in our academic writing classes. For TDT members, this initiative involved a great deal of extra work, but more importantly, amassed a significant amount of team learning and professional satisfaction.

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Appendix: Can-do statements included in the course syllabi

First-semester statements

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- **Identify** the locations, functions, and features of: introduction, body and conclusion paragraphs and **apply** this knowledge to write suitable paragraphs in academic essays
- **Recognize** and **apply** basic methods of maintaining unity and coherence
- **Recall** and **apply** basic text format conventions
- **Understand** and **utilise** basic paraphrase techniques and citation conventions for sourced information
- **Understand** and **utilise** the writing process
- **Apply** knowledge of essay structure and process writing to **produce** an academic essay

Second-semester statements

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- **Identify** the locations, functions, and features of: introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs, thesis statements, topic sentences, and support sentences and **apply** this knowledge when writing academic essays
- **Analyse** topics and **develop** suitable controlling ideas and thesis statements for academic essays
- **Recognize** and **apply** methods of maintaining unity and coherence; **check** whether these methods are present
- **Recall** and **implement** appropriate conventions for formatting academic essays
- **Understand**, **utilise**, and **check** suitability of more advanced techniques to integrate sourced information (i.e., paraphrasing, summarising, quoting); recognize citation conventions, generate a viable reference list
- **Recognize** particular styles and conventions within academic writing and **adopt** them appropriately
- **Understand** the writing process and **utilise** it in the production of academic essays
- **Apply** combined knowledge of essay structure, rhetorical style, process writing, and supporting evidence to **produce** an essay of at least 1,000 words.

FOLIO 24/1

A triangulated approach to the evaluation of reading material: Literature review and learner-based evaluation

Alessandra Belletti Figueira Mülling and Peter Watkins

Introduction

In 2014 an opportunity presented itself to write self-access English language learning material for a Brazilian government-backed project. The project was run by the Sul-Rio-Grandense Federal Institute in partnership with the UAB (Open University of Brazil). *English M1*, as it was called, was aimed at adult learners with a low-level of proficiency (A1 and A2). Author 1's role was to review the material but this also included writing and sometimes rewriting material produced by the material writers. The material writers were English teachers in the Federal Institute. When the first set of material was completed and students enrolled to use *English M1* there was a great sense of satisfaction. It was available for free to vocational school learners and members of staff in a self-access mode. Use of the material was optional. However, it was not known how much the students benefited from it and what could be learned from the experience going forward. This research took place at a time when Author 1 was no longer part of the educational institution that designed the material.

This article begins with a description of the reading material in *English M1*. We then review the literature on materials evaluation and self-access materials. The article then describes the rationale for the choices made when creating the approach to the evaluation of *English M1*. It then exemplifies how *English M1* was evaluated. The approach we used combined literature on self-access materials and reading material and interviews with learners in order to fully understand the ways in which the material was engaged with. Focusing on the reading sections of the material, this article presents how a triangulated approach to the evaluation of this material granted a deep understanding of its impact on learners. This article delves into learners' responses when encountering no instructional content or activities pertaining to the texts within the reading sections of this material. This article is a segment of a broader PhD research study in which varied aspects of *English M1* were evaluated using the triangulated approach here proposed.

The material

The reading section in *English M1* is called Catching a Glimpse (CaG). The section title 'Catching a Glimpse' was chosen to expose learners to sophisticated vocabulary and because we believed that after having read it 18 times (the number of units), they would probably acquire the meaning of the phrase. We did not want an obvious name, like 'reading section', because we assumed this type of phrasing would be easily learnt in other contexts, whereas 'catching a glimpse' is less frequently used therefore less likely to be learned. CaG is comprised of an English text written for pedagogical purposes. Language choices were deliberately made with the aim of recycling the grammatical and lexical content of the corresponding unit. It was hoped that by contriving the texts to the target lexical and grammatical content of that unit, learners would find reading easier, as this would support bottom-up processing and, consequently, motivate the reading of the texts in the 18 units. For instance, unit 06 focuses on the present simple, vocabulary about home chores and adverbs of frequency. The unit ends with a text named 'Doing the clean-up'. The text contains 191 words and most sentences recycle the target content, for instance 'So, mopping, doing the dusting, doing the dishes, sweeping and all other home chores are not very difficult to perform' and 'For example, instead of doing the dishes, they use a dishwasher. Or, instead of sweeping, they use a vacuum cleaner. They usually have a mop and the broom is commonly left aside'. Although these sentences aim at a relatively natural language use, they are input-flooded and these choices were deliberate.

All texts (one in each unit) are related to the culture of the United States (such as Thanksgiving). There is no instruction (such as 'read the text') or follow-up activity (such as comprehension questions) in this section. All texts contain an L2-L1 glossary (English-Portuguese). As part of the materials writing team, Author 1 recalls there was an expectation that by not associating the text with any activity, learners would perceive this final

section of the unit as a more pleasant one. Although this choice was made rather intuitively, we now know that previous studies support this approach. Moving away from the intensive reading methods traditionally found in language instruction (Renandya, 2017), such as avoiding follow-up activities or pre-reading tasks which tend to direct the reading effort (Watkins, 2018a), might lead learners to feel freer to read for a more general comprehension (Day & Bamford, 2002).

Literature review: Good practice in materials evaluation

While it seems obvious that materials should be evaluated, the way in which that is done can take many forms, depending on the context and purpose of the evaluation. It has been reasonably argued that, in comparison to pre- or while-use evaluations, post-use evaluations help the evaluator reflect on the outcome of using a piece of material in a particular context and inform them as to whether it failed or succeeded to a greater extent (McDonough et al., 2013). It is also thought that progress in materials design can only be made through systematic and rigorous evaluation of the effects of materials on the end-users (McGrath, 2016; Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2010), hence the reason why consulting learners on their experience is so important.

Learners' feedback is even more needed when it comes to evaluating the effect of self-learning materials, as teachers and online tutors (when they exist) are unlikely to have a clear enough awareness of how learners reacted and felt about the material, particularly where the material is studied asynchronously (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018). Addressing the end-users themselves is very much needed in a scenario where more and more English learning is taking place autonomously, through technology-enabled self-learning materials (Floris et al., 2018; Hockly & Dudeney, 2018; Chun, 2013; Reinders & Lewis, 2006). There is, however, a scarcity of information on learners' reaction when it comes to self-study materials, or when using computer-based courses which facilitate independent use (Yamaguchi et al., 2019; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018; McGrath, 2013; Hubbard, 2013, 2009). Back in 2008, Stubbé and Theunissen noticed that although self-directed learning had become a popular mode of study, no reviews on technology-enhanced learning for adults could be found. In more recent times, Reinders and White (2016) concluded the same: there is an urgent need to address the learners' perspective on the affordances of technology-mediated learning environments, such as how these affordances contribute to their learning needs and goals.

To some extent, Yamaguchi et al. (2019) and Reinders and Lewis (2006) are exceptions to this. In their studies, learners in self-access centres were provided with a list of characteristics to be rated, such as clear instructions and appearance. However, even though most of the learning in self-access centres occurs independently, there is some type of guidance from a tutor. Completely independent learners could conceivably rate these criteria differently. Besides that, the method used in these evaluations failed to provide learners with an open question or room in the questionnaire in which they could refer to things they wanted to. Kelly and Baird (2017) also queried learners about self-access English language learning material. In this study, learners' opinions were gathered through surveys, rating-scale questions, open-ended questions as well as a space for additional comment. The additional comment box, however, came at the end of the survey, perhaps devaluing the only moment in which the learners could write freely in comparison to the initial (and long) time in which they had to respond to what the evaluator had established. Another potential weakness we identified in this study is that learners' written comments were not probed for the enhanced clarity or detail often needed for a more accurate understanding of the experience reported or opinion given.

A few studies (Stillwell et al., 2010; Peacock, 1997) evidenced that learner's opinions often cannot be accurately assessed because when evaluators do not know learners' L1 the quality of the data collected can be negatively affected and even restrict data collection instruments, such as interviews (unless there is a translator, which might hinder participants' willingness to openly talk about their experience).

Methodology

It could be helpful for statistical reasons, or for a quick assessment of value for management purposes (for example a school opting to continue or not using a coursebook) to know that 'x' number of students have attributed, for instance, a positive learning value to a certain feature in the material. Nevertheless, such positive attribution, which reflects the different ways in which the learners conceive the situation (positively or negatively), provides no information on the reason for such an opinion.

On the other hand, well-designed qualitative analysis can promote an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of participants' reports and of what is non-observable (such as implied information, attitudes, behaviours), probing issues that lie beneath the surface. Considering the aim of this study was to understand learners' reactions to reading the texts in CaG, and, in particular its lack of an obvious pedagogic framework or instruction, this study used a qualitative approach.

In-person, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the best instrument for gathering learners' experiences from their perspective. Semi-structured interviews enable multi-sensory data to be captured, verbal and

non-verbal, all important in the process of attributing meaning to respondents' opinions. Contextualization of information, formulaic expressions, discourse markers such as 'well', and prosodic features such as pauses, laughter, emphatic stress and strong pitch movements may provide insights that are only perceived in interviews, especially in-person (Jenkins, 2007). This richness of data allows researchers to explore in-depth the how and why people frame their ideas in the ways they do (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to make sure the topic that needs to be covered will be, whilst still giving space for spontaneity. This is particularly important when evaluating self-access materials because although the researcher might have an idea of the important questions to be asked, he/she does not know the whys and hows for learners' opinions, therefore it is important that respondents are given the liberty to explain them. Semi-structured interviews assured richness of the data obtained and meant that what stood out are learner-relevant criteria. The interviews were conducted in the learners' L1 (Portuguese), which is also Author 1's first language. This increased the chances that learners would be able to express themselves and that their messages would be more accurately interpreted.

Data collection

During the interview, participants were prompted with the reading session CaG on a notebook screen to help them recall their experience, a technique recommended by Lavrakas (2008). In line with the nature of semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2018), questions were defined a priori (for instance, 'did you read the texts?' 'Why?') The answers to these questions generated sub-themes that could be analysed at the data analysis stage. These sub-themes emerged as a result of the freedom participants had to comment on the things they wanted and the follow-up questions that came up during the interviews. This aligns with the aim to address participants in a unique, non-standardized, personalized way (ibid.).

Participants

In total, twenty-four participants were interviewed. All participants were Brazilians and spoke Brazilian Portuguese as their L1. Their ages ranged from about 18 to 40 years old. Most were staff members at the vocational school (such as teachers) where the material was developed, a few were students in vocational courses offered by the institute, and only two were state-school learners at the secondary level. All learners confirmed they had read all eighteen texts in CaG, or most of them.

Participants' previous experience with learning English varied greatly. For example, one participant had never studied English, while another had studied it for seven years at a language school. However, all learners identified themselves at a basic level of English proficiency. For instance, the learner who had studied English for seven years noted that she had forgotten most of it due to a lack of practice.

Overall, participants chose to use the material because they wanted to learn English for general purposes, such as watching movies or traveling. Younger learners also mentioned the potential benefits for future careers and better job opportunities. A few respondents needed to read academic articles in English for their undergraduate programs. The majority also mentioned future visits to English-speaking countries as a reason for learning English. When asked why they opted for self-access material, specifically *English M1*, two reasons were recurrent: it was perceived as less time-demanding than a classroom-based course and it was free of cost. Some staff members also mentioned the possibility of career progression and salary raises as motivators to use the material.

An insider evaluation

This research study is an example of insider research (Cohen et al., 2018). The aspects addressed go back to the period when Author 1 worked in the educational institution that designed the material. As noted above, she was part of the team that designed and authored the material. Her background as a Brazilian learner and teacher of English combined with her insider knowledge as one of the designers of the material could influence the way data were collected, analysed and reported (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Aware of the potential that tacit knowledge throughout the interviews could lead to misinterpretation of data (such as bias), careful attention was given to interpreting data drawing on the richness of the context of the data. Taking into account that the whole point of this research was to value learners' opinions as the ultimate users of the material, participants were openly told that Author 1 was part of the team that designed the material, showing transparency was not feared, on the contrary, we were being transparent just as we wanted them to be transparent too, an essential quality in insider research in order to ensure credibility (Teusner, 2016).

There is another way of perceiving 'an insider' which can be beneficial. Because Author 1 shared a cultural background with participants, she was more likely to understand their learning environment, being able to deal with it in a more holistic way – which is fundamental in qualitative data analysis. Author 1's insider knowledge enabled her to gain interviewees' trust, an advantage that has been discussed in previous literature. Lee (2016) backed this up stating that in some circumstances, sharing a linguistic, social,

cultural and ethnic background (a natural affinity) could lead to greater access and rapport. This became evident in the post-use materials evaluations described in Stillwell et al. (2010) and Peacock (1997). The fact that these evaluators did not speak learners' L1 was one of the hindrances in the data collection because interviews had to be conducted in a language in which learners could not express themselves as well as if they were using their L1.

Data analysis

Interviews were recorded and the qualitative data collected was analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo for efficiency in the organization and display of data selection and analysis. Because of the nature of semi-structured interviews, most of the questions were established before the interview as they were based on the research questions. This means that when the analysis process began there was some level of pre-coding already established. The predefined codes were later modified, adjusted, or new codes created in response to the data collected and the other questions added spontaneously depending on participants' responses (as recommended by Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The weight of evidence lies in the recurrence of themes (opinions, experiences, and approaches reported by participants) as they crop up repeatedly and from multiple respondents (Cohen et al., 2018). Each category name had a description, which determined whether a certain coded piece of data belonged or not. Once initial levels of coding took place, categories began to form and codes that belonged to the same (and possibly more than one) domain were clustered, creating themes. In other words, data was treated not only in search of patterns but in search of correspondence, that is, making speculative inferences. From then on, a new phase of coding took place for establishing more abstract and meaning-based codes. New names were created for category themes that reflected both the descriptive and the interpretative nature of the codes, as shown in *Figure 1*.

Figure 2 shows how the data (participants' extracts in the black rectangle) suggested a pattern that was coded

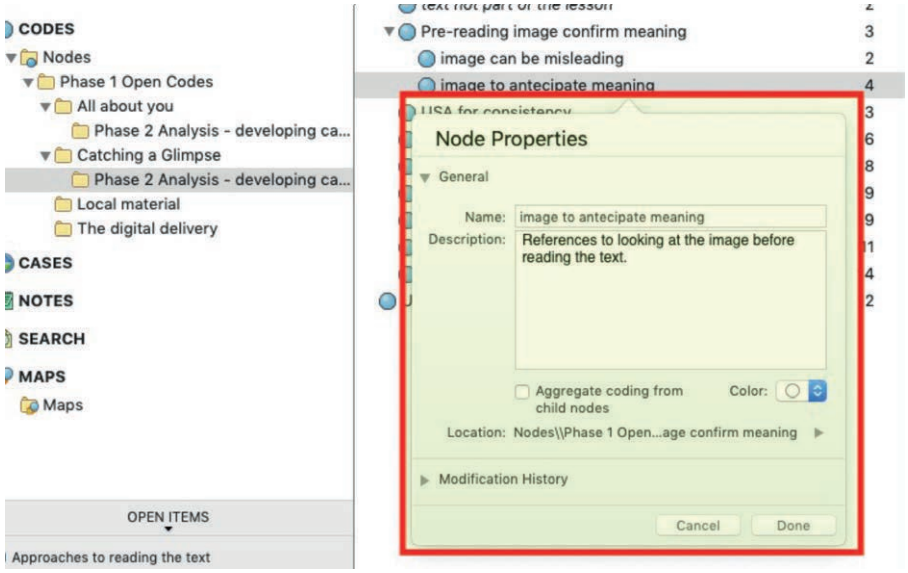

Figure 1: Node name and description in NVivo

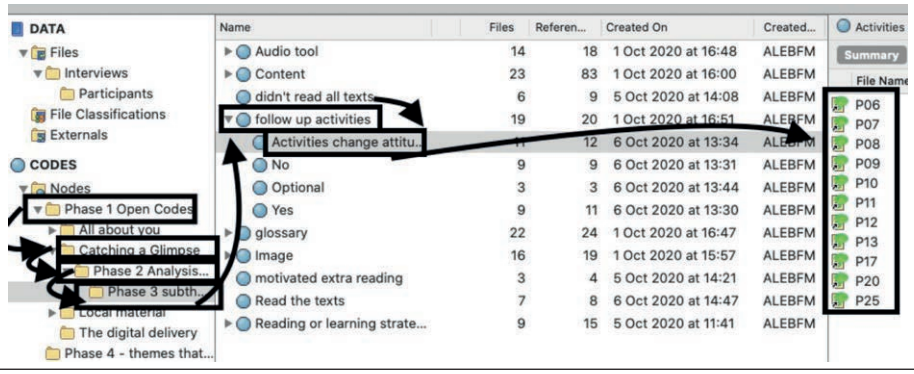

Figure 2: A full-cycle of coding in NVivo. In this example, the final category shows which participants demonstrated that a follow-up activity would change their attitude to how they read the texts in CaG.

under 'Activities changed attitude to reading'. This was related to aspects related to 'Follow-up activities' in the reading section, which, in its turn, was created in the third phase of coding and after the second (also about the reading section) and the first phases of coding.

The triangulated approach to the evaluation of English M1

The triangulated approach used to investigate learners' response to the reading section of the material *English M1* is a combination of two perspectives: literature on materials evaluation and the learners. This was organized in two parts as we have shown. First, the literature-based evaluation raised hypotheses about how the reading section likely impacted learners. At this point, evaluation is 'predictive' in the sense that it judged the materials' performance based on how materials should be designed for better learning experience (Mukundan et al., 2011). As a post-use evaluation (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018; Jolly & Bolitho, 2011), the second stage of the evaluation was based on learners' feedback (which was gathered in the semi-structured interviews), it found out who they are and offered their opinions about their experience with the material. Finally, in a contrastive stage, findings from the two evaluations were compared and discussed.

Considerations about not having a reading instruction in CaG

CaG may provide readers with an opportunity to experience reading in a way that differs from the intensive reading approach traditionally found in language instruction environments and coursebooks (Renandya, 2017; Freeman, 2014) because there is no testing (follow-up activities) or a pre-reading task which tend to direct the reading effort (Watkins, 2018a). This might lead learners to read for a more general comprehension (Day & Bamford, 2002). At the same time, the lack of an obvious purpose for reading the text might arouse doubts about the value and purpose of reading.

Also, the idiomatic (and not easy to understand) nature of the title 'catching a glimpse' might have posed some doubts to the purpose, or utility of that section. On its own, 'catching a glimpse' does not relate to the idea of reading. Even though the material explains the meaning of the expression 'catching a glimpse', it is on the introductory pages, therefore not available at the point of need. International coursebook materials designed for both classroom and home use tend to use much more straightforward wordings like 'reading', such as in *Cutting Edge Starter* (Cunningham et al., 2014) and *Top Notch 1* (Saslow & Ascher, 2015).

Because of their pedagogical nature, the texts in CaG cannot be described as authentic (Watkins, 2014). They privilege target vocabulary and structure. Whilst this might facilitate learners' comprehension, which is particularly needed in self-access environments, it also might prevent them from experiencing a more authentic elaborateness in the way the ideas were conveyed (Crossley et al., 2007); as a consequence, this might render the reading experience as boring.

These ruptures with traditional learning materials might lead to a lack of clarity. The inexactness of what CaG is about may put learners off engaging with it. As a self-learning material, this could be perceived as a drawback since limited awareness and guidance decrease learners' capacity to make informed decisions (Kennedy & Levy, 2009; Stubbé & Theunissen, 2008; Hurd, et al., 2001).

Findings: The learner-based evaluation of CaG

Participants in the study were designated as P1 through P24 for the purpose of quoting them in the presentation of the data. Half of the participants indicated that they would not like CaG to have a follow-up activity because 'just reading' was pleasant, and an activity would make reading mandatory and hinder the relaxed attitude. Eleven (out of twenty-four) participants used the word 'relaxing' to describe reading in CaG. For example, a Portuguese teacher said that it felt like 'a pause after work ... a text to relax, to read as if reading a text in the newspaper'. A Spanish teacher said that she would not like an activity because it would transform the relaxing reading experience into a learning moment, especially if the activity was related to grammar or vocabulary, though not so much if it was comprehension based.

Three learners would only like follow-up activities if these were labelled as optional, for those who 'want to read further into the text' (P12). They claimed that an optional activity would please anyone willing to do it and at the same time not interfere with a 'more casual' reading (P09) because they would not feel guilty about dismissing it if the material itself told them that it was optional.

Four of the participants perceived CaG as a chance to learn about culture and not to learn about language (as in grammar rules, pronunciation or vocabulary). They used the word 'entertaining' to describe it. Likewise, when asked whether he would like a reading-related activity, P10 said that the texts were different from the rest of the unit because they did not demand a learning effort. In his words:

> *Look, I liked it the way it was, because it was there as something extra, something to enrich,*

> *not something mandatory 'oh I have to read this because I have to do this activity' ... no, it was an extra, right? a bonus... for us to get to this point [of the unit]... read... For me it was like that, I finished everything in this unit, now I will relax a little bit reading this text, you know? That's how it was for me... I was already relaxed, I had already done the activities, everything was ready, before moving on I read the text.*

Nine respondents expressed that a text-related activity could benefit language learning. The challenge of correctly answering questions could be motivating (P13, P20), compel reading (P17) and legitimize the effort of reading (P02). P17 said that making the activity mandatory is needed because learners are more likely to dismiss activities perceived as optional. P06 argued that because there were no text-related activities, she 'only read the texts', her 'understanding was not tested'.

Both P02 and P11 expressed what would be, in their views, a good follow-up activity with open questions. The first said that the questions should not have 'too obvious' answers and motivate thinking. The latter said that such an activity should give her assurance that she had understood the text properly, which is the same argument raised by P06. They criticized the kind of activities they are usually exposed to in which the answers are obvious.

P02 expressed that not having to format her reading style to answer a question led her to feel as if 'reading a text in Portuguese'. At first, she sounded very determined about not wanting a follow-up activity in CaG. She then paused and reconsidered: 'but for tests we need them', referring to the traditional assessments that take place in secondary education.

Findings and pedagogical implications

A few insights can be derived from the data presented. First, there is a strong association between conscious study of grammar and vocabulary and language learning as opposed to associating the learning of a language with its use for communication (such as reading for general understanding). Traditionally, second language learners have little opportunity for 'just reading' in the target language. The findings in this study suggest that, to some extent, some learners need to be told what to do with a text as 'just reading' does not seem to be a straightforward reaction in language learning environments. This explains why CaG – a reading section without an instruction or a follow-up activity – challenged learners' view of efficient learning and efficient time spent using this language learning material.

However, the data also showed that learners actually enjoy 'just reading' and most of them do perceive activities as a hindrance to their enjoyment. This does not mean that materials should never offer reading-related tasks. What this suggests is that reading for gist must be legitimized as an important part of learning a second language. This means that learners, especially in self-access materials, need to be told about the benefits of 'just reading' as this will allow them autonomy to opt for a 'freer' reading style or, if a task is present, a more contrived reading activity. While the importance and benefits of extensive reading have been argued for in the past (for instance Renandya, 2017 and Jeon & Day, 2016), it is not commonly found in published language teaching materials.

A second finding has to do with how to design accountability into self-access learning materials. The reality shows that correction is not easily designed in self-learning environments where automatic feedback is often the only possible feedback. The danger in this is that it might push writers into designing poor quality questions, the only criterion being 'is there only one indisputably correct answer?', rather than designing questions that would help readers focus on a key part of the text or motivate thinking. Bearing in mind the low proficiency level of these learners and the self-access nature of this material, reading for gist is put forward as the ideal type of reading when designing reading sections in self-access English learning materials for low-level learners.

Conclusion

When evaluating CaG based on language learning literature, notions about the impact of this reading section on learners cannot possibly go much further than assumptions. Based on this first stage of evaluation, perhaps if redesigning CaG, an instruction of the sort 'Read the article and find out more about the American culture' would be recommended. This would ensure that learners understand what the text is there for and what they should do about it (read). One might even replace the wording of the heading 'Catching a glimpse' with something more straightforward as 'Reading'.

The learner-based evaluation, however, allowed for a much greater insight into the kind of instructions self-access low-level English learners need: learning strategies and rationale for doing things. It became evident that learners had no difficulties understanding CaG as a reading section. Why they should read, however, was less clear. These learners did not know that reading ('just reading') those texts could lead to language learning. A revised version of CaG would include a note saying that because the texts were written to fit learners' level, they should be able to comfortably read them and grasp the overall meaning. Besides that, there could be learning tips that teach learners about the value of reading for general gist

and the vocabulary gains that might result from extensive reading of accessible texts. Learners could be motivated to read the text at least twice for greater vocabulary gains.

This study contributes to the field of materials evaluation in the sense that (1) it provides knowledge which is procedural in nature. It puts forward an approach and exemplifies how a post-use materials evaluation that draws on learners' reported experience can provide evidence for best practice in a way that is responsive to learners' experience. Without considering learners' views, such things might never be uncovered. In terms of materials development, this article promotes the need to design self-access English learning materials for low-level learners with a component of learner training, particularly when it comes to a reading section. The benefits of reading for actual communication are nothing new. For instance, Masuhara (2013) and Watkins (2018b) had already argued for that. Meaning-focused reading is necessary in self-access materials too. However, to state the obvious, whereas in the classroom teachers can mediate the reading experience and provide a rationale, in self-access materials there is a need for explanation and guidance on why 'just reading' is also a legitimate language learning effort.

Who would benefit from this study and how?

Although the substantial findings and contributions to knowledge in this study can inform at many levels the different contexts in which material writers or teachers engage in materials development, the methodological contribution, that is, the post-use evaluation where literature and learners' views are compared, might not be as easily conducted because of the time constraints of those who run evaluations.

Teachers are often busy and may not typically conduct evaluations (McDonough et al., 2013). However, they could use learner-based evaluations for specific aspects of material, such as a single reading task. In the classroom, teachers gain insights into how learners engage with texts, but this awareness is limited for homework activities. Teachers can only infer learners' home reading behaviours from experience or literature. Since home reading is a self-directed activity, teachers cannot be certain how learners engage unless they ask them directly. Gathering feedback from learners about their reading habits would help teachers identify areas where learners need support, improve home-reading activities, and develop targeted learning strategies for reading in the target language when not in the classroom with immediate teacher support.

Recommendation for future research

The majority of the participants in this study had very little experience reading in English or learning English before using *English M1*. Future studies should identify whether learners at more advanced levels (learners who already spent some time learning English as an L2) are more skilled in regards to learning strategies (for instance, learning strategies related to reading in the L2). If this is true, it would be interesting to know whether this makes self-access materials relatively easier for more advanced learners, who might be better at identifying and exploring the affordances of the material, whereas lower-level learners might need a greater level of support with reading strategies and language learning strategies.

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The acquisition of Portuguese as a Foreign Language by Chinese students: Translation as a teaching tool

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Background

In this article, we will describe the implementation of a project which involved Chinese students from three different undergraduate courses in the fields of Portuguese Language, Culture and Translation in the School of Education of the Polytechnic of Leiria (ESECS-IPLeiria), Portugal. Under the supervision of the teachers, the students prepared nine video tutorials in Portuguese, to provide answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) related to the evaluation practices and exams at ESECS-IPLeiria. Empirical experience has shown that Chinese students often find it difficult to understand information written in Portuguese about ESECS-IPLeiria, particularly information associated with assessment procedures. This type of information is written in a language that often transcends the linguistic skills of those learning Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL). The videos were produced with the aid of the radio and television studios of the institution. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, they were also provided with subtitles in Chinese, created by Portuguese students who are learning Chinese.

The interactionist approach and the Communicative approach in the process of foreign language acquisition

The role of interaction in human development has been the subject of multiple studies, most notable is the contribution of Vygotsky's Development Theory, which goes back to the 1930s. Drawing on his own empirical experience, Vygotsky emphasized the influence of social context and interaction on the teaching-learning process. Subsequently, several other authors, such as Ellis, Brown, Richards and Lee et al. explored and deepened these principles in the context of foreign language teaching and learning.

At the same time, considering the growing application of the Communicative approach, communicative competence has gained greater prominence in language teaching and learning. As a result, referring to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) has become essential. For an integrated application of the different competences, the CEFR, within the context of functional competence, stipulates a component designated as 'interactional schemes' which concerns 'the use of spoken discourse and written texts in communication for specific functional purposes' (CEFR, 2001, p. 178). Here, 'forming the working group and establishing relationships between participants', 'identifying what could and should be changed' and 'agreeing on the distribution of roles' (ibid., p. 180) make up the list of actions associated with pragmatic language use.

Recent research also emphasizes the fact that communicative intercultural competence can be decisive for the functioning of contemporary societies (OECD, 2013; UNESCO, 2016), as it creates speakers who are proficient in the target language and participatory citizens who have the capacity for critical reflection and creativity (Byram et al., 2017; Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018).

Project-Based Learning

Within the current Communicative approach, Guslyakova et al. (2021) state that Project-Based Learning (PBL) is the most in-demand methodology in education in the 21st century. Defined as a purpose-driven approach that focuses not just on a product, but on the gradual creation of a dynamic process, PBL puts the learner in a prominent position. Emphasizing its active nature, the student tends to be encouraged to navigate through a wide and relatively accessible variety of resources. The 'multimodal context' in which interaction takes place (Ardeshir & Akbarzadeh Mohammadabadi, 2016, p. 41423) is, on the one hand, one of the greatest advantages of this approach and, on the other, a motivational element for those involved. Today, with the influence of the accelerated technological advances in all spheres of life, combinations of different communication methods are emerging:

> *Parallel to this is a revival of the aural, or the use of the oral as a representational means across distances previously dominated by writing. In the first instance, it was analogue telephone and radio that allowed this possibility, then more the closely interconnected multimodality of the digital era as sound is also made from the same bits and bytes as image and character. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 361)*

The modes of communication that can be combined today include written and verbal, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial representations. Alongside these new combinations, new challenges and needs arise, recognizing and considering the presence and interaction between different modes of communication. The phenomenon of multimodality thus implies mastering communicative, interpersonal, technical, and cultural skills. One of the key words in this phenomenon is what is known as 'mediation' or negotiation, which is carried out by the agents involved in a communicative act and which is one of the key elements of PBL.

In today's job market, skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, people management and creativity are highly valued. Employers are increasingly looking for professionals who can make difficult decisions and demonstrate leadership qualities. But how can these skills be developed in higher education, contributing to a key educational objective of the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (Maley & Peachey, 2017), which recommends preparing students for active and responsible citizenship, in the context of foreign language learning?

To prepare students for their future professional careers, higher education institutions must have educational opportunities that can help them develop these interpersonal skills. For these reasons, PBL enhances the creation of challenging learning environments for the development of skills, with the purpose of responding to an inquiry, a challenge, or a problem (Ellis et al., 2020).

Thus, PBL provides students with the opportunity to engage with relevant and current societal challenges, where they research information, establish hypotheses and seek for answers, ultimately applying their knowledge in a practical solution or final product (Owens et al., 2022). This process promotes a more active role in the learning process, as well as student autonomy, innovative ideas, and communication between peers (Zulfa et al. 2022), while the teacher acts as a facilitator.

In this approach, the 'project' can last a few weeks or a whole semester, which means that it is usually long. During this period, participants devote most of their attention to carrying out their projects, looking for solutions to problems they have been set in the context of their daily lives. This type of teaching thus makes learning and practical application inseparable, by creating an application process that involves exploring the context, developing ideas from knowledge and communication between peers. Another positive aspect associated with this approach is that students can be asked to organize their proposals using graphics, videos, or simple programs, among other multimedia tools.

The aim is thus to promote a more active role for students in the learning process, stimulating their autonomy, the development of innovative ideas and peer communication. To this end, it is necessary to stimulate the imagination, encouraging students to go after solutions, while the teacher essentially acts as a facilitator of the whole process.

The way PBL is implemented is relatively simple and usually involves the following steps: students are presented with a challenge so that they can investigate its possible causes and develop hypotheses. After learning more about the problem, they define strategies to solve it; they establish a plan and carry it out; they demonstrate the results and, finally, they are assessed by the teacher. The fundamental aim is for each student to be able to interact with their own experiences and environment, identifying what is problematic about it and what needs to be improved or resolved, and to suggest one or more ways of preventing or resolving the challenge.

The correlation between PBL and project management in translation

Involving an important translation and subtitling component, the project reported here - in addition to learning Portuguese as a foreign language - aimed to introduce students to project management in translation. The seventh version of the *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK, 2021) guide, published by the international organization Project Management Institute (PMI), describes the four values of the code of ethics and professional conduct: responsibility, respect, fairness, and honesty (ibid., p. 21).

In addition to the skills that are necessary for the successful execution of a project – such as communicative skills, mediation and negotiation skills, decision-making skills, autonomous spirit, among others - interpersonal skills also stand out. The participants in a project take on different positions and responsibilities according to their personalities. The human dimension thus occupies as important a place as the technical dimension.

The project manager - who is the teacher - acts as a facilitator who promotes communication between those involved. This includes the clients (future students), the translators and proofreaders (the students working on translation and subtitling tasks), and the technical resource manager (also the teacher). The skills being

developed and practiced here include understanding the translation workflow and recognising the importance of effective communication, both of which are crucial in addressing the technical challenges involved not only in translation tasks but also in PBL.

Implementation of the PBL project

Introduction and target audience

The project, 'Video tutorials in Portuguese with Chinese subtitles', was implemented in the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, at the School of Education and Social Sciences of the Polytechnic of Leiria (ESECS-IPLeiria), as part of two curricular units: *Portuguese for Specific Purposes II* - which is part of the Portuguese-Chinese Translation and Interpreting and Portuguese Language and Culture course - and *Specialized Multimodal Translation* - part of the Applied Portuguese Language course. Both courses are taken by Chinese students with an intermediate level of Portuguese, while the second course also welcomes Portuguese students from the degree course in Translation.

Under the supervision of the teachers, the students prepared nine video tutorials in Portuguese, to provide answers to FAQs, which were written by the students themselves, related to the evaluation practices and exams at ESECS-IPLeiria. (The FAQs can be seen in the Appendix).

The videos were produced with the aid of the radio and television studios of the institution. Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the videos were also provided with subtitles in Chinese, created not only by the Portuguese students who are learning Chinese, but also by the Chinese students enrolled in the PFL courses mentioned above.

Objectives

The main goal of this initiative was to find answers to the real challenges faced by these students in their academic integration process in Portugal. By combining the project methodology with the process of learning Portuguese as a Foreign Language and multimodal translation (Portuguese/Chinese), the project seeks to create conditions for students to apply and expand their knowledge of these languages in authentic and socially relevant contexts of use. The translation and subtitling process also seeks to combine the use of specific technology with the ability to translate in a context of multimodal communication. These are essential skills for the practice of professional translation which fosters comparative analysis, and the use of PBL can enhance their development.

In particular, the project aims to promote students' academic literacy (both in terms of their receptive and productive skills in Portuguese) about assessment procedures at IPLeiria, accessible through consultation of the academic regulations, and interaction with the Academic Services, face to face or online. In addition, the project aims to train translation skills in this field of discourse.

Methodology

The project was implemented during the semester of 2022/2023, as part of two different curricular units: Portuguese for Specific Purposes (PFE), and *Specialized Multimodal Translation* (SMT).

In PFE, during the first five weeks, nine groups of students created a set of Portuguese language videos, which sought to clarify aspects such as: (i) the assessment methods, elements and scales, (ii) the difference between continuous assessment and periodic assessment, (iii) the importance of regular class attendance, (iv) the purpose and audience of each exam season, (v) the difference between normal exams, appeal exams and improvement exams (vi) and navigating the school's platforms for consulting the exam calendar and registration. In SMT, Portuguese and Chinese students worked on subtitling the videos in Chinese, during the last three weeks of the semester.

The process of preparing the video tutorials took place over several stages, with the support of the teachers, who acted as facilitators. As part of the PFE curricular unit, the students began by familiarizing themselves with the project methodology and its objectives. Next, the students researched and selected information about assessment, both on the internal school's platforms (the scheduling platform AGCP, Moodle and the Student Portal) and in the academic regulations and programs of various courses. Based on the information gathered, students prepared FAQs (see Appendix) and created some experimental video tutorials using their mobile devices. Once they were familiar with this textual genre, several working groups were assigned FAQs about assessment at IPLeiria, which they tried to clarify by creating a video tutorial of three minutes. To do this, they had to create a script, according to a template provided by the lecturer. Once the script had been corrected based on the feedback provided, the students practised reading it aloud and were encouraged to pay particular attention to diction and rhythm, with feedback from the teacher and their peers.

Secondly, image and sound recording were carried out with the assistance of the *School Communication Laboratories* (see *Figure 1*), which guided the students at this stage, particularly in terms of providing corrective feedback and promoting repetition, which proved to be effective learning strategies. The video recording was carried out with the support of the

School *Multimedia Resource Center* and included the recording of a short message to identify the members of each group, their course and the purpose of the video. Group and individual photographs were also taken and used to introduce the FAQs in the video tutorials, and to be included in the technical sheets, as illustrated in *Figure 2*.

Figure 1: Audio recording in the Communication Lab of ESECS

Results

Development of video tutorials

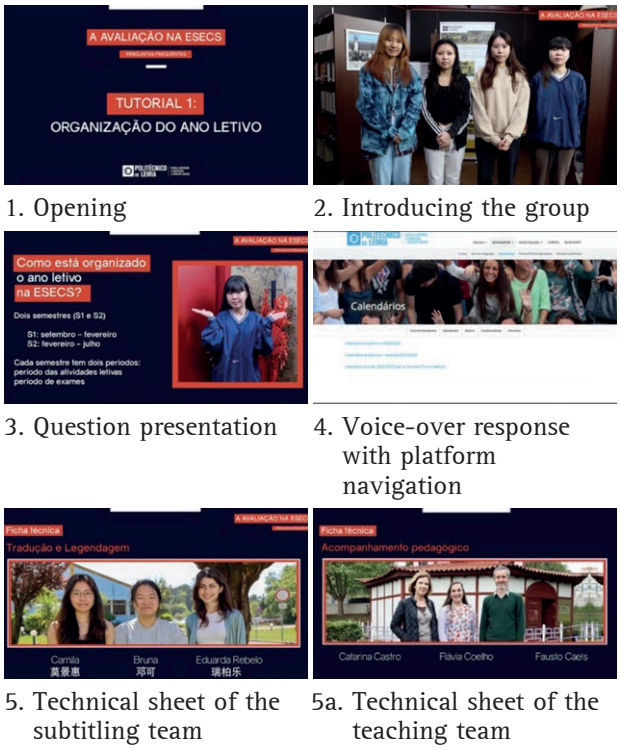
This project was focused on designing a very specific product: a set of video tutorials in which students answer FAQs about assessment practice. The making of the videos is therefore the main result of the work done with and by the students. They show that - with the proper support from the teacher/facilitator - the students can use Portuguese in authentic communicative tasks that are directly relevant to their immersion experience of studying in Portugal.

As part of this project, a total of nine videos were developed, each lasting three minutes. The videos follow the structure illustrated in *Figure 2*: they begin by introducing the students and the question they are going to answer. This is followed by the answer to the question, in voice-over, while the navigation through the institutional platforms that allow access to that information or procedure is exemplified. The videos end with a fact sheet, which includes the names of all the students and the teachers and technical staff who took part in the project, as well as specifying the institutional framework. For the final editing, the team had the support of the school *Multimedia Resource Center*.

The videos are expected to be hosted on the Polytechnic of Leiria's server soon, so that they can be of public use beyond the teaching experience itself. This could clarify the doubts of other (future) international students, particularly those from China, who attend this school.

Subtitling the video tutorials

Once the videos had been created, the voice-over scripts were shared with the *Specialized Multimodal Translation* (SMT) teacher so that they could be translated into Chinese by the (Portuguese and Chinese)



1. Opening
2. Introducing the group
3. Question presentation
4. Voice-over response with platform navigation
5. Technical sheet of the subtitling team
5a. Technical sheet of the teaching team

Figure 2: Main frames of the video tutorials

students enrolled in this curricular unit. During this process, recurring terminology across the nine video tutorials was identified, and a decision was made on how to translate it into Chinese. Finally, subtitles were introduced using the software Ooona, the license for which was specially acquired as part of the project. Ooona is a professional cloud-based subtitle editor frequently used in the media industry to efficiently create, translate, and manage subtitles.

This process allowed the students to work not only on interlingual translation skills, but also on other tasks inherent to multimodal translation and subtitling. Of note were the subtitle synchronization tasks and the analysis of the final translation product and its suitability for the requirements of the subtitling process, particularly in terms of how the subtitles align with the images, the voice-over narration and the modes of communication that co-occur in the video tutorials.

In addition to the technical and linguistic skills associated with subtitles and the use of the Ooona software, the students were also challenged to familiarize themselves with some general guidelines on the subtitling process. To this end, they used the simplified Chinese subtitle style guide from the Netflix streaming platform (full reference below) as their main reference.

During this process of learning about style issues in subtitling, the students were also confronted with different characteristics and behaviours between different languages and/or variants and regions.

Although in both languages used in the project,

Portuguese and Chinese, it is common to divide subtitles into a maximum of two lines, the length of each line is based on different criteria. Following the guidelines of the Netflix guides, in the case of the Portuguese language used in the EMEA2 region (Europe, Middle East and Africa region), the limit of characters per line is 42. In the case of Chinese, it is only 16 characters. There are also substantial differences in relation to the use of punctuation: in the case of Portuguese, there are no significant differences in relation to the use of punctuation in any other type of text and/or scenario, while in Chinese there is a direct indication that 'no commas or periods are used, just a single space' (*Netflix Simplified Chinese* [PRC] Timed Text Style Guide, 2023).

The importance of knowing the rules for subtitling in Chinese, compared to what happens in the same field in Portugal, gave the students an opportunity for self-study that enabled them to play an active and decisive role in this phase of the project.

By consulting the guiding documents provided by the teacher, the students proposed what they believed to be the fundamental pillars of their process of acquiring, learning, and understanding Portuguese as a foreign language: linguistic, cultural and communicative skills. Technical skills, domain skills, interpersonal skills, autonomy, and the power to make decisions played a major role in this stage. The freedom 'to be' and recognize oneself as a member of a project and a team, which is fundamental to the professional and personal success of anyone involved in collaborative work, was essential in carrying out this task.

The power of the contrastive analysis that resulted from translating the script and adapting it for subtitles is also noteworthy. By working on an activity that requires a pragmatic and authentic use of the Chinese language in its written form, the students became aware of the intersemiotic dimension of this process, the transposition of oral into written signs and what this entails.

The active use of what is, for most of these students, their mother tongue along with working between their first language and a second language and collaborating with Portuguese students allowed them to develop a sense of intercultural awareness, but also to compare differences in sentence structure and organization, grammatical structures, lexicon and terminology, oral vs. written mode, formal vs. informal register and other functional aspects of the two languages.

According to the theory that: 'It is possible to predict all errors in the L2 from the identification of the differences between the learners' L1 and the target language' (Madeira, 2017, p. 311), it can be concluded that direct contact with their native language allowed students to engage with non-linear translations and the contextual variables of intercultural communication within an academic setting.

This confrontation with an ambiguous and dynamic reality prepares students to deal with the unpredictable and with the ability to accept that there are no concrete, transcendent answers to every plan of action. This is something that, from empirical experience, proves difficult for Chinese students to internalize, as culturally, due to the pervasive influence of Confucian ideas, 'teachers are viewed as knowledge holders. If teachers do not display their knowledge in lectures, or if they play games with students or ask students to role-play in class, then they are not doing their job!' (Yu, 2001, pp. 196-197).

Impact on students' learning

To assess the students' perception of their participation in the project, an online questionnaire was made available, in which 26 students took part. The results show that the students were generally satisfied (73.1%) or very satisfied (23.1%) with the work carried out and expressed a preference for Project-Based Learning (73.1%) over other methodologies.

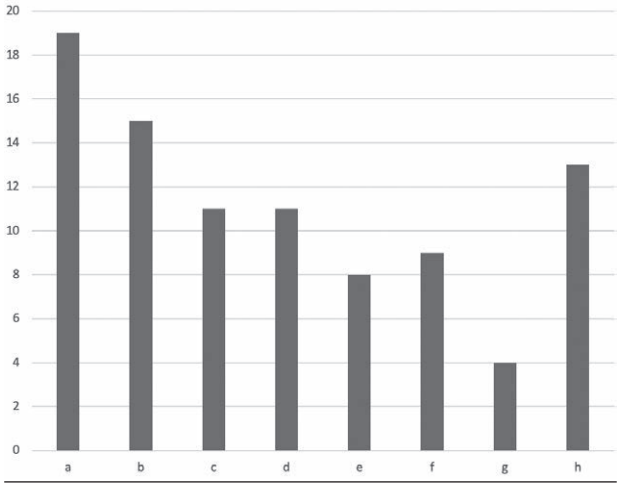
When asked what they most enjoyed doing, most students pointed to the collaboration with the school's Communication Labs. They also found working with the Multimedia Resource Center, used for recording videos and taking group photographs, to be significant. Additionally, they appreciated the oral presentation training, both the guided sessions in the classroom and their independent practice.

Regarding the impact on learning Portuguese (see *Graph 1*), the students reported an improvement in their comprehension of written texts, the acquisition of new words related to assessment practices and increased confidence when expressing themselves in Portuguese. It should also be noted that grammar knowledge, traditionally highly valued by Chinese students, comes second-to-last in the responses (see parameter g in *Graph 1*), which is in line with the philosophy of project work, according to which achieving communicative goals in a foreign language is possible even if the grammatical structures are not fully consolidated.

Regarding the impact of Project Based Learning (in which giving students more responsibility is an essential aspect) on their study and work methodology (*Graph 2*), students highlighted, above all, making decisions with colleagues (19 responses). Also noteworthy is navigating the school's online platforms (15 responses), which is not always obvious to students of Portuguese as a Foreign Language and requires explicit teaching and training. A final point to note is the use of Portuguese outside the classroom (13 responses), since the project has created situations that have allowed curricular knowledge to be applied to new societal contexts. (The data for both *Graph 1* and *Graph 2* consist of responses from 26 students, each rating three facets, making a maximum total of 78 responses per graph.)

What facets of Portuguese do you feel you have improved with this project (max. 3)?

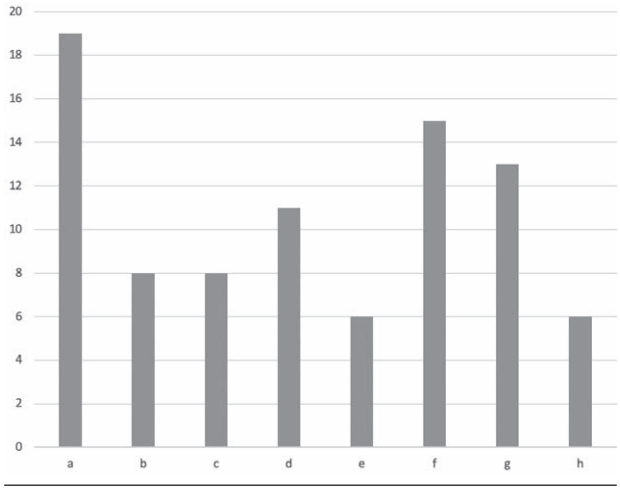
a) Understanding texts written in Portuguese (ESECS website, agcp, moodle, student portal)
b) Learning new words in Portuguese about assessment
c) Contacting and talking to new people (at the radio station, with the film crew)
d) Understanding oral instructions in Portuguese (from the teacher, radio and video technicians)
e) Pronouncing words better when I speak in Portuguese
f) Speaking louder in Portuguese so that people understand me better
g) Applying grammatical knowledge in real life
h) Speaking Portuguese more confidently (at school, in life in general)



Graph 1: Impact of the project on learning Portuguese

What facets of your way of working/studying do you feel you have improved with this project (max. 3)?

a) Making decisions with colleagues
b) Helping my colleagues
c) Respecting my colleagues' opinions
d) Contributing ideas
e) Solving problems and unforeseen situations
f) Navigating ESECS platforms (website, agcp, moodle, student portal)
g) Using Portuguese outside the classroom
h) Feeling more confident overall



Graph 2: Impact of the project on study and work habits

Final considerations

The results obtained show that this project, which aimed to place the learning of Portuguese as a foreign language in a broader social context, had a very positive impact on the various stakeholders and significantly strengthened cooperation between students, teachers, researchers and school staff. The satisfaction questionnaires carried out show that this type of learning has added value in terms of the pragmatic aspect of knowledge, both in the linguistic sphere and in the performance of other tasks.

For the teachers involved, it was particularly stimulating to see the students overcome a real communicative challenge which, in this case, involved understanding and explaining the assessment practices in use at the school, and which will culminate in the videos produced being made available online, anticipating FAQs from other future Chinese students.

There are, however, some limitations to mention; the short duration of the project, given the complexity of the content, the language, and the objectives involved, both in terms of learning goals and expected products. For this reason, it was necessary for the teachers to intervene more actively - particularly in the phase of writing the scripts and standardizing the subtitles. A longer period would probably have encouraged the students to build more autonomous paths.

As far as recommendations are concerned, we would highlight the importance of articulation between curricular units in order to promote the transversality of language learning, which should be oriented towards real communicative and social challenges; the importance of involving students in the production of resources that can be useful to the academic community and, finally, the positive impact of including digital resources in learning, as they are the students' areas of choice. The use of technology in a classroom context promotes student participation in activities proposed by teachers in their role as facilitators, giving them a sense of belonging and bringing them closer to the dynamics of different classroom tactics, such as gamification and others (Haleem et al., 2022). Some of the most relevant advantages of applying digital technologies in education include the development of self-learning abilities through data collection and analysis, responsiveness to the needs of the current job market, personalised responses, and knowledge expansion. Students thus act as active agents in their own learning process. The central role they assume gives them increased responsibility compared to more traditional teaching methodologies, which position the teacher as the main (sometimes even the sole) active agent in this journey.

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Appendix

FAQs written by the students

1. How is the academic year organised at ESECS?
2. The semester has two terms. How long does each term last?
3. How can I find out the exact dates of the semesters and terms?
4. What do I do now? How do I find the academic calendar?
5. How and when are we evaluated at ESECS?
6. We've received our grades. What now?
7. Is the evaluation the same for all course units?
8. I missed the first class. How can I find out about the evaluation methods?
9. Where can I find information about the evaluation of each course unit?
10. Where can I find the course syllabus?
11. Where can I see an example?
12. What do I do now? How do I find the syllabus?
13. What is the difference between continuous evaluation and periodic evaluation?
14. How does continuous evaluation work?
15. How does periodic evaluation work?
16. What type of evaluation will we have?
17. Is continuous evaluation the same in all subjects?
18. Do all students take exams?
19. How do I find out my final grade after classes end?
20. I want to travel after school at the end of the academic year. Can I do that?
21. I have to take an exam. When and where are the exams?
22. The calendar shows two exam periods. Is that correct?
23. I have to take a regular exam. Should I enrol?
24. We've taken the regular exam. What now?
25. I want to improve my grade. Is that possible?
26. How do I enrol for a grade improvement exam?
27. What happens if my grade in the exam is lower than the previous one?

FOLIO 24/1

SNAPSHOT OF MATERIALS IN USE IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS: UZBEKISTAN

Insights and innovations from AIM

Diana McCray, Aziza Yunusova & Kamola Muradkasimova

The Academic English Interactive Mentor (AIM) website is a comprehensive online resource developed as part of the project titled 'Empowering Language Teachers and Learners in Uzbekistan' with the aid of co-production methodology. Co-production is a collaborative approach that involves the active participation of stakeholders, i.e., teachers and learners, in the design, development, and implementation process. We used this methodology to ensure that our final product (the AIM website) is more relevant, effective, and tailored to the needs of its users (see Mazgutova et al., 2022). The AIM website has been successfully trialled and is still being widely used by teachers in Uzbek universities across the country.

The project, supported by the British ESRC and Lancaster University, was aimed to enhance the academic English reading and writing proficiency of university teachers and students in Uzbekistan. The website includes a number of self-contained pages users can access for classroom learning and out of class self-study purposes. The 'Home' and 'About' pages of AIM (see *Screenshots 1* and *2* in the Appendix) serve to introduce the main goals for designing this academic resource. AIM also contains some relevant 'Information for Students' and 'Information for Teachers' focused on possible ways to browse through the website and use its tasks and materials, providing instructors with effective teaching strategies and students with tools for independent learning.

Needs analysis

The needs analysis was pivotal in the development of AIM, providing essential data that shaped its content. By aligning this interactive tool with the specific needs of Uzbek learners, AIM ensures a relevant and effective learning experience, ultimately enhancing the academic English proficiency of its users.

The needs analysis conducted for AIM followed a structured approach to gather data from English for Academic Purposes (EAP) educators across Uzbekistan. The survey comprised a detailed questionnaire designed to identify the linguistic and educational challenges faced by teachers and students in Uzbek universities. The questions focused on various aspects of academic writing in English, including argumentation and critical thinking, citation and referencing, the use of academic language and others. The respondents were selected from diverse universities across the country to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the national educational landscape. Besides multiple-choice and Likert-scale items, the survey included open-ended questions, allowing teachers to provide in-depth feedback and highlight specific issues not covered by the structured questions. This approach ensured a robust data collection, capturing both the breadth and depth of the educational needs in the region.

Academic essays

AIM offers a collection of academic essays across various genres including persuasion, problem-solving, and professional writing, accompanied by detailed feedback on ideas development, structure, academic style, language accuracy and appropriacy. By addressing specific linguistic and educational needs identified through a comprehensive survey of EAP teachers, AIM ensures its resources are tailored to meet real-world academic challenges.

Every essay on the website is presented in two formats, i.e., the *Plain Text Essay* and the *Annotated Essay* (see *Screenshots 3* and *4* in the Appendix). The former contains the unmodified version of an assignment written by a student, which teachers could either 1) adopt as an online resource, inviting students to read the text on their tablets or laptops or 2) prepare a paper-based version of the essay and ask students to read it thoroughly and brainstorm possible strengths and weaknesses that they might have observed when reading the essay critically. All essays are supplemented with a list of 'Strengths and Weaknesses' (on the left-hand side of the essay) on various aspects of academic writing and 'Activities' (on the right-hand side of the essay) that could be either completed in class or as part of self-study.

The Annotated Essay version (see *Screenshots 5* and *6* in the Appendix) includes colour-coded comments focused on several aspects including ideas development, academic style, macrostructure, source use, lexical appropriacy, grammatical accuracy, spelling accuracy and punctuation accuracy. Teachers in Uzbek universities have used the annotated essays to facilitate a range of interactive activities in their academic writing classes.

One of these activities is the 'Annotation Matching Game', in which the teacher provides students with the plain text essay on one handout and annotations on several aspects of the essay on the other. Students are expected to match the annotations to the relevant essay sections and encouraged to provide the rationale behind each annotation.

Another activity suggested by teachers is 'Writing Workshops', in which the teacher divides the annotated essay into sections and has students in groups rewrite sections of the essay applying the feedback from the annotations. Analysing errors and identifying their sources seems to be an effective method for eliminating these errors in student essays.

The 'Annotations Creation Exercise' has also been increasingly popular in Uzbek classrooms. Students are expected to annotate the essay prior to comparing their own annotations with the ones provided on the website. This exercise helps students identify key aspects of academic writing as well as common problems.

Working with annotated texts and focusing on different aspects of writing could be particularly helpful during peer review sessions, in which students exchange their essays with classmates and use annotations as guidelines to provide feedback to each other.

Common problems

Another component of the AIM website particularly valued and widely used by the teachers in Uzbek universities is *Common Problems*. This section highlights frequent issues encountered in students' writing, offering precise and clear examples as well as practical solutions. A section on *Common Problems* has been integrated into the website (see *Screenshot 7* in the Appendix) to enhance learning and teaching as well as provide insightful guidance on avoiding common errors. This website component has been used in academic writing classes to address and mitigate learners' writing challenges.

Teachers have been using *Common Problems* as a helpful feedback resource incorporating suggestions from AIM into their written response to students' essays. Illustrations from the website have been adopted to highlight specific errors made by Uzbek learners of academic English. If a student misuses citation and referencing, for example, they could be directed to a relevant subsection of *Common Problems* on the AIM website.

Interactive Quizzes have been designed by Uzbek teachers based on the *Common Problems* presented on the website. For instance, after teaching a class with a focus on run-on sentences, a quiz could be used for reinforcement purposes, inviting students to restructure syntactically confusing sentences. Quizzes of varying difficulty levels can be developed by teachers to cater to different student abilities and needs.

Students might also be invited to use ideas from *Common Problems* to review their own written work prior to final submission. This encouragement of self-review has been considered particularly useful for self-editing purposes and has helped students to foster their independent learning.

Links

The *Links* component of the website (see *Screenshot 8* in the Appendix) contains a series of valuable online resources designed by material writers and researchers in the area of academic writing to support teachers and students. This section includes a brief and clear description of the content and focus of each academic website supplemented by the actual link to the resource. To illustrate, teachers in Uzbek universities have found the links to Using English for Academic Purposes for Students in Higher Education (UEfAP) (*https://www.uefap.org/*) and the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) (*https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/*) particularly interesting and relevant for their students.

The materials cited in the *Links* section of AIM could be used productively during peer review sessions. Students could apply these materials as guides to review and provide feedback on each other's essays, enhancing their own and their peers' academic writing skills.

Teachers in Uzbekistan have also been using *Links* successfully for writing workshop sessions. Learners in small groups are assigned to focus on one specific challenging aspect of academic writing, such as building an argument, establishing coherence or constructing a thesis statement. Each group is asked to browse through the *Links* page of AIM, identify useful academic resources and create a presentation synthesising ideas from several websites. This is another opportunity for teachers to create a supportive environment in the writing classroom.

On the whole, AIM remains a valuable resource for students and teachers, offering a range of information and tasks to enhance academic writing skills. By integrating these materials into their learning and teaching routines, the users of the website can significantly improve their writing skills and academic performance. As reflected

by one of the teachers in Uzbekistan:

> *I addressed the website and faced so many useful materials for my classes. The variety of activities, authentic materials and theoretical basis for methodology in the website are very informative and helpful for my course. Students found the activities effective, creative and interesting and visited the subscribed website as a source for teaching and learning foreign languages. The website became great support and source for me to enrich materials, plan effective lesson and conduct productive teaching with eager students in motivated atmosphere.*

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Appendix

Screenshot 1: AIM Home page

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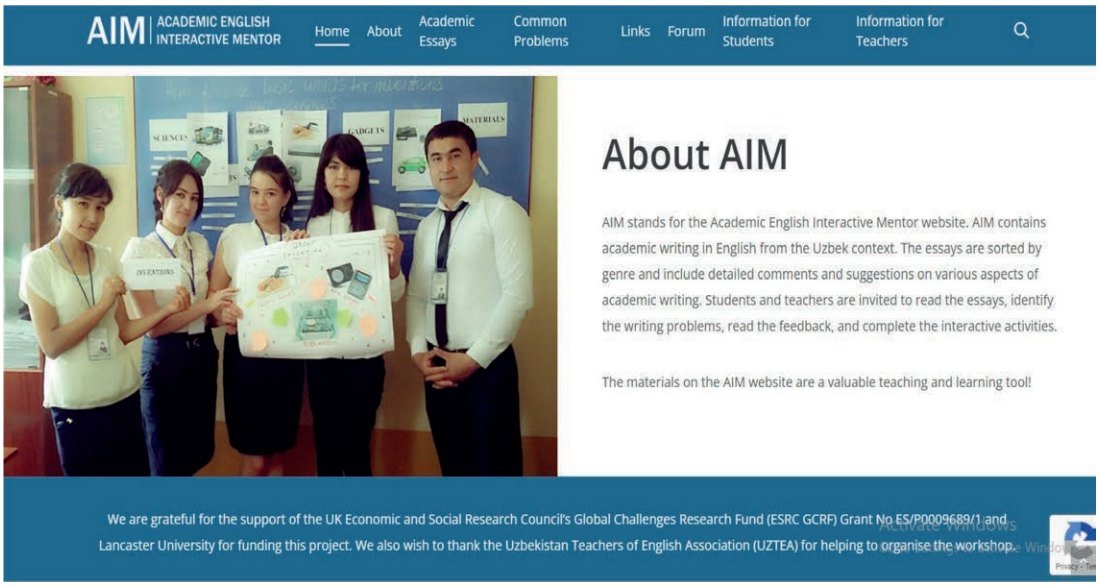
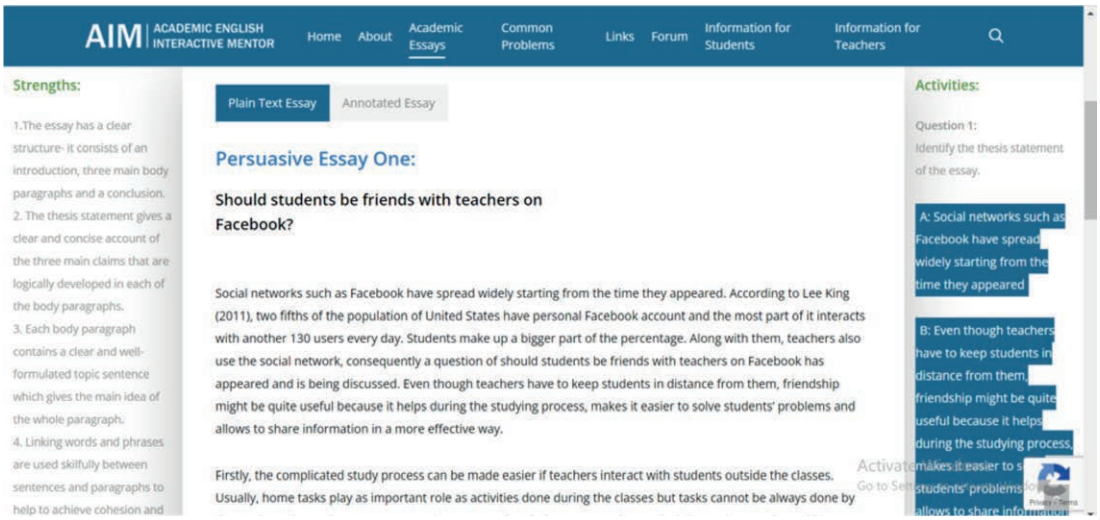
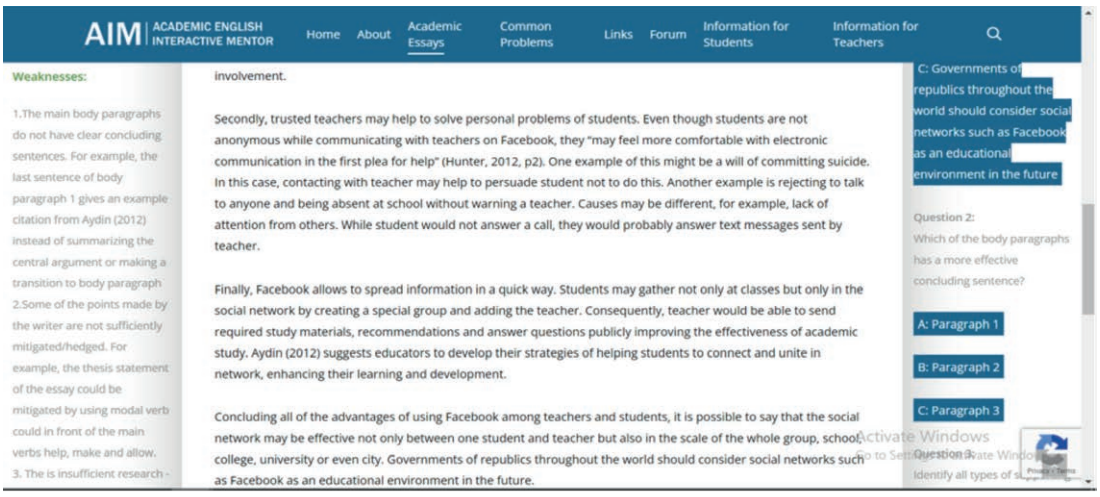


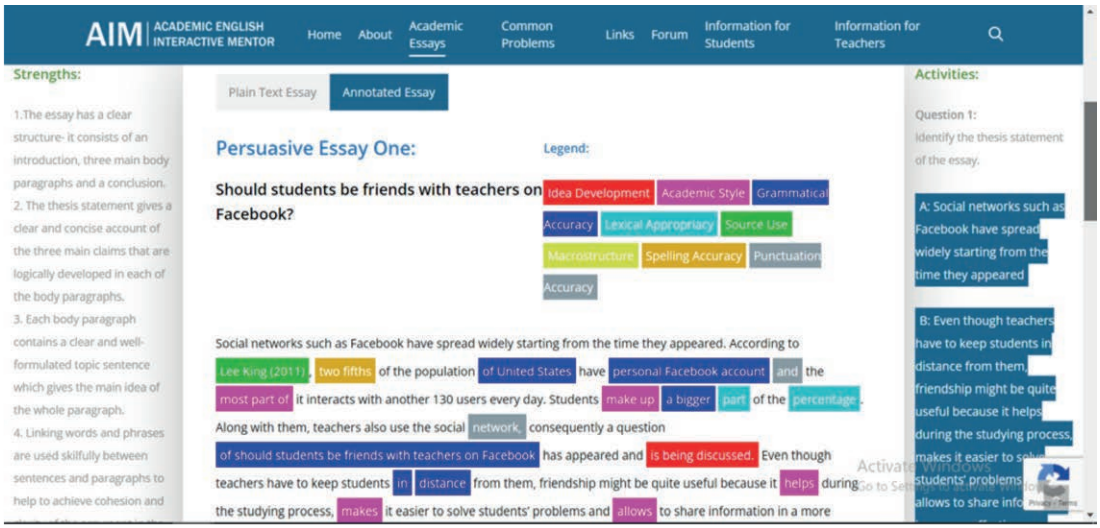
Screenshot 2: AIM About page



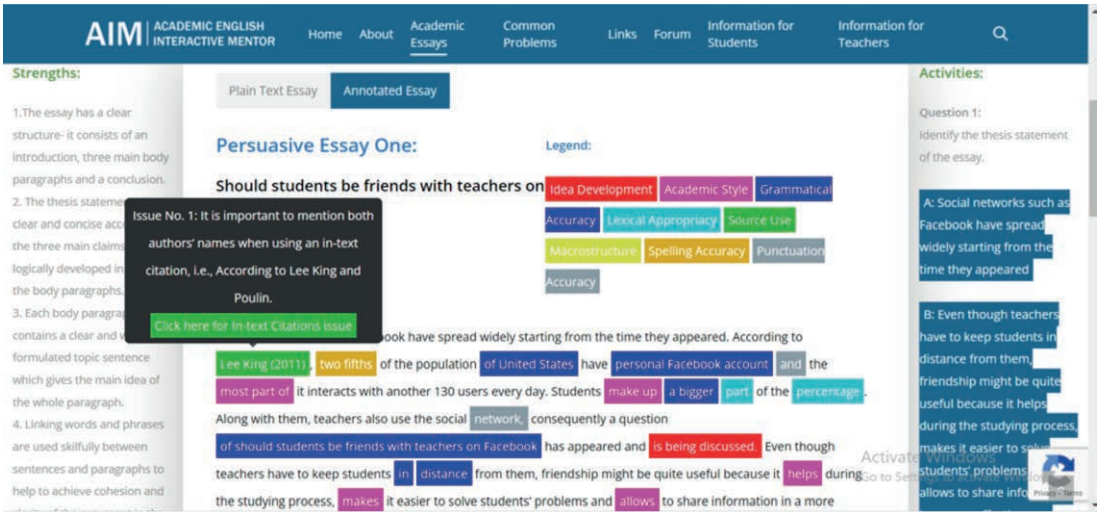
Screenshot 3: AIM Academic Essays page (Plain Text Essay)



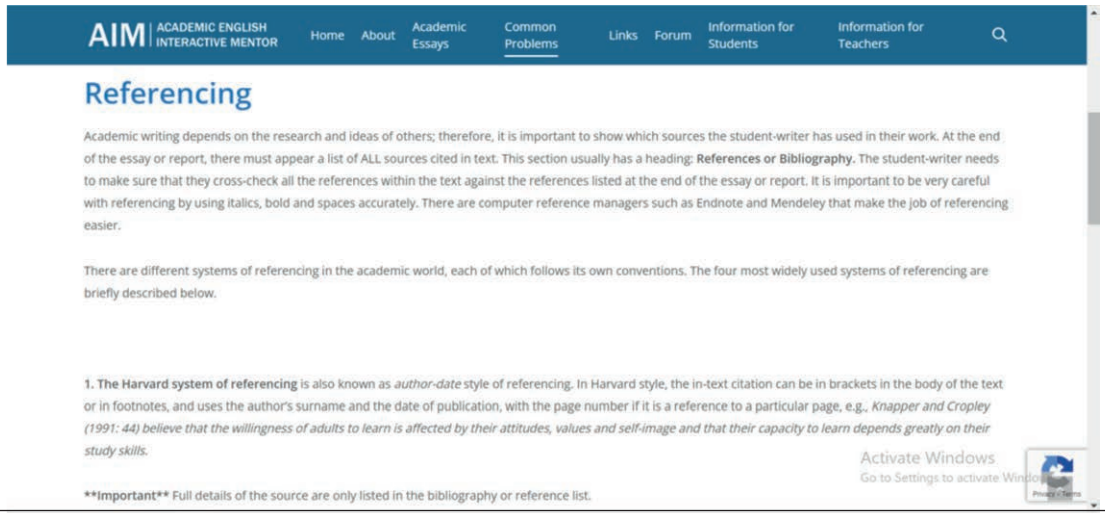
Screenshot 4: AIM Academic Essays page (Plain Text Essay)



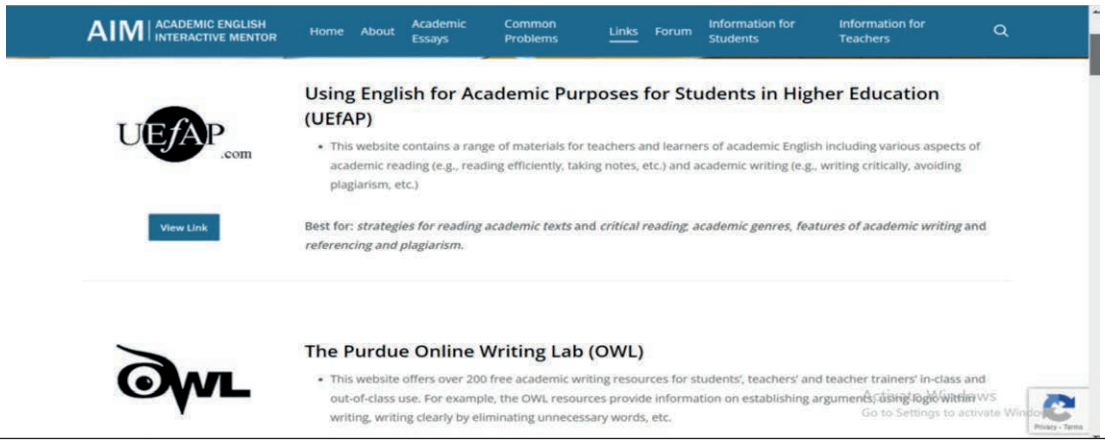
Screenshot 5: AIM Academic Essays page (Annotated Essay)



Screenshot 6: AIM Academic Essays page (Annotated Essay)



Screenshot 7: AIM Common Problems page



Screenshot 8: AIM Links page

FOLIO 24/1

MATERIALS SPOT

Exploring a multimodal materials framework for teaching

Jonathan Paul White

Introduction

In the current and evolving multimedia landscape, learning materials which reflect the many ways students process information have become increasingly important. In many teaching contexts, educators are expected to utilise and combine various media to achieve learning objectives, yet few studies have attempted to develop a teaching framework to meet this challenge. This study proposes a novel framework for multimodal teaching practice, with example materials and an evaluation of its effectiveness.

Multimodality

The concept of multimodality recognises the way information is now created and disseminated: through the synthesis of visual, audio and textual modes afforded by developments in technology. In discourse analysis, Kress (2011, p.36) conceptualized texts as 'multimodal semiotic entities'; they are considered as a whole but constituted from diverse 'threads', such as image, speech, gesture, writing or music. A multimodal text is an 'ensemble', consisting of different modes which rest on the 'agentive semiotic work' of the texts' creator (Kress, 2011, p.36). Similarly, research into e-learning identifies the 'multimedia principle' (Clark & Mayer, 2024) as an enabler of active learning through the creation of pictorial, textual and verbal representations. Multimodal approaches are particularly important for inclusive pedagogy and neurodivergent students (Ellis, 2024), as the use of various formats ensures engagement with concepts through a preferred learning channel.

In academic English language teaching, multimodality has been studied in relation to the varied learning modes used by teachers and students. While these studies examined students' perceptions of multimodal material creation (Plastina, 2013) and use (Kustini et al. 2018), others have proposed that the development of theoretical frameworks for multimodal teaching and practice is imperative (O'Halloran, Tan & Smith, 2016).

Framework

The framework below (*Figure 1*) is a lesson planning procedure, synthesising multimodal materials and teaching practice. It can be implemented within one session of teaching, depending on the time available. Ideally, a class duration of between 90-120 minutes would be suitable to complete the three given stages; otherwise, the final 'create' phase could be flipped for asynchronous study or included in a subsequent lesson. Conceptually, the framework distinguishes the modes (top), activities (bottom) and cognitive processes (middle) involved, with chevrons indicating order of events as a lesson progresses. The combination of modes is focused on achievement of one, or more, defined learning outcome.

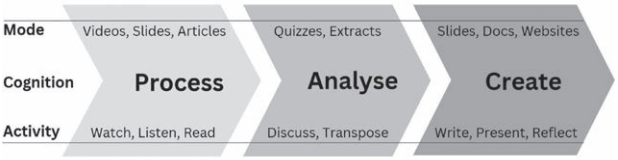


Figure 1: Multimodal teaching framework (author)

The particular modes and activities suggested for each cognitive process have been found to be most suitable. However, the modalities and activities could occupy different positions according to a lesson objective or topic. In contrast, it is recommended that the cognitive processes in the central section (process, analyse, create) should remain in the order presented, as they scaffold learning and reflect progression in level of cognitive challenge. This follows Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956: Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) and William's 'Critical Thinking Stairway' (2014) which present thinking skills in ascending order of complexity.

Similarity to the Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) classroom procedure could be drawn, yet there are a number of key differences. Firstly, the learner is considered as agentive in this framework, as the activities and processes are carried out, experienced

and can be revisited by the students. This change of emphasis is important, as multimodal materials enable continued and repeated study outside the classroom. Another difference is the focus on 'analysis', rather than 'practice' in the second stage of a class. This is similar to an alternative model of teaching practice developed by Anderson (2017), called Context, Analysis, Practice. The analysis stage requires students to engage with the topic through noticing, identifying, classifying, comparing or evaluating. They are not practising the target skill at this stage, rather developing their understanding through focused tasks. Conceptualising the third stage as 'create' rather than 'produce', recognises the high level of cognitive challenge, potential for agency and original thought.

Teaching context and methods

The example materials presented below were created for undergraduate and postgraduate students attending English for specific purposes courses (social sciences) at a modern Italian university. To attend the seminars, students must have a minimum level of CEFR B2 (Upper Intermediate) in English. Key course aims are to develop students' academic speaking and writing skills, as many have limited experience in studying and producing spoken academic and written genres in English, such as seminars, presentations and essays. The learning objective is for students to study and demonstrate the critical thinking skill of synthesis in an academic presentation. Practically, this means combining sources on slides with appropriate citation in relation to a sub-topic, and commenting on the relationship, scope, significance or limitations.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials a questionnaire was administered. In a previous study of multimodal materials in an English for specific purposes teaching context (Plastina, 2013), students created multimodal assignments, completed a survey on their motivation and engagement, and reflected on the process in written explanations. Written reflections on a multimodal teaching programme were also gathered and analysed by Kustini et al. (2018), in combination with interviews. In the initial cycle of this project, a questionnaire was used, combining rating scale and open questions. In total, 42 students completed the questionnaire from four classes. Students' qualitative responses from the questionnaire were examined using Content Analysis, coding the open-ended question responses to identify frequencies in the data. This study was approved by the university language centre's academic and administrative directors.

Example materials

Process: Video

Videos can serve as an effective starting point for multimodal teaching and are accessible for students to review on a learning platform. The examples below are stills from short videos created to introduce the concept of critical thinking (*Figure 2*) and synthesis (*Figure 3*). The first image (*Figure 2*) is an adaptation of the 'Critical Thinking Stairway' (Williams, 2014), which depicts the cognitive processes required for higher education study, in ascending order of challenge.

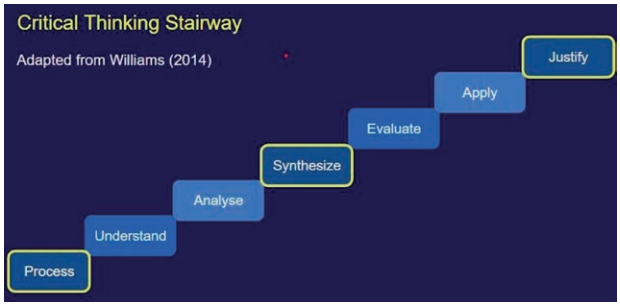


Figure 2: Still from video introducing the Critical Thinking Stairway

The second image (*Figure 3*) shows an example of synthesis from a student's academic presentation, reproduced here with their permission.

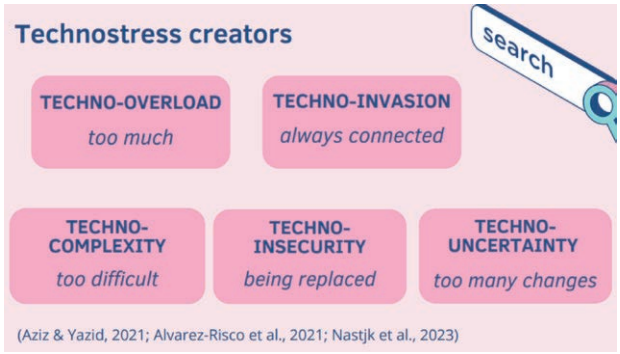


Figure 3: Student slide demonstrates synthesis included in video

Creating original video materials can be very time-consuming. To make this process more efficient, scripting the spoken commentary and using a platform such as Zoom to make the recording can save time. In these materials, basic tools in the video editing software Camtasia were used to fade between sections and improve the audio track, with Google Slides providing the background text and images. It is important to consider that there are freely available videos online which focus on critical thinking skills and synthesis in particular. Although they are unlikely to be as closely related to a given teaching context as bespoke materials, they can be integrated into lessons to achieve the same purpose.

Analyse: Quiz

As shown in the multimodal framework (*Figure 1*), a quiz is suggested in the middle 'Analysis' stage of a lesson. During this phase students can be given definitions, questions or examples to discuss in pairs or groups, applying their understanding from the previous stage. A quiz activity can be both interactive and inclusive, as it enables participation in a collaborative, engaging and anonymous way. Online interactive presentation software, such as Mentimeter (2023) and Wooclap (2024), enable instructors to create and share quizzes with students for use in classroom, lecture and asynchronous settings. Both companies set out their commitment to accessibility as a core value and provide details on how the sites implement accessibility principles.

I have found these interactive presentation websites to be very effective in encouraging participation, especially for those students who are less likely to volunteer a response verbally. As illustrated in the adapted illustration below (*Figure 4*), student responses can be displayed and discussed, providing opportunities for the teacher to check understanding and recognise all students' contributions in an efficient and face-saving manner. In this example, Wooclap was used to gather students' explanations of how the student slide (*Figure 3*) from the video shows synthesis.

They collected definitions based on different points and added their own summaries.

They used a schematic 'chain' slide to put together points they had explained.

Combining information and making them simpler.

Figure 4: Example students' responses in Wooclap quiz

Create: Google Slides

In this phase students demonstrate the concept or skill they have studied through the creation of original material. The example below (*Figure 5*) is a student's slide, based on their presentation topic and reproduced here with their permission.

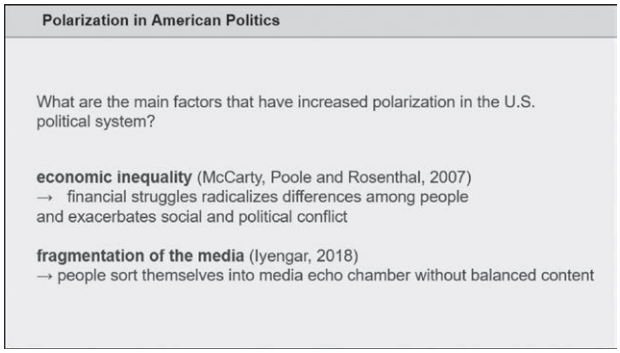


Figure 5: Student slide from the 'create' lesson phase demonstrating synthesis

As pair or group discussion is encouraged for the analysis phase of the lesson, it is more useful for students to complete this final phrase individually, to clearly demonstrate their own learning. Depending on the time available, as a follow-up stage students can be asked to present their slide to the class.

In this context, a slide would be the most suitable mode for this phase. As can be seen in the modalities section of the framework, other materials such as Google Docs or Google Sites might also be suitable vehicles for the creation of student texts. In fact, as websites constitute a flexible and multimodal means of communication, they are increasingly being used in higher education as an alternative format for student project-based work and assessment (Reyna & Meier, 2020; Reyna 2021; White, 2022).

Evaluation

Regarding student perceptions of the effectiveness of multimodal framework classes, 90% (38/42) of those surveyed rated multimodal lessons as either effective (20/42) or very effective (18/42). *Figure 6* below provides a numerical representation of the students' positive evaluations, categorised by themes, given in response to an open question about potential benefits or drawbacks of multimodal teaching.

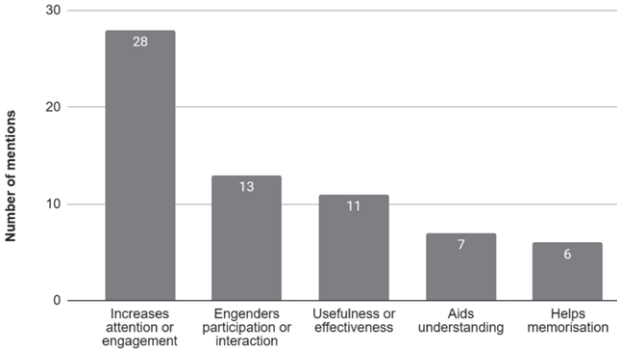


Figure 6: Student positive evaluations of multimodal materials

Perception that multimodal materials increase attention or engagement is clearly the most common, followed by encouraging participation or interaction. The following student comment encapsulates these themes, as well as the suitability of multimodal materials for inclusive pedagogy:

> *Nowadays, students need more stimuli and multimodal lessons are a good way to improve our attention on the topic. Especially for neurodivergent students like me, these methods are very helpful.*

These findings support those of other studies on the use of multimodal materials, as positive impact on student engagement was found to be a frequent and significant perception. Plastina (2013) noted that multimodal assignments had a positive effect on student motivation, awareness and engagement. Qualitative data regarding students' perceptions of a multimodal teaching programme (Kustini et al. 2018) also pointed to motivation, along with enjoyment and crucially, engagement. As the comment above also shows, multimodal lessons are considered helpful by a neurodivergent student. This aligns with current guidance on inclusive teaching practice (Ellis, 2024), which recommends that presenting information in various formats aids neurodivergent students' comprehension.

Turning to possible limitations and challenges of multimodal learning, there were fewer comments about potential drawbacks overall, when compared to perceived benefits. Time factors and technical know-how for lecturers were most commonly mentioned, as can be seen in the bar chart (*Figure 7*) below.

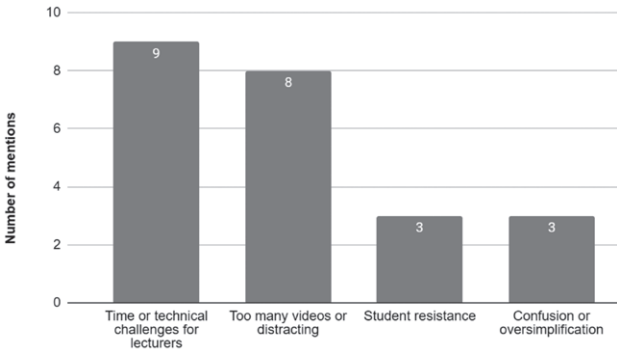


Figure 7: Student identification of limitations in multimodal materials teaching

Time was mentioned as a limiting element: for example the additional time required for instructors to create multimodal materials for classes. The technical challenges of learning how to use and combine multimodal materials was also noted by a number of students, as can be seen in these comments:

> *The main disadvantage can be time wasting for professors to organise them.*

> *Technical problems are the main disadvantages also because sometimes professors aren't prepared enough to use digital and multimodal instruments.*

It is noteworthy that these were student comments, showing both their empathy and insight into the potential drawbacks of multimodal teaching for instructors. Finally, a commonly cited limitation relates more directly to students, highlighting the distracting effect of multimodal materials, as in this example:

> *Sometimes if they're used too much they can be distracting for the students.*

Conclusion

This article has presented a multimodal materials teaching framework, which provides a reflection of contemporary pedagogical practice and multimedia materials in use. It offers a student-centred approach to materials creation and teaching, promoting the synthesis of video, audio, visual, and textual modes to achieve defined learning objectives. Students were very positive about the experience of studying through multimodal teaching materials, characterising them as an engaging way to learn; a finding which is supported by other studies into the use of multimodal materials in English for specific purposes teaching contexts. Despite the challenges of implementing a multimodal approach, adopting this framework clearly enhances student engagement, especially for neurodivergent learners who benefit from varied learning modes. Hopefully this paper will inspire others to incorporate diverse modes, including video, in their teaching practice, and provide an inclusive framework to consider when planning, creating and teaching with multimodal materials.

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FOLIO 24/1

MATERIALS SPOT

Ease in Portuguese: Digital materials for beginner level Portuguese

Gianna Merki

Introduction and teaching context

The course 'Ease in Portuguese' consists of a comprehensive and innovative approach to Portuguese for beginners. The material samples presented here are part of an extensive online A1 level course designed to be engaging, interactive, and visually based. They are samples of the first and second lessons of the first unit of the course. The general aim is to develop students' communicative abilities in Portuguese with online classes conducted as naturally as possible via platforms such as Skype or Zoom. The samples show some aspects of the structure and content of the course, namely the way the first words are introduced by focusing on listening and repeating them while looking at illustrative images associated with these.

Theoretical basis

The teaching and learning process behind these materials is grounded in a combined process of conscious and subconscious learning/acquisition prioritizing, however and when possible, elements of inductive learning over deductive learning, that is, focusing on using the grammatical structures in a functional way before teaching the rule explicitly, which seems to bring a greater benefit to the student in the learning process (Haight et al., 2007).

In addition, students are also encouraged to develop their spoken production early on, following the Output Hypothesis according to which output plays a crucial role in understanding the target language (Swain, 1995).

How the course is taught

A characteristic feature of the course and of its respective units is that they are not linked to a textbook, rather, they are inspired by diverse ideas and sources, leading to the creation of teachers' own materials that can be tailored and personalized to each student or group. Materials are designed and taught via PowerPoint and the latter is sent to the students after each class.

Portuguese is the language used to learn and teach, promoting the full immersion of the learner early on. L1 languages of the students such as English, French or Spanish are used to the very minimum fostering a more natural approach to language retention. For this to work successfully, the teaching process is supported by extensive visual support, showing images associated with all new words introduced, thus promoting an immediate connection between the image and the word and the understanding of its meaning without the need to translate it (see Screenshot 1).

Screenshot 1

The images and words are listened to, repeated and read providing a basis for further language development.

Another way to introduce new words is for the students to listen to a word and repeat it while looking at the corresponding image with no written text. As in the image below (Screenshot 2), six words are listened to and repeated, corresponding to each of the six images.

Screenshot 2

After this, the images are shared with the corresponding words, listened to and repeated, allowing the student to read them (see Screenshot 3).

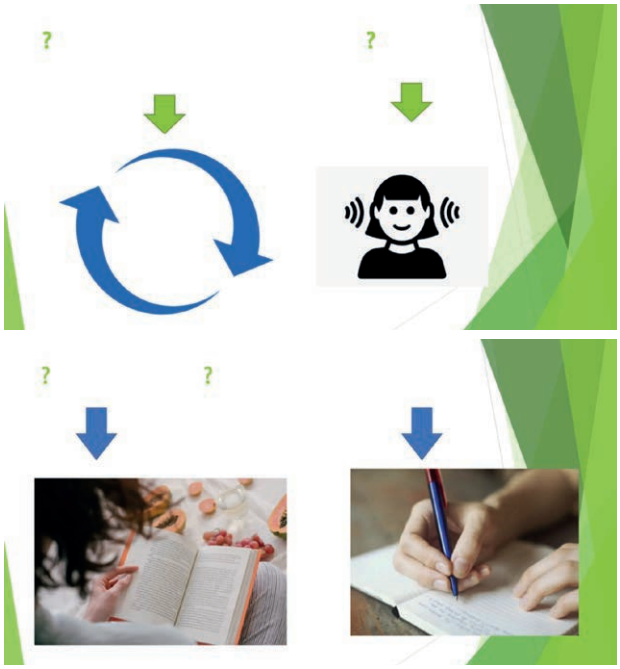
Screenshot 3

Numbers and other simple words are also taught in the same manner, listening first and then repeating them (see Screenshot 4), only reading them afterwards (see Screenshot 5).

Screenshot 4

Screenshot 5

Another essential aspect of the course is the practice and self-access materials provided to students in which the images are displayed without the corresponding words, allowing them to work on the material on their own, strengthening the knowledge gained during class (see Screenshot 6).



Screenshot 6

Also, the use of gestures and short understandable sentences by the teacher (namely with words that can be intercomprehensible between languages the student already knows) can provide context and promote a grasp of the implicit meaning.

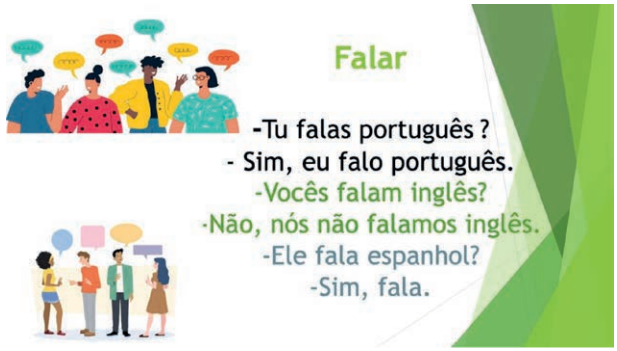
As mentioned, this sample content corresponds to parts of lessons 1 and 2 of a beginners' A1 level course and encompasses basic vocabulary such as simple greetings and phrases, numbers, and with regard to grammar: the personal pronouns, articles and the verbs *to be* and *to speak*. The vocabulary is organized and sequenced to apply to everyday situations promoting easy and effective communication early on.

Grammar is also, when possible, presented together

with images, as in the example below (Screenshot 7), personal pronouns.

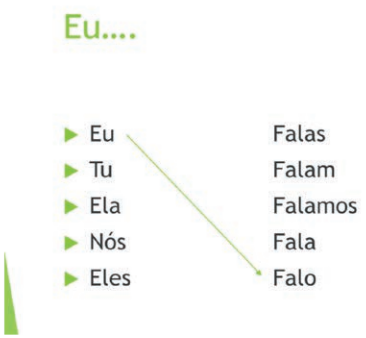
Screenshot 7

The introduction of the verb *to speak* is also firstly done by using some images and short sentences aimed at achieving meaning rather than focusing on the form itself (see Screenshot 8).



Screenshot 8

Subsequently, a sample of a discovery exercise following the previous slide allows the learner to try to identify how the verb *to speak (falar)* might be conjugated (see Screenshot 9).



Screenshot 9

Conclusion

The course has been designed for beginners with knowledge of romance languages who intend to develop their communicative ability as quickly as possible, therefore it is essentially focused on spoken production and output, interaction and listening in real-life situations.

The digital materials can be personalized and tailored to specific needs as they are designed and shared using PowerPoint. They mostly target groups of two students at a time but they can also be adapted to different contexts or groups.

The samples of this course are entirely designed to meet students' needs and offer the possibility of learning the Portuguese language online in an engaging manner while focusing on practical daily needs. The extensive visual support, as well as the interactive teaching method through the L2, provides confidence in the process and in the ability to communicate from the outset.

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BOOK REVIEW

Developing Intercultural Language Materials

Freda Mishan and Tamas Kiss
Series editors Research and Resources in Language Teaching:
Anne Burns and Jill Hadfield
Routledge 2024, 270 pp.
ISBN 9781032651354 (hardback), ISBN 9781032651378 (paperback),
ISBN 9781032651385 (ebook), DOI: 10.4324/9781032651385

Reviewed by Erzsébet Ágnes Békés

In their Foreword to the volume *Developing Intercultural Language Materials*, Mishan and Kiss emphasise that 'personal experience and cultural backgrounds will have shaped our thinking' (p. xi). This is clearly also true for the writer of this review, whose birth country is Hungary with decades spent in the United Kingdom (having arrived as a political refugee) and having gained language teaching experience in such diverse places as Ethiopia and the Amazonian jungle. In all these contexts, I have always been drawn to practice and practical solutions as opposed to theoretical concepts and frameworks. However, I came to realize that certain theories in language teaching can inform and guide our practice. This is why I have been so keenly interested in the series (edited by Anne Burns and Jill Hadfield) titled *Research and Resources in Language Teaching*, and have written a review on another volume (Békés, 2023) related to how Action Research can be sustained and supported by institutional commitment.

In their Preface, the editors explain that all books appearing in the series apply the same organisational principle, namely, they take us on a four-part journey from theory to practice, from research outcomes to their application and implementation in the classroom, closing the cycle by practical suggestions for future research.

So, let us look at all four parts of the volume and see in more detail how these organisational principles are achieved. Just out of interest, I counted the pages of each part and was pleased to find that the classroom-related activities (in Part II) take up a sizeable proportion (almost 100 pages of the total of about 250) so I felt that I was ready to face the theory!

The Introduction to Part I introduces the key concept of *intercultural competence* defined as 'understanding and accepting different cultural norms' (p. 2) and goes on to how cultural content is represented in language teaching coursebooks. The authors remark that, in this regard, there is plenty of room for improvement, because textbook writers often do not make a genuine attempt at achieving a multicultural approach and tend to reflect a 'Western' perspective.

Intercultural competence is further elaborated in Section 1, which describes the key contemporary influences, such as globalisation and the digital environment, before conceptualising 'culture' itself. The concept is both complex and fluid and 'can be best conceived as an ever-evolving *process*, a reflection of the living, shifting interplay of peoples, environments, geopolitics and global relations' (p. 15). However, in our increasingly heterogeneous world, there is a need for interculturalism and working models of integration leading to 'mutual intercultural understanding' (p. 19). The authors claim that intercultural competence and *interculturality* can be achieved by 'acquiring a critical awareness of our own and (an)other culture/s and achieving a positioning between them' (p. 25).

What stood out for me in Part I is the emphasis given to the fact that beyond the cognitive domain, the affective domain is also of huge importance in

intercultural learning, because it is only through including that part of our humanity that we can become open and willing to change, namely, accept, value and empathise with cultures other than our own.

Section 2 of Part I provides the basic techniques that can be used to evaluate language teaching materials. These include materials analysis/evaluation, content analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and semiotic analysis. The latter three frameworks are explained and illustrated in brief before the authors propose their own perspective regarding intercultural learning: the lens of complex dynamic systems (CDS). The authors contend that culture itself can be perceived as a complex dynamic system and so can intercultural learning because it is, among other characteristics, non-linear and emergent. So, let's put all this theory into practice!

Part II titled *From implications to application* appealed to me right from the start. First, there is a useful table (pp. 67-69) that summarizes intercultural learning objectives and matches them up with the 50 activities. Many of these serve the purposes of multiple objectives, such as 'making connections between cultures', 'fostering a comparative perspective', 'exploiting cultural universals', 'developing respect for cultural differences', and 'building bridges between cultures'. The activities are divided into four groups: Set A consists of those that help practitioners evaluate the intercultural content of teaching materials, while Set B contains activities to be used with learners in the intercultural classroom. Set C offers practitioners practice in how they can design intercultural materials and Set D provides help with adapting materials to different cultural contexts.

I was most interested in the activities whose objective is to foster (critical) cultural awareness (Set B). Activity 8 made me smile, because I recalled how before I took on an assignment in Ethiopia with *Voluntary Service Overseas*, I was keen on learning as much as I could about customs and cultural practices in that African country, including non-verbal means of communication, such as handshakes among men and kissing when Ethiopian women meet each other. I was dying to find out who extends their hands first and how many times women (or men) kiss?[1]

Activity 10 is another favourite of mine, because 'time' was an eternal issue of contention in Ethiopia, which still uses the Julian calendar, whereby it's a different hour, day, month and year from what I am accustomed to.[2] I agree with the authors that the use of visuals to decode culture (Activity 11) can be powerful because 'we interpret visual images according to the schemas that we have created through cultural, learning and personal experiences' (p. 86). There are some guiding questions related to this activity, sensitising learners to power relationships, segregation by race, gender or age, and visual elements that can lead to insights and reflection.

As we progress to more complex intercultural activities, I was drawn to the I DIVE activity (No. 19), which encourages us to differentiate between what we see (description) and what we think it might mean (interpretation). Raising awareness about our subjectivity when we analyse and interpret culture is key in intercultural learning and, once again, it reminded me of what became a motto during my extended volunteer assignment (as an English teacher) in Ethiopia: 'Ask before you question'.

I could cite many other activities, for example, the ones that exploit the power of literature (poems or well-chosen reading extracts), but the space for a book review only allows me to highlight another wonderful group of activities that, demanding as they might be in the setting-up phase, can be hugely engaging. These are the ones that lead to learner-generated materials, for example, the creation of memes and comic strips. Activity Set C and D are most helpful when it comes to how practitioners can design intercultural materials applying a useful framework (p. 131) or adapt materials to fit cultural contexts by employing various actions such as modifying, supplementing, or repurposing materials (p. 150) and using a template for profiling learners (pp. 150-151).

Part III goes on to consider what status the teaching of intercultural competence skills has in curricula worldwide. The authors provide a brief overview and also describe the findings of the international survey that they carried out to explore what practitioners do on the ground to incorporate intercultural learning for the development of intercultural skills. They conclude that 'internationally, there are varying levels of commitment and attitude to teachers integrating the teaching and learning of intercultural competence into their syllabi' (p. 161). Before presenting case studies as *vignettes from the field*, Mishan and Kiss present a useable set of fourteen principles that can guide how intercultural skills can be integrated into the curriculum. From among those I'd like to pinpoint the ones that have guided my own practice over the years in this regard. I have taught learners in widely diverse contexts: North-African immigrants in Crete and Afghan refugees in a camp north of Athens, multiethnic student teachers and language teachers in Ethiopia, and members of an indigenous tribe in Ecuador (see Vignette 4.1 on p. 225). I have always believed that culture needs to be

1. As for kissing, it turned out to be three times. It shows the ingrained and blind-spot nature of culture that my Ethiopian VSO trainer was unable to tell me the most important element of the ritual: which cheek do we plant a kiss on first. The Lonely Planet pocket guide book on Ethiopia helped me out. You start on the right side.

2. As a result, in Ethiopia I was always seven years younger.

introduced alongside language content (Principle 3) and was mindful of establishing where my learners were, namely, gauging their knowledge and understanding, as a starting point (Principle 4). Being flexible is another principle I can relate to (Principle 6) as this implies being flexible in the approaches we use and being able to adjust the techniques as we go along. In Ethiopia, I believed in being 'relentlessly flexible' when I needed to navigate a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural country, where being creative and developing learners' creativity (Principle 7) was a must on account of large classes and under-resourced circumstances. Openness and trust (Principle 11) allowed me to disregard (at least when I was in the company of my closest colleagues and students) the advice of avoiding PARSNIP topics (politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, 'isms, pork) and discuss *The Kite Runner* in our book club in a country where same sex relationships are outlawed. I have always appealed to the 'affective' more than the 'cognitive' (Principle 12), because I agree with the authors when they state that 'the affective domain ...has a crucial role, especially in connection with working on attitudes towards otherness and overcoming feelings of fear and uncertainty when operating in new cultural encounters' (p. 169).

The next section of Part III presents vignettes from the field in various contexts (primary, secondary, tertiary, ESOL colleges, private ESP colleges and teacher training). These vignettes are as 'multicultural' as can be, coming from, among others, Ireland, Malaysia, Thailand, the UK and Australia. They all attest to teachers' creativity in using diverse classroom techniques that can be termed as communicative teaching strategies but are also eminently useful for integrating intercultural skills into language learning (see Table 3.1 on pp. 196-198 linking the techniques described in the vignettes and the activities presented in Part II).

Finally, Part IV focuses on the learnings in the context of practitioners' professional development, because the authors profess that the kind of intercultural awareness that they encourage us to cultivate will necessarily lead to changes in the pedagogical approach and mindset of those who subscribe to the need for developing intercultural competence as an integral part of language teaching and learning.

As someone who has been a member of an international community of teacher-research mentors (MenTRnet), I was delighted that Action Research (AR) is described and treated as an eminent form of research methodology for classroom-based inquiry and exploration. This is because, as the authors point out, some key features of AR 'include a focus on the practical application of research, the involvement of practitioners in the research process, and a cyclical process of reflection and action' (p. 207). Linking back to the concept of complex dynamic learning systems, AR is seen as an approach that lends itself to the study of the openness and adaptability of these systems. Several other methods of collecting and analysing data are also listed, such as observation and focus group discussion, and areas of focus are highlighted, including research on how intercultural materials are used.

Potential research projects involving learners are also delineated, and the initiative for Global Citizenship Education is presented as a way forward after the global pandemic, which has changed the nature and magnitude of international interactions online. A further issue worthy of research interest is the *assessment* of intercultural competence, which is difficult to operationalise and measure. It is not impossible, though, and the authors provide a sample survey questionnaire (p. 235) that could be used to assess this skill. Mishan and Kiss conclude by stating that even though intercultural education is a relatively new field, it will certainly gain ground owing to the seismic changes in population movements and global communication.

I enjoyed reading the book and savoured the way theory and practice were presented in a 'combo' that will make this volume an indispensable source for teachers, teacher-educators and other stakeholders in the teaching-learning process who believe that intercultural competence is an indispensable skill that needs to be nurtured and cultivated. The well-thought out and impeccably presented activities combined with useful guidance on further reading allow us to opt in and opt out of the content, which is as multifaceted and engaging as a truly complex dynamic learning system.

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MenTRnet *http://mentrnet.net*

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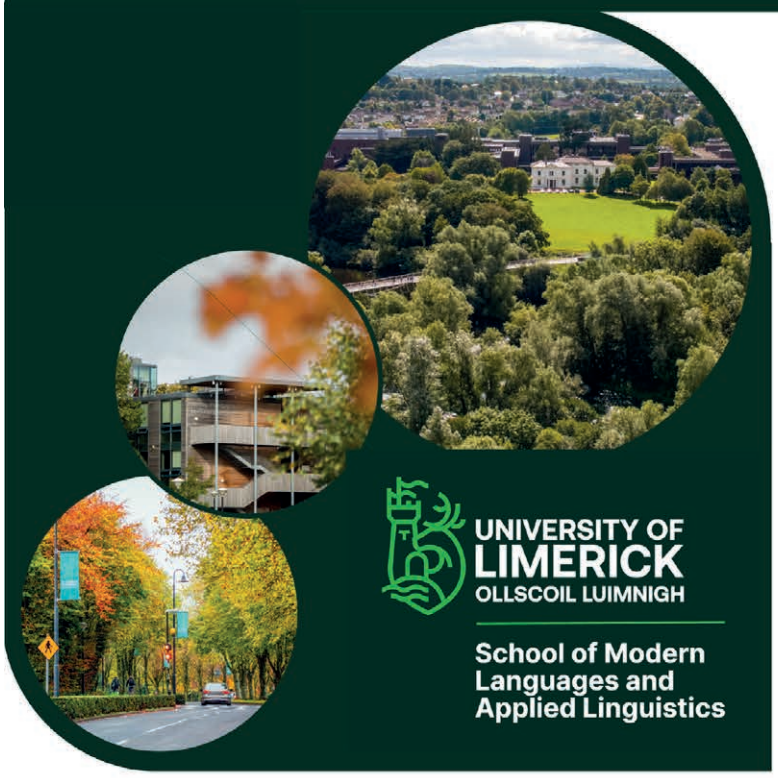
INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURED PHD IN ARTS AND HUMANITIES



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