



**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES DEVELOPING ORIGINAL
DIGITAL ENGLISH TEACHING MATERIAL IN PANDEMIC TIMES**

ESTUDIANTE

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in Pandemic Times**

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Challenges and Opportunities Developing Original Digital English Teaching Material in Pandemic Times

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Abstract

There are many reasons why English teachers may create their own digital teaching material even though there is enough online. This essay describes some of the reasons why teachers should create their own digital instructional resources by analyzing challenges and benefits offered by that. The writer also suggests aspects that teachers should consider when developing educational tools and the systematization of a digital book created by her .

Keywords: Challenges, benefits, English teaching, materials development, online teaching, opportunities, systematization

Introduction

Due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), Costa Rica is facing new challenges in education in which adaptation and technology play an important role in continuing to teach and learn. Online English education supports students in the learning process through the Internet and digital material; however, there are some limitations English teachers have found in their praxis. According to the research conducted by Atmojo and Nugroho (2020), in pandemic times (COVID-19), there are English teachers who do not have the knowledge to

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design material for their online lessons. Nugroho (2021) stated that in this global epidemic during e-learning education, English Foreign Language teachers faced some obstacles such as demotivation. Dhawan (2020) said that teaching online is not as simple as it looks like. Loads of time is required for creating online teaching material. Anas and Musdariah (2018) reported that educators who have adequate accessibility to the Internet will be able to find useful online material to be used in language lessons. However, most of the time, these online resources are not designed by those who are currently teaching the students, meaning that in many cases, they do not match with their student's actual needs, learning styles, or interests. Rahayuningsih (2016) determined that teaching materials are important elements that impact a class. They help students to increase their understanding, achieve the teaching and learning goals, and bring motivation into the learning process. It is essential for teachers to create their own digital teaching material to take into account important educational aspects of their students and curriculum to grow professionally through the development of it. For instance, for this coronavirus period, it is essential for teachers' digital teaching materials to be adapted to be posted on different platforms such as Google Classroom or WhatsApp in order for students to access the material without any problems and they can continue in the learning process.

This essay comprises a definition of what digital English teaching material is, the use of digital English teaching material, what challenges English teachers face to create their own original digital teaching material, valuable reasons why they should create them, what includes the development of teaching digital material, and the systematization of a digital English book created by the writer to exemplify the theme and analyze results.

Digital English Teaching Material

Hendripides and Hikmah (2018) defined teaching materials as educational equipment, instruments, or multimedia used by teachers to teach and bring motivation for learners to learn. Furthermore, digital English teaching material is developed in a variety of ways, such as texts,

conversations, exercises, graphics, games, audios, animation or videos. Digital teaching material allows teachers to integrate multimedia causing students to have the opportunity to access vivid and high quality information any time they want. Multimedia promotes interaction in the learning process letting the students take an active role through playing games, listening to audios, making recordings, and watching videos. Besides, it allows students to recap and pause at their own pace as well as helping students with physical or learning difficulties.

Digital teaching material is presented in digital files, CD-ROMs, DVDs, digital books, blogs and websites, etc. It can be accessed anywhere and anytime; you only need an electronic device and Internet access in some cases. Digital teaching material is enriched with multimedia resources which present different messages or activities using elements such as text, images, links, animation, sound and video. These elements are multi-sensory, getting the attention of the students and including different learning styles in the teaching process.

The Use of Digital Material in English Teaching

For our daily lives and professional purposes, the Internet service plays an important role. The Internet facilitates access to a huge amount of information. You can find instructions on any topic you are interested in. For educational purposes, there are powerful tools such as the British Council website or Canva platform that provide guidance or information to use and create teaching material. According to Livingstone and Bober (2004), nowadays, the access to the web has increased greatly from residential areas to educational institutions. In pandemic times, the use of the Internet service grew; the educational system started online teaching, causing teachers to understand how to use video platforms and to learn new ways to develop digital educational material. The integration of digital material in English education brought new opportunities for teachers to share knowledge, and students had more alternatives to acquire it. Charpentier (2014) said that the use of technological resources has reoriented the methods used to teach English recently because information can be transmitted through

different devices, such as computers, tablets or smartphones, and it is presented through different resources innovating the development of the lessons.

Challenges Developing Original Digital Teaching Material

Despite the positive effects in education that the Internet has brought in educational contexts, there are some reasons why English teachers do not develop their own digital teaching material, such as the availability of websites, blogs, digital books, games, audios, or videos. Some obstacles that teachers face are: the lack of training or assistance at work or demotivation for creating digital teaching material, few time to make and use online teaching material and there are teachers who are not open to incorporating digital teaching resources because they think the way they teach does not require it. These barriers have hindered the progress of technology intervention developed by the educators to support the students in their English learning process, and they have limited learners to be equipped to face the challenges this era brings. The following are main obstacles identified that have affected the development of English teaching material by English teachers.

First, a great number of educators lack training or support at work causing absence of knowledge to use technological tools or programs to create digital teaching material to use in class with their students. According to Marwan (2008) the absence of technical assistance is estimated to be one of the main issues faced by educators to incorporate technology in their praxis. It means that there are educational institutions that do not have staff that give support to teachers to integrate digital teaching material in their lessons.

Second, many teachers do not have the motivation for creating online English teaching material. They do not feel inspired; they do not have enthusiasm, they think it is difficult, or they believe they do not have the skills or creativity. To resume, they have a negative attitude toward something new that they think they are not going to have the control to manage, or they believe they are not going to achieve the goals. George and Sabapathy (2011) wrote that,

nowadays, in current education, motivated educators are relevant for going beyond the education field.

Third, some English teachers say that they do not have available time to create and use digital teaching materials in class because they already have a lot of work. With regard to this Hadijah and Shalawati (2017) cited that educators had difficulties to handle their time of developing and using technology in their praxis because they were working in other regular responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities can be the preparation of lesson plans or tests, grade papers or the organization of special events, among others.

Also, many teachers say the time in the classroom is not enough for them to apply the materials or the resources are not available. In connection with this Bingimlas (2009) explained that there are educators who are trained to incorporate technology in class, but they avoid it because they do not have sufficient time to use it. Additionally, Ruggiero and Mong (2015) stated that educators mentioned that there are limits that affect the use of technology, such as the absence of technology resources.

Fourth, there are teachers who do not want to innovate their classes with the use of technologies because they think the way they have taught is correct and they do not need any change or different implementation. According to Raman and Yamat (2014) older teachers who already have worked many years and have a lot of experience do not have the willingness to adapt and learn new technologie. According to Lawless and Pellegrino (2007) technological education has emerged as a main teaching ability of teaching. Currently, because of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), online education has a fundamental role to avoid the interruption of educational systems. That is why it is necessary for teachers to be able to manage different technological tools and develop digital teaching resources to continue teaching effectively.

Opportunities Developing Original Digital Teaching Material

Even though there are challenges teachers can face through the use of technology tools to develop their digital teaching material, there are valuable reasons why teachers should develop their own original digital material. Educators evolve their research spirit through investigation about how to use different digital tools, programs, and how to create activities. This gives them the opportunity to keep updating themselves and learn new technologies. According to Torres and Mercado (2004), as educational instructors, we are working through academic investigation, which is the tool that enables us as trainers to grow in our praxis. Teacher empowerment can be built through research. One benefit of it is that educators can learn how to utilize digital tools which are used to make digital material for teaching.

When teachers design their own original digital material, they can apply the teaching philosophies or approaches they use and develop topics related to their curriculum. Hickey (2014) considered that technological resources reflect and will intensify our teaching approaches, analyzing our beliefs about our educational praxis and increasing our effectiveness in constructing pertinent teaching materials. Producing original teaching material helps teachers become more independent and incorporate students' needs and contexts, and that also develops the educator's creativity and innovation. Pun (2013) mentioned that technology gives different opportunities for creating attractive teaching material and effective educational environments. In addition, when teachers use digital resources constructed by them with their students, they can reflect upon their application and modify or update them if it is necessary.

Teaching Material Development

Teaching material development is a term that is not clear for many teachers. The design of learning material includes different stages that are important to know and understand to achieve the learners and educators' goals. Tomlinson (2012) described teaching material development as every stage people do to create and utilize resources for English learning, including their validation, adaptability, layout, construction, use, and

investigation. There are four important phases to take into account for the development of teaching materials. They are Needs Analysis, Instructional Design, Universal Design for Learning, and Graphic Design.

The first phase is Needs Analysis; it refers to the collection of data through educational actions that will identify what students need in their learning process. This collection of information can be done through observations, students' notebooks or books, assessments or interviews, among others. After that process, difficulties are selected and students' needs are defined. This stage will validate the purpose of the development of the material for teaching and learning English in a specific context, and it will be a guide for the teacher developer to better understand what he or she must work on.

The second phase to consider is Instructional Design. İşman (2011) confirmed that the main objective of this design is to show organization, creation, judgment, and execution of the instructional procedure. This process includes different principles to be taken into account. One principle that is part of this stage is the choice of the material that will be developed to help the students to bring solutions to their needs. Something important to consider is the language hierarchy presented in the material. It refers to the sequence of the topics; they must be presented from simple to complex.

Also, other aspects to contemplate are the establishment of the goal of the material, the selection of the contents and their objectives, the specification of what skills will be developed through the activities (listening, speaking, writing and reading), and the use of an educational approach and definition of the types of activities that will be developed. They include active, didactic, or collaborative activities. One advantage that you can have as a teacher materials developer is that you know what type of activities your students enjoy, for example conversations or games, and if you know them you can include them in your material.

The third phase is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Courey (2012) said that UDL is known as a series of ideas and approaches applied by teachers with their students through

the creation of inclusive educational material. These ideas are presented in different forms for learners to use the material. The material must offer a variety of design, activities, interpretation, and commitment.

That refers to the flexible use of engaging comprehensive material for students and variety in content that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. For example, teaching material can be presented in texts, infographics, images, audio, video, and games in a digital book, and students have the opportunity to interact by writing, drawing, speaking, playing, etc. Students' academic goals and their diversity are aspects that must be taken into account. It is necessary for all students to be able to use the learning materials made by their teachers to progress in the learning process and achieve the goals without any exclusion.

The fourth phase to develop teaching material is Graphic Design. Walker (2017) explained that graphic design is in charge of the organization and resolution of issues. Also, it works on objectives, actions, interface experience, and commitment to the people who use the product. In addition, graphic design refers to the interface, and it includes what kind of language will be used, color palette, types of fonts, size, images, the management of the space, and the use of links if they are included and the use of a pedagogical metaphor in case teachers want to create a book, blog or website. The educational metaphor is a symbol used in teaching material to represent specific parts of a resource or to guide the students through the use of the teaching material.

Systematization of an Original English Digital Book for Children

Development of the Book

The following is the description of the development of a digital book for children created by the author. Its implementation and a reflection about the results obtained by the use of it with her students. During the development of the digital book for children, the Needs Analysis, Instructional Design, the Universal Design for Learning, and Graphic Design stages were

taken into account. The book was created for a group of children who are nine years old and who take an online basic English course in a private institute in San Isidro de El General, Pérez Zeledón, San José, Costa Rica.

A Needs Analysis was carried out by the teacher (author) through observations during different classes and assessment results. Through this collection of information, two elements were identified: one, the students' difficulty, which was that they had problems writing and speaking the correct use of the verb "to be" in simple present tense in affirmative sentences, negative sentences, yes/no questions and wh-questions, and two, the selected need (a digital book); in this case, students needed a digital book with a variety of activities that could guide them on the correct use of the verb to be in written and spoken contexts. After that, the goal of the material was set; it was to use the verb to be correctly in simple present tense in affirmative and negative sentences, yes/no questions and WH-questions when writing and speaking.

In Instructional Design, the establishment of the content of the book was organized in five different chapters, and each chapter had an objective which was related to its corresponding content. Also, for each chapter, the skills to develop were identified, and the types of activities were planned. To decide what learning activities would be included in each chapter, Universal Teaching Design was considered. As a result, the activities created and the way students worked with the book were very varied. For instance, the book taught the verb "to be" through conversations, texts, grammar explanations, exercises, pictures, a game, audios, and a video, and students could listen to audios, read, write, draw, speak, watch a video, play a game, and do exercises.

Another aspect that was taken into account to develop the book was the teaching approach used by the teacher (author of the book). Communicative Language Teaching is reflected in each chapter through the development of the contents. For example, in Chapter 1, students talk about their personal information, and in pairs, they make a conversation where they greet and meet a classmate. In Chapter 2, students share and draw about what their classroom looks like. In Chapter 3, learners have conversations about helpers in their

community. In Chapter 4, students describe their friends and family, and in Chapter 5, students ask and answer questions about their pets or family member's pets.

The Graphic Design stage was one of the most elaborated parts because it needed a great deal of online searching to learn how to use new digital tools to create the book. Adobe Illustrator was used to draw, color and set up the book, Windows Voice Recorder was used to record the audios of the conversations and readings, Genially was used to make a board game, and Adobe Acrobat Pro was utilized to add links with multimedia (audios, a game and a video) in the book.

In this stage, also, the color palette and typography were chosen. The palette was composed of five colors, which were used to identify the different five chapters and also to recognize distinct parts of sentences or questions of the verb “to be”. The educational metaphor was selected, too. I created an owl, who was interacting through text with the students, greeting, talking about himself, asking questions, and explaining grammar uses and rules.

Implementation of the Book

The book was used by the students during five online classes; each class was one hour long, and one chapter was taught in each session. Skype was used for this purpose. Students had the digital book for the class, but they also had a printed version. During the five sessions that I shared my screen with the book, they could see it, listen to the audios, play a game, and watch a video.

In the first session, students got familiar with the digital book. They met the educational metaphor (an owl), they understood the use of the color code to identify different parts of grammar sentences or questions, and they recognized the bottoms that allowed to link the audios, the game and the video. In the first class, students studied greetings, personal information, and affirmative and negative sentences with the verb “to be”. Everytime I read what the owl said, I made a different voice to get the students' attention. They listened to the audio of a conversation and read it at the same time. After that, students completed a

conversation and wrote the answers in their printed book. Finally, they had a conversation in pairs, and they interacted without any problem.

In the second class, the students studied classroom objects and the use of the subject pronouns “it” and “they” and prepositions. In Chapter 2, learners described a picture of a classroom using the vocabulary they already knew. After that, they read and listened to a conversation describing a classroom with their objects. Later, they underlined the classroom objects and circled the prepositions from the reading. Then, I illustrated the topic with my classroom objects and I used prepositions to talk about their location in order to give them examples to follow. Afterwards they brought to the screen the classroom objects they had at home and pronounced their names and where they were located. They did a complete exercise with “it” and “they” and drew three of their classroom objects where they usually place them in their printed book. I asked them to read aloud their answers to check them and to present their pictures. Children were excited sharing and seeing their classmates' drawings. Next, they described them orally. Finally, they expressed what they saw and compared two pictures of classrooms. For example, they said that in picture 1, the calendar is on the whiteboard and that in picture 2, the calendar is under the shelf.

In the third class, they studied community helpers and yes/no questions with the verb “to be”. I asked them if they knew a teacher, a nurse or a farmer in their community and they started saying “yes” or “no”. They started talking about people from their community and their jobs. They did a matching exercise between sentences and pictures of a community and they did a multiple choice exercise. After each exercise I asked them to say their answers to check them together. Later I made the owl voice to present some grammar information about “yes” and “no” questions. They listened to and read a conversation at the same time, and after that, they answered yes/no questions with the verb “to be”. Again I asked them to say aloud their answers to check them as a group. At the end, students accessed a link to play a board game, they rolled a digital dice to move their players, they answered yes/no questions with the verb “to be,” and they advanced to reach the goal to win.

In the fourth class, students learned about adjectives and WH-questions with the verb to be. First, they read and pronounce after me some descriptions of pictures. I mimicked some pictures to illustrate them to bring dynamism to the class and students felt more identified with their personalities. For instance, I made a lazy, shy and old face. Second, I explained to the students the difference between adjectives that represent personality and adjectives that represent physical appearance and later they classified adjectives between personality and appearance. Third, following an example students described themselves, one family member, and one friend in written form. Fourth, I made the owl's voice to read and gave grammatical explanations about wh-questions with the verb "to be". After that, students did a matching exercise with questions and answers, and finally, students read and listened to a conversation and answered questions about it.

In the fifth session, students studied animals and opposites. They watched a video about animals, their appearance, and opposites. They took notes and talked about them. I asked them what animals they remembered and what they looked like. Then, I made the owl's voice and asked them about their pets or family members' pets. They said their names and described them. To illustrate our conversation I brought my cat to show them my pet and they were so happy to see my cat and they asked me her name. After that, they did matching exercises about animals and their opposites. I requested them to respond aloud to check the answers as a group. They listened to and read a text at the same time and corrected sentences with information about the reading. At the end, they did different exercises to practice all the contents they learned through the book. For example, they wrote an affirmative and negative sentence about an elephant using adjectives, they answered yes/no questions with the verb to be about how butterflies looked like, and they answered wh-questions about the educational metaphor (the owl). At the end, I made a different voice and I read a friendly message said by the owl, in which he says "it is time to say good bye and he hopes they enjoyed the journey and learned a lot".

Results

During the implementation of my digital book called *I'm Milo*, my students used their computers or cellphones. They had the opportunity to choose what device to use for the classes. Also, they were in different locations, most of them were at home, but in one session a student was traveling by car with her mother. There were no location limits for learning. Another aspect I noted is how students are familiar with the technological tools to take the online classes. During this pandemic time, they have already learned how to interact through different platforms because of school or private English classes. In my classes, they learned very quickly how to answer a Skype call or hang up, how to use a camera, a microphone, headsets and chats, and how to go through the digital book and access links.

For my online classes, I like to create a warm and friendly environment; that is why I made a different voice to read what the educational metaphor (the owl) said. It made the students feel relaxed and be ready to learn. They kept their cameras on most of the time, and they always were on the correct page. Page numbers were very important for my students; they could locate the different chapters, contents or exercises of the book very quickly. Also, I observed that students have developed patience in online classes, and they respected when their classmates were participating by muting their microphones and waiting for their turns. If they needed their classmates or me to repeat something, they requested that in a very polite way.

Interactive elements of the book were another aspect that made the students get engaged. I observed how enthusiastic students were when they listened to the audios, played a game, and watched a video. The intervention of multimedia was a factor that influenced the students to pay attention all the time because they were just not receiving information; they had to interact with it in English. The experience of listening to different voices, having interaction in the game and watching movement and listening to a song in the video activated the children's senses to be ready to participate.

Something relevant to the book was the application of Communicative Language Teaching. In all the chapters, real situations were included. They were related to the students'

own life or experiences such as their personal information, their school supplies, their community helpers, description of themselves, family or friends and descriptions of their pets or family member's pets and they felt very identified. For example, in Chapter 5, we talked about pets, and students were very excited about sharing about their dogs or family members' dogs. For that chapter, I created a text about a girl's cat, and I drew it in the book. In real life, this text talks about my own cat. I could bring it to the screen, and they were surprised that my cat looked like the picture in the book, and it had the same name, "Luna". I think having the opportunity to personalize the teaching material lets us as teachers take into account resources we have available to be used as a complement during the development of the class.

A main limitation I found during the application of the digital book was that students could not type or draw digitally in it because they needed Acrobat Adobe Pro to have editable access, and it had a fee. However, some alternatives I would like to consider when I create a digital book for my students to write in the future is the use of some free word processors programs, for instance, OpenOffice or LibreOffice Word or the use of Google Docs which access is free. Another option is to have my own website with all my teaching resources for my students to access for free. I think that, as a teacher, when developing any teaching material, it is very important to use tools that all students can have access to without any extra charge to take into account all the students' contexts because not all of them have possibilities to pay extra fees. However, students had the option to print the book, and they answered the written exercises or drew in the printed version of the book.

Conclusion

English teachers should not limit themselves to avoiding the development of their own original teaching digital material in this modern era. They should expand their knowledge through all the digital tools available on the Internet to progress professionally and to evolve their teaching praxis with their students. Taking into account Needs Analysis, Instructional Design, Universal Design for Learning, and Graphic Design stages in the development of the

book was essential for me as a teacher to construct a teaching/learning digital material with strong elements that fit with the context of my students.

The application of our own digital teaching material with our students lets us expand our vision, reflect on and realize aspects that can be taken into account to improve the development of our educational material, and identify elements that boost the learning process. It lets us mature as professionals and bring better opportunities for students to learn English through our own teaching material. In this modern age, in which technology is changing the teaching practices and students are opened to learn new technologies, teachers must take advantage of it and have a positive attitude to promote the use of digital teaching material and educate their students' parents too about the importance of the use of digital educational materials.

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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Karla Retana Hernández, cédula de identidad 11175-0431, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de la responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado “ Challenges and Opportunities Developing Original Digital English Teaching Material in Pandemic Times”, para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Aprendizaje del Inglés,



Firma

Heredia, a los 07 días del mes de septiembre del año 2021.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante Karla Retana Hernández, cédula 1 1175 0431, que lleva como título **Challenges and Opportunities Developing Original Digital English Teaching Material in Pandemic Times**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

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