

College of Education for Humanities

Department of English Language

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CH6

EFL/ESL Materials, Media, and Technology: Expanded Questions and Answers

1. Who creates the materials available to EFL/ESL teachers?

The materials used in EFL/ESL classrooms come from a wide range of sources because different educational contexts have different needs. Large publishing companies produce commercial textbooks, workbooks, audio recordings, videos, and software that are widely circulated across schools and private institutes around the world. These are often accompanied by teacher manuals and online support materials. In many countries with centralized education systems, government agencies or national curriculum committees create or approve the textbooks used in all public schools, ensuring that the content aligns with national educational goals. Some universities, private language institutes, and corporate training centers create locally developed materials that are tailored to the specific needs of their students, often produced by experienced teachers or curriculum design teams working within the institution. Finally, classroom teachers themselves frequently create or adapt materials when they find that the assigned textbook does not fully meet their learners' needs. These teacher-made materials may include worksheets, visual aids, activities, assessments, or entire lessons designed to bridge gaps in the textbook, incorporate more authentic language, or respond to learners' interests.

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of commercial materials?

Commercial teaching materials offer several practical benefits, especially for teachers who have limited time to plan lessons. They provide ready-made, systematically organized content that guides both teachers and learners through structured units, often with clear learning objectives and step-by-step activities. Accompanying teacher manuals usually give suggestions for classroom procedures, assessment, and supplementary activities, which can be especially helpful for novice teachers still developing their instructional strategies. However, commercial materials also have limitations. Many textbooks reflect the beliefs and assumptions of the authors or publishers, which may not align with teachers' own pedagogical principles. This can create tension when teachers are required to use a textbook that promotes approaches—such as memorization or grammar-first learning—that they do not personally support. Moreover, when teachers rely heavily on a textbook, they risk reducing their role to that of a technician who simply follows the script, resulting in superficial teaching that does not address students' real communication needs. Another drawback is that commercial textbooks are often designed for broad, international audiences, which means they frequently omit cultural or situational details relevant to a specific local context. Therefore, using such textbooks without adaptation can lead to content that feels distant, irrelevant, or inauthentic for learners.

3. What are authentic materials, and what types are available?

Authentic materials refer to any real-world items that were not originally created for language teaching but are used for genuine communication outside the classroom. Teachers incorporate them to expose learners to natural language as it appears in everyday life. Authentic listening and viewing materials include items such as television programs, news broadcasts, commercials, movies, radio shows, songs, and audiobooks—media that allow students to hear real speech patterns, accents, and communication styles. Authentic visual materials come in the form of photographs, paintings, magazine pictures, posters, signs, sketches, or postcards, all of which stimulate students' observation skills and support comprehension activities. Printed materials include newspapers, magazines, advertisements, menus, brochures, tickets, maps, forms, catalogs, and song lyrics, which help students develop reading skills in real-life contexts. Realia consists of physical objects such as utensils, tools, currency, clothing, toys, or everyday household items that bring a tangible, hands-on dimension to language learning. Together, these materials allow teachers to simulate real communication and create highly engaging, meaningful tasks that mirror situations students may encounter beyond the classroom.

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials and media?

Authentic materials provide learners with meaningful exposure to language as it is naturally used, making classroom learning more connected to real-world communication. By working with everyday texts such as menus, advertisements, or radio announcements, students engage with content that carries real-life purposes, which can help increase motivation and improve comprehension skills. Authentic materials also offer rich contextual clues, allowing learners to infer meaning even when they do not understand every word. This shifts the focus from memorization

of isolated language items to the understanding of meaning within context. However, these materials also present challenges. They require significant time and effort from teachers to locate, adapt, and prepare, especially if the content needs to be simplified or scaffolded. Some students may find authentic materials intimidating or confusing because they are not graded for language learners and may contain unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural references, or fast speech. Additionally, some learners may resist using materials such as TV shows or songs, believing that these sources are too informal or "not serious enough" to count as real learning. Thus, while authentic materials enrich the learning experience, they must be thoughtfully selected and carefully supported to ensure their effectiveness.

5. How do EFL/ESL teachers use authentic materials and media?

Teachers use authentic materials in a variety of creative ways to enrich textbook lessons or to replace them entirely. Some begin with a topic or concept introduced in the textbook and expand it by bringing in real-world materials that make the lesson more engaging and relevant. For example, when students express interest in learning to order food in a restaurant, a teacher might collect actual menus, magazine photos of food, and restaurant order slips to create an immersive restaurant simulation. Students might then work in groups to analyze the menu, create their own menus, practice role-play dialogues, and rehearse ordering food. Other teachers design entire lessons around authentic video clips, asking students to write commentaries, compare their interpretations to the original dialogues, or create alternative soundtracks. Authentic materials may also become part of long-term projects, such as reading boards filled with advice columns, cartoons, puzzles, and quizzes that invite interaction and discussion. Teachers sometimes design city exploration

projects where students use real brochures, maps, menus, and transportation guides to plan itineraries and budgets. Through these activities, authentic materials support a range of communicative tasks, foster creativity, and encourage learners to engage with language in purposeful and meaningful ways.

6. What kinds of technology do EFL/ESL teachers use?

Teachers around the world use a wide continuum of technology—from the simplest tools to sophisticated digital platforms—depending on their teaching environment and available resources. At the low-technology end, even natural objects or simple tools like chalk, pencils, paper, and blackboards can serve as effective teaching aids. Teachers in less-resourced settings may draw diagrams on the ground or use objects from the environment to illustrate concepts. As technology increases, teachers commonly use radios, overhead projectors, cassette players, video cameras, and VCRs to support instruction. Radio, for example, has long played a role in distance learning, enabling students in remote areas to access educational content. Telephones can also be used creatively to help students practice real-time communication, especially for learners who need English for professional purposes. At the high-technology end, computers and digital media have expanded instructional possibilities significantly. Teachers use interactive websites, digital video libraries, multimedia projects, online collaboration tools, and software for language practice. Digital video, in particular, allows learners to control playback, replay segments, and compare multiple speakers. Students in modern classrooms may also engage in projects involving photography, website creation, digital memory books, or environmental documentation using cameras and multimedia tools. The variety of technologies allows teachers to select tools that enhance learning, suit their teaching context, and support students' language development.

7. What problems do some EFL/ESL teachers have with materials, media, and technology?

EFL/ESL teachers often encounter challenges when working with materials, media, and technology. One common issue is the feeling of being forced to strictly follow a prescribed textbook, especially in settings where administrators require adherence to a specific sequence of lessons. This can make teachers feel restricted and unable to introduce creativity into their teaching. Another problem arises when teachers rely too heavily on the textbook, allowing it to determine the entire flow of instruction. This “let the textbook do the teaching” approach can minimize the teacher’s role and prevent students from experiencing richer, more meaningful language use. Teachers also struggle with the overwhelming variety of websites and online resources available. Without guidance, it can be difficult to determine which sites are reliable, engaging, and appropriate for students' proficiency levels. These challenges highlight the need for teachers to strike a balance between institutional requirements, personal teaching philosophy, student needs, and thoughtful integration of materials and technology.