Principles in Developing Effective, Engaging, and Context-Sensitive ELT Materials

Iga Agustin, Maulina Nur Chikmahwati
Magister's program of English Education, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang
igaagustin101@students.unnes.ac.id

ABSTRACT
The development of teaching materials is at the heart of English Language Teaching (ELT). Materials serve as the bridge between curriculum goals and classroom practice, providing learners with input, guiding their practice, and facilitating output. Whether in the form of textbooks, handouts, digital media, or authentic resources, materials embody pedagogical decisions about language, content, and methodology. To ensure their effectiveness, ELT materials must adhere to sound principles of materials development, drawn from research, theory, and classroom practice. Principles of ELT Materials Development reinforces the idea that materials are not merely neutral tools for instruction but are the primary vehicle through which pedagogical theories are transformed into classroom realities. Developing effective materials requires a balance between theoretical Second Language Acquisition (SLA) principles and the practical demands of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework. In English Language Teaching (ELT), these principles help teachers to develop English language learning materials effectively and efficiently. Ultimately, successful materials development in the modern era is a continuous cycle of design, implementation, and evaluation aimed at fostering learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also globally competitive and culturally grounded.

INTRODUCTION

The development of material is a fundamental aspect of language education, serving as a foundation for teachers to facilitate teaching and instruction. The teaching materials are not merely the materials that teachers use to teach students, but they must also meet students' learning needs. The high-quality learning materials are essential because they serve as a bridge between pedagogical theory and classroom practice. This significantly impacts students' learning motivation, information retention, and learning proficiency. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the principles of material development, which can guide teachers in creating effective materials. The principles that guide materials development go beyond simply selecting content; they encompass language acquisition theory, cognitive psychology, and practical curriculum design. In English Language Teaching (ELT), these principles help teachers to develop English language learning materials effectively and efficiently. Adherence to these principles ensures that materials are not only linguistically accurate and culturally sensitive but also pedagogically appropriate, thus creating an environment conducive to authentic learning. Effective materials empower students to become learner-centered and independent learners, transforming them from passive recipients of information or knowledge into active participants in the teaching and learning process. Simultaneously, these materials should enable teachers to shift from mere transmitters of knowledge to facilitators, guides, and reflective practitioners, able to adapt and utilize resources to meet the diverse needs of students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Material development is a systematic process of designing, evaluating, adapting, and producing materials that support language learning and teaching. Material development in language teaching requires careful consideration of various factors to ensure effectiveness and relevance to learners'

needs. Every teacher is a materials developer. This means that teachers create materials for specific subjects. In English Language Teaching (ELT), materials can include textbooks, student worksheets, audio recordings, video, and other supplementary resources. Materials for specific language skills, including speaking, writing, reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, are explained through teaching principles, development strategies, technology integration, and assessment methods. This structure highlights the interconnection of theory, practice, and technology in creating language materials that are effective, contextual, and relevant to modern learning (Walsh & Cullen, 2021). Systematically understanding the principles of materials development aims to provide a comprehensive framework for developing materials that are engaging, effective, and perfectly aligned with communicative goals and modern language education. We must align the material's creation with existing principles for successful learning.

Without clear principles, materials development risks becoming arbitrary or superficial. According to Tomlinson (2013), principles serve as guidelines that help teachers and developers create resources that are pedagogically sound, motivating, and contextually appropriate. These principles ensure that learning materials are coherent, student-focused, and contextually meaningful, ultimately leading to more effective teaching and learning experiences. These principles also empower students to use English in real-life communication. That's why understanding the principles of learning materials development is crucial.

1. Core Principles in Material Development

Material development in language teaching requires careful consideration of various factors to ensure effectiveness and relevance to learners' needs. The principles of materials development help us ensure that all learning materials align with the overall aims, objectives, and teaching philosophy of the course or curriculum. Here are the main principles in material development for creating materials in teaching and learning English:

a. Provide Rich and Meaningful Input

The first principle in materials development is providing learners with rich and meaningful input, as language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible language that is slightly beyond their current level of proficiency. Rich input refers to the use of authentic, varied, and engaging spoken or written texts that reflect real-life uses of the English language. In contrast, meaningful input enables learners to connect new language with their prior knowledge, experiences, or interests. For example, in instructional materials, we can incorporate video blogs in which real people introduce themselves and discuss their hobbies, or reading texts such as short news articles, songs, and social media posts that demonstrate natural language use. To maximize learning, materials should employ multimodal input, including audio, video, visuals, and written texts, and present rich vocabulary, natural discourse patterns, and varied grammatical structures in context. At the same time, potentially challenging input should be scaffolded through strategies such as pre-teaching key vocabulary, using visual supports, or activating background knowledge, ensuring that learners can comprehend and benefit from exposure to authentic language.

b. Ensure Opportunities for Output

The second principle in materials development is ensuring opportunities for learner output, as producing language through speaking or writing enables learners to process input more deeply and develop greater fluency and accuracy (Howard & Major, 2004). Output activities encourage learners to notice gaps between what they intend to express and what they are actually able to articulate, thereby promoting language development. For instance, after watching a short video, learners may be asked to summarize the content, create a dialogue, or record an oral response. In contrast, writing tasks such as emails, blogs, or reflective journals foster authentic language production. Effective materials should therefore be designed to promote meaningful interaction rather than mere repetition, incorporating pair work, group discussions, and role-plays that encourage learners to use the newly acquired language actively. Additionally, providing structured

opportunities for feedback enables learners to reflect on and refine their output, resulting in more accurate and confident language use.

c. Balance Focus on Form and Focus on Meaning

Materials should strike a balance between attention to language form and opportunities for focus on meaning. Learners should develop a critical and analytical approach to language use, understanding the underlying forms and engaging in meaningful communication. This balance reflects how people naturally learn. For example, a teacher wants to teach about giving an opinion in the classroom, including the form of language that can be used (e.g., "In my opinion…," "In my point of view…," "I think…"), and then move on to debates or discussions. We try to communicate (meaning), we make mistakes, we get corrected or notice the correct form (form), and then we try again.

d. Promote Affective Engagement

Language learning is not purely cognitive but also affective. This refers to the emotional side of learning. The affective filter is a concept suggesting that learners who are stressed, bored, anxious, or unmotivated have a high filter that blocks input from being processed. Good materials should lower this filter by being engaging, personally relevant, and creating a positive, low-stress learning environment. According to Dörnyei (2001), materials should stimulate interest, imagination, and emotional involvement. Stories, humor, games, and personalization tasks (e.g., writing about personal experiences) increase motivation and retention. Using topics that resonate with the learners (e.g., social media trends, a mystery story they have to solve, a popular movie). Using humor, music, games, and activities that require personal expression (e.g., What's your opinion on...) creates engagement and lowers anxiety. Motivation and emotion are crucial. A bored or anxious student will not learn, no matter how well-designed the material is from a linguistic standpoint. Therefore, materials should be visually appealing and user-friendly to engage learners effectively (Grewal et al. 2024). Considerations for physical appearance, usability, and durability should be integrated into material design to enhance

effectiveness.

e. Encourage Learner Autonomy

The goal of any course is to create learners who can continue learning outside the classroom. A good material empowers learners to take responsibility for their own learning after school. Autonomy means giving learners the skills and awareness to take control of their own learning. This may include self-check exercises, reflective journals, or online resources that extend beyond the classroom. Materials can do this by teaching learning strategies, promoting self-assessment, and providing choices. Learner autonomy is particularly vital in higher education, where independent study is a standard expectation. Autonomy builds confidence and motivation. It equips students for lifelong learning, which is essential since language acquisition is a lifelong process.

f. Recycle and Integrate Language Skills

Effective material is not something that is only taught once and then forgotten. In this case, effective material is material that recycles language items in new contexts and integrates the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). For example, a unit may introduce vocabulary in a reading text, recycle it in listening comprehension, and apply it in writing and speaking tasks. This will help students better understand the material being taught and aid in their retention of the material. Language items (vocabulary, grammar) shouldn't be taught in one chapter and then forgotten. The materials need to be recycled to use in new contexts in later units. It helps students transfer materials from short-term to long-term memory. In real life, we rarely use just one skill at a time (e.g., we listen to someone and then respond with a spoken word; we read an email and write a reply). Materials should reflect this by creating activities that integrate multiple skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). Recycling ensures retention. Skill integration makes learning more authentic to real-world language use and reinforces learning in multiple ways.

g. Contextualization and Cultural Relevance

Finally, the material must be contextualized and relevant to the students' culture. Nunan (1988) advocated that when developing teaching materials, material developers should

consider learners' existing knowledge based on their experiences, social context, and use of their first language. Cultural appropriacy should be regarded as, with materials reflecting familiar cultural scenes and social situations, to engage students effectively. The material taught to students should reflect their cultural context while still exposing them to the global English language. This will make it easier for students to connect the learning to their prior knowledge and understanding. Teachers must be creative in developing materials that are culturally relevant and appropriate for the target learners (Rahmawati, 2025). In Indonesia, this might mean incorporating local topics, highlighting local tourist attractions and cultural aspects, while also preparing learners to engage with international discourse. For example, a teacher will teach students descriptive text about a place. The teacher will use the Borobudur Temple as the topic to be described, as it is a cultural heritage site in Indonesia. Therefore, it is essential to link the material creation to the students' culture.

2. Examples of Principles in Practice

English Language Teaching (ELT) materials development in practice involves translating theoretical principles into concrete classroom activities. The core examples of this development process involve integrating different linguistic skills, striking a balance in focus, and engaging students emotionally. Below are examples of learning material development in practice:

a. Integration of Input and Output

In practice, materials development often centers on creating a sequence where learners first receive language and then actively use it. This is grounded in Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which suggests that learners grow when exposed to language slightly above their current level. A unit might require learners to read an authentic article about environmental issues (Input), discuss the problems presented in groups (Interaction), and then write a formal proposal for a local "green campaign" (Output). This approach follows Merrill Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis, which posits that producing language (output) encourages learners to negotiate meaning

and restructure their existing knowledge.

b. Balancing Focus on Form and Meaning

Effective materials design ensures that students not only study grammar in isolation but also apply it to real-world communication. A listening task based on job interviews introduces specific vocabulary and formal expressions (Focus on Form). This is immediately followed by role-play activities where students practice these expressions in a simulated interview context (Focus on Meaning). This prevents the pedagogical extreme of "grammar-only drills" or unstructured conversation practice. Richards (2017) emphasizes that materials should operationalize the curriculum by providing these specific tasks that scaffold learners toward demonstrable competencies.

c. Promoting Affective Engagement

Research by Zoltán Dörnyei (2001) highlights that language learning is not purely cognitive; it is also deeply affective. Learners watch a short film clip and are then asked to write alternative endings to it. This type of task stimulates interest, imagination, and emotional involvement, which increases long-term retention. By using stories, humor, or personalization, such as writing about one's own experiences, materials developers lower the "affective filter" and increase student motivation.

d. Recycling and Skill Integration

Materials are developed to ensure that language items are not "one-off" events but are reinforced across different skills. Vocabulary related to "health and lifestyle" is first introduced in a reading passage, then reinforced through a listening comprehension task, and finally applied in a classroom debate. This mirrors Nation and Macalister's (2010) principle of systematic alignment between input, process, and output. Effective materials recycle language in new contexts to help students internalize it more deeply.

e. Contextualization and Cultural Relevance

Materials development must reflect the learners' local background while preparing them for global communication. In the Indonesian context, teachers may supplement government textbooks with local topics, such as tourism in Bali

or regional cultural heritage, while using global English for international discourse. This aligns with Kumaravadivelu's (2003) "Post-Method Pedagogy," which emphasizes particularity, the idea that teaching must be sensitive to local sociocultural contexts. It ensures that learners remain grounded in their identity (such as the Pancasila Student Profile) while becoming globally competitive.

f. Digital and Technology-Enhanced Materials

Modern development includes moving beyond traditional textbooks to include interactive and personalized digital tools. Practical Example: An English teacher at a secondary school might integrate Quizizz for a grammar review session, YouTube videos for authentic listening practice, and Google Docs for collaborative writing projects. These tools foster learner autonomy, allowing students to take responsibility for their own learning through self-check exercises and online resources that extend beyond the classroom walls.

3. Principles Within the OBE Framework

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is a framework where curriculum and materials are designed as tools to help learners achieve specific, measurable, and observable learning outcomes. In Outcome-Based Education, principles of materials development must align with intended learning outcomes; therefore, the materials should have:

a. Clarity of Focus on Outcomes

The central principle of OBE is that the entire educational process must be organized around the outcomes rather than the inputs. Learning outcomes are statements of what learners are expected to achieve and demonstrate upon completing a learning process. Unlike broad goals, outcomes in an OBE framework must be measurable, observable, and assessable. They often use action verbs from taxonomies like Bloom's Taxonomy (e.g., "analyze," "design," "evaluate") to specify exactly what the learner can do.

b. Constructive Alignment

This principle ensures a systematic link between the intended outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment strategies. In ELT, this means that if a course outcome is for

students to "deliver an academic presentation," the syllabus and materials must specifically scaffold the vocabulary, functions, and tasks needed for that outcome. Every teaching activity is viewed as a "stepping stone" toward achieving the program-level competencies.

c. Backward Design (Design Down)

In OBE, curriculum and materials development start from the desired outcome and work backward to the day-to-day lesson plans. Needs analysis is used to ensure that outcomes are not arbitrary but are grounded in the real-life needs of the learners. If a needs analysis reveals that graduate students must write research papers, the "backward design" process sets that as the outcome and then builds the necessary modules to achieve it.

d. Demonstrable Competency

OBE shifts the emphasis from simply "covering content" to learners demonstrating mastery of skills, attitudes, and values. Skills-Based Focus: In ELT, learning outcomes should cover not just linguistic competence (grammar and vocabulary) but also communicative, strategic, and intercultural competencies. Achievement is determined by whether a student can successfully perform a task (e.g., producing a 1,000-word research essay) rather than how many hours they sat in class.

e. High Expectations for Success

The OBE framework assumes that all learners can achieve high standards if they are given the appropriate support and time. Materials must provide enough support so that challenging outcomes remain achievable. Materials are developed to be context-sensitive, ensuring they meet learners' specific needs while still aligning with rigorous national standards, such as Indonesia's *Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi* (SN-Dikti).

4. Challenges in Applying Principles

The challenges in applying the principles of English Language Teaching (ELT) materials development arise from various practical and institutional constraints. These challenges require educators to go beyond theoretical knowledge to develop creative strategies for real-world

adaptation. The following are the core challenges:

a. Over-Reliance on Prescribed Textbooks

One of the most significant hurdles is the tendency for educational systems or teachers to depend heavily on government-issued or commercially prescribed textbooks. These materials may be designed for broad markets and often do not align with specific pedagogical principles, such as providing rich, context-sensitive input. When teachers follow these books rigidly, they may bypass the actual needs of their particular student demographic. Scholars like Richards (2017) note that textbooks can act as a "straitjacket" if they do not allow for the teacher's own professional judgment and adaptation.

b. Limited Access to Authentic Resources

Principles of development often advocate for "authentic input" to mirror real-life communication, yet access to these resources can be restricted. Teachers may lack the internet connectivity, library facilities, or multimedia tools required to bring current, authentic texts into the classroom. This can result in materials that feel "artificial" or disconnected from the genuine way the English language is used globally.

c. Institutional and Time Constraints

Applying sound principles requires a significant investment of time and energy, which often conflicts with the realities of school schedules. Teachers are usually burdened with high teaching loads and administrative duties, leaving little room for the rigorous process of evaluating or designing customized units. This time pressure can lead to a "survival mode" where teachers use the quickest available option rather than the most pedagogically sound one.

d. Large Class Sizes

Many ELT environments, particularly in the Indonesian context mentioned in the text, involve teaching large groups of students. It is tough to apply principles of "individualization" or "affective engagement" when a teacher is managing 40 or more learners simultaneously. Materials that require complex interaction or high-stakes personalization often become unmanageable in crowded classrooms.

e. Lack of Specialized Training

There is a noted gap in professional development regarding how actually to *create* or *adapt* materials based on theory. While many teachers understand the theories (such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis), they may lack the practical "design skills" to translate that theory into a usable worksheet or digital module. This leads to a disconnect where teachers may "know" what good materials should look like but are unable to produce them.

f. Contextual and Cultural Mismatch

Materials produced for a global audience often fail to resonate with local cultural or linguistic realities. A textbook designed in the UK or the US may use social scenarios that are foreign or even inappropriate for learners in a different cultural setting. If students cannot relate to the content, their "Affective Filter" may rise, leading to decreased motivation and engagement.

5. Implications for Graduate Students

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) materials development, the implications for graduate students involve transitioning from being passive consumers of curriculum to becoming active, critical, and creative contributors to the field. The following are the core implications for graduate students:

a. Evolution into the "Teacher-as-Developer" Role

Graduate students are encouraged to shift their professional identity from merely implementing a prescribed curriculum to actively designing it. Students must develop the skill to systematically assess existing syllabi and commercial textbooks, identifying whether they align with sound pedagogical principles or the goals of Outcome-Based Education (OBE). A key responsibility for graduate-level practitioners is adapting global ELT materials to fit local sociocultural realities, such as the Indonesian *Merdeka* curriculum or specific regional needs. According to Graves (2000) and Nation & Macalister (2010), this role requires a dual perspective, balancing macro-level planning (national standards) with micro-level practices (task design).

b. Bridging Theory, Research, and Practice

Graduate study serves as a "bridge" where students connect abstract linguistic theories with real classroom challenges. Students should draw selectively from multiple theories, such as Behaviorism for drills, Cognitivism for scaffolding, and Constructivism for project-based learning, to create a balanced curriculum. Beyond teaching, graduate students are expected to approach materials development as a field of inquiry, using research-based evidence to justify their pedagogical decisions. As noted by Tomlinson (2013), mastering these principles ensures that the resources students create are not arbitrary but are "pedagogically sound and motivating".

c. Mastery of 21st-Century Competencies

The curriculum emphasizes that graduate students must be prepared for the demands of a modern, digitally-connected educational landscape. Exploring digital materials involves more than just using apps; it requires critically evaluating their accessibility, ethical implications, and actual contribution to language acquisition. Students are encouraged to experiment with creating their own digital teaching modules, podcasts, or interactive quizzes to strengthen their technological competence. Future ELT professionals must integrate global issues, such as digital literacy and social justice, into their instructional materials to prepare learners for active participation in an international context.

d. Commitment to Continuous Reflection and Professionalism

The introductory session of the course sets a tone for lifelong reflective practice. Every project and evaluation is viewed as an opportunity for students to critically assess how their development choices impact learner proficiency and motivation. Students are guided to see themselves as future teacher-educators and curriculum planners who can lead educational reforms within their institutions.

By mastering principles of materials development, graduate students can:

➢ Critically evaluate commercial textbooks.
➢ Adapt materials for local contexts.

> ➢ Design innovative, learner-centered resources.
> ➢ Bridge theory and practice in curriculum implementation.

Ultimately, principles enable future ELT professionals to create materials that are not only linguistically effective but also engaging, motivating, and transformative.

CONCLUSION

Principles of ELT Materials Development reinforces the idea that materials are not merely neutral tools for instruction but are the primary vehicle through which pedagogical theories are transformed into classroom realities. Developing effective materials requires a balance between theoretical Second Language Acquisition (SLA) principles and the practical demands of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework. The challenges of applying these principles are significant. However, the implication for graduate students is clear: there is a professional necessity to transition from being consumers of textbooks to reflective developers of curriculum. By adopting a "researcher-practitioner" mindset and utilizing frameworks from scholars like Graves (2000) and Richards (2017), educators can create context-sensitive materials that are culturally relevant, technologically innovative, and pedagogically transformative. Ultimately, successful materials development in the modern era is a continuous cycle of design, implementation, and evaluation aimed at fostering learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also globally competitive and culturally grounded.

REFERENCES

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics, 1*(1), 1–47

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Longman

Graves, K. (2000). *Designing language courses: A guide for teachers*. Heinle & Heinle.

Grewal, S., Manuel, M., & Veettil, R. (2024). Principles and Procedures of Material Development in the Evolving EFL Scenario. *Salud Ciencia Y Tecnología-Serie De Conferencias*, *3*, 656. DOI: https://doi.org/10.56294/sctconf2024656

Howar. J., & Major. J. (2004). Guidelines for Designing Effective English Language Teaching Materials. *TESOLANZ Journal, 12*(10), 50–58. https://www.tesolanz.org.nz/publications/tesolanz-journal/volume-12-2004/

Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Laredo Publishing Company.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). *Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching.* Yale University Press.

Minto, T. L. (2024). Material Development in ELT: Principles and Procedures. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL), 12*(1). DOI: 10.33329/rjelal.12.1.316

Nation, I. S. P., & Macalister, J. (2010). *Language curriculum design*. Routledge.

Nunan, D. (1988). Principles for designing language teaching materials. *Guidelines: A periodical for classroom language teachers, 10* (2), 1-24.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-Based Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Rahmawati, I. (2025). Integrating Local Cultural Values in Character Education: An Integrative Literature Review within the Indonesian *Educational Context. Perfect Education Fairy, 3*(4):145-155. DOI:10.56442/pef.v3i4.1261

Richards, J. C. (2017). *Curriculum development in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press

Tomlinson, B. (Ed.). (2013). *Developing materials for language teaching (2nd ed.).* Bloomsbury Academic

Walsh, N., & Cullen, B. (2021). Materials development frameworks and the challenges of developing learning materials. In P. Clements, R. Derrah, & P. Ferguson (Eds.), *Communities of teachers & learners. JALT*. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2020-37