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Language Teaching Materials Evaluation: Principles from Theoretical Perspectives

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Abstract: This theoretical review investigated principles for evaluating language teaching materials to support learner-centered instruction. Drawing on academic literature, the study synthesized frameworks and perspectives to guide teachers in selecting teaching resources aligned with learners' needs and curriculum goals. Six key principles emerged: learner centrality, contextual appropriateness, goal compatibility, skills-systems balance, flexibility, and fostering interaction and reflection. These findings highlighted the need for a holistic, adaptable evaluation process that prioritizes both pedagogy and communicative purpose. The study underscores the importance of reflective, theory-based materials evaluation and calls for further empirical research to validate these principles in diverse teaching contexts.

Keywords: coursebooks, teaching materials, materials evaluation, language materials, learning materials

Introduction

Textbooks are central to English teaching, yet teachers use them differently. Some follow them closely, while others adapt and supplement them with various materials to suit their students' needs, showcasing diverse teaching styles and global contexts. Reputable ELT publishers create dependable



coursebooks based on research and testing (Dringó-Horváth & Menyhei, 2021). However, teachers should adapt these materials to their students' needs, using them as tools to support their teaching, not as rigid instructions (Andrean, 2023).

Teachers who only aim to 'finish' textbooks risk losing control of their teaching and disengaging students. Effective teachers, however, set clear objectives and use the book as a tool, adapting it to support student progress. The diverse selection of ELT materials shows the changing demands of language learning. Beyond textbooks, there are resources for specific skills, levels, and contexts (Pokhrel, 2022). Teachers must carefully choose materials that fit their curriculum and students' needs (Grossman & Thompson, 2008).

Teachers should avoid selecting materials based solely on visual appeal, brand, or price. Instead, language teachers must focus on pedagogical effectiveness by asking critical questions about learning goals, adaptability, and engagement (Minto, 2024; Tomlinson, 2012). This thoughtful evaluation is essential for effective language teaching.

Research Aim and Research Question

Because teaching materials are central to language learning, this study explores theoretical principles for their evaluation. It aims to help teachers make informed choices by examining frameworks and perspectives, promoting reflective practice based on students' needs and curriculum goals.

This paper emphasizes aligning materials with teaching aims in today's diverse ELT environment. The core research question is: *What theoretical principles can help teachers effectively evaluate language teaching materials to foster learner-centered instruction?*

Literature Review

'Context' in evaluating language teaching materials

It is not accurate to label a coursebook as simply 'good' or 'bad.' Materials evaluation must consider the specific context in which they will be used (Bahumaid, 2009). A book that succeeds in one environment might fail in another due to various teaching and practical factors. Therefore, evaluation should be a relative process, based on how well the materials meet the needs of the learners (Al-Busaidi, 2018) and support the instructional objectives set by the teacher or institution (McLaughlin & Trlica, 1976).

A coursebook's effectiveness is shaped by numerous variables, such as students' age, language proficiency, cultural backgrounds, learning aims, and individual interests (Şahin, 2021). Practical issues like class size, lesson time, technological access, and institutional guidelines also influence material usage (Azarnoosh *et al.*, 2016; Berges-Puyó, 2024; Msofe *et al.*, 2021; Li, 2024). Thus, materials that work well for adults in small private classes may not be suitable for large, mixed-ability groups in under-resourced public schools.

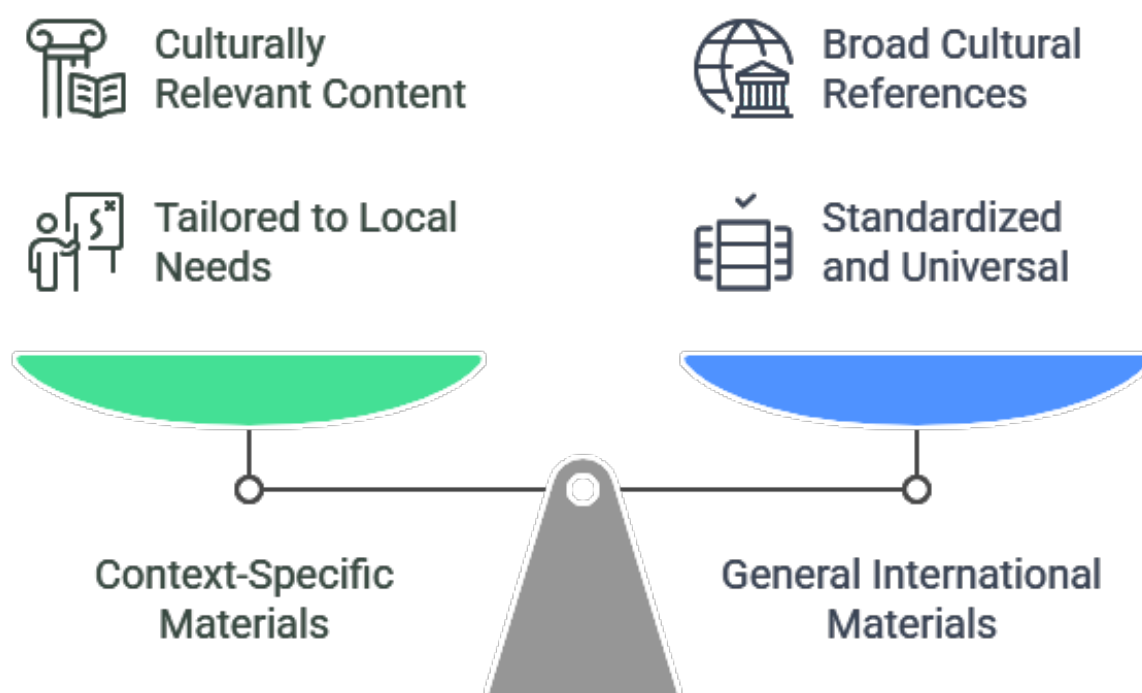
Because English language teaching occurs worldwide (Ly, 2022), there is a huge range of teaching environments. A coursebook designed for European private language schools might not be appropriate for a rural Southeast Asian classroom due to differences in teaching methods, student expectations, curriculum, and assessment. This global variation highlights the importance of evaluating materials in a way that is tailored to specific local needs (Azizah *et al.*, 2021; Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015; Oviedo & Álvarez, 2019) or easily adaptable (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010; Hanifa & Yusra, 2023; Hanifa *et al.*, 2024).

Materials designed for particular learner groups, like those matching national curricula (Chang, 2002; Etten & Smit, 2005), are developed to reflect local education, learning goals, and classroom conditions. They often include familiar themes and examples. However, this context-specific design can make them unsuitable for use in significantly different environments (Harwood, 2010). When used in other settings without adaptation, these materials may fail to engage learners or support effective instruction due to differences in language use, learner needs, or classroom interaction (Tomlinson, 2008).

General coursebooks from international publishers are designed for a wide, global market, often focusing on a broad range of language skills and using cultural references from English-speaking countries like the UK and US (Çelik, 2022; Gray, 2002). Although these books are standardized and well-produced, their broad focus can mean they lack relevance to specific local cultures or fail to address the unique learning needs of particular groups (see Figure 1). This universality can reduce their effectiveness in situations where learners require more localized, culturally appropriate content (Hadley, 2014; Kim & Paek, 2015).

Figure 1

Balancing Cultural Relevance and Adaptability in Language Materials



Perspectives on English language coursebook design

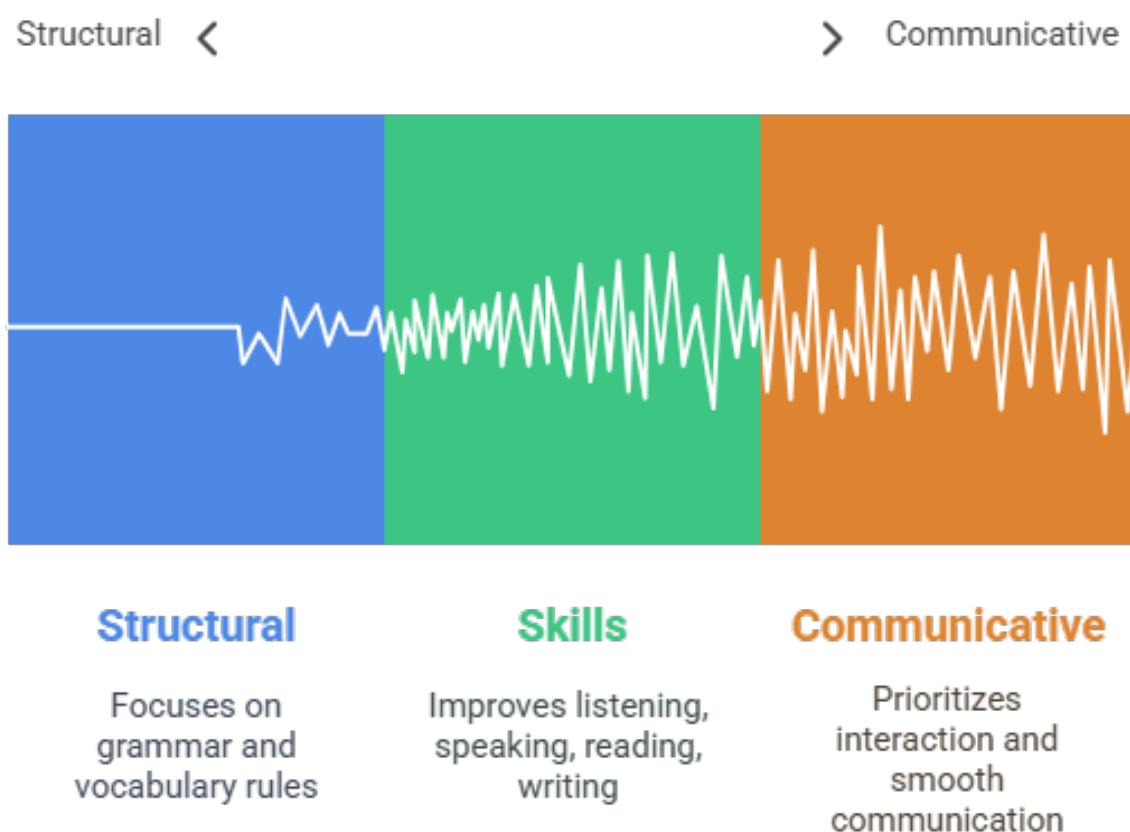
English language coursebooks differ significantly in what they aim to achieve, the theories they are based on, and how they suggest teaching. Coursebooks are often built around one of three main ideas (see Figure 2):

- *The communicative or functional approach* sees language as a tool for real communication, which prioritizes interaction and smooth speaking (Ahmed, 2013; Azimova, 2019; Salmanova, 2025).
- *The structural approach* focuses on language as a set of rules and elements like grammar and vocabulary that need to be learned (Behlol & Hukam, 2010; Valipour & Assadi, 2015; Genc, 2018).

- *The skills approach* concentrates on improving the four key abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Burns & Siegel, 2018; Gautam, 2019; Hinkel, 2006).

Figure 2

Coursebook Approaches Range from Rule-based to Real-world Application



These different viewpoints shape both the content of lessons and the ways it is taught and practiced. Beyond general course designs, some cater to specific learner needs. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) materials, for example, prepare students for English-medium academic study by focusing on academic genres (Dvoretzskaya, 2016; Hamp-Lyons, 2001). Other specialized materials, like English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for business or tourism, address learners' goals and contexts with relevant language, scenarios, and tasks which reflect real-world professional or academic demands (Syahid et al., 2024; Trisyanti, 2009).

While many coursebooks are categorized by a primary approach, they often blend elements from several. A unit might combine communicative tasks, grammar practice, and skills work to create a more complete learning experience (Jafarigohar & Ghaderi, 2013; Ly, 2020; Skela & Burazer, 2021). For teachers and curriculum developers, understanding these theoretical orientations is key to analyzing and evaluating materials. These perspectives provide a useful framework for assessing a coursebook's alignment with teaching goals, learner needs, and institutional expectations.

Research gap

Despite plentiful research on coursebook design and evaluation, clear and theory-based guidelines for learner-centered material assessment are lacking. Existing work often provides checklists or context-specific insights without strong theoretical grounding. Few studies link educational theories



like communicative competence to practical evaluation. This review seeks to bridge this gap by identifying key theoretical principles to empower teachers in making effective decisions for learner-centered materials evaluation.

Methods

Research design

This study employed a library-based methodology, which focused on scholarly investigation and theoretical analysis. As a theoretical review, it systematically examined existing literature on language teaching material evaluation. This approach aimed to establish a strong theoretical basis to guide educators in making effective decisions about selecting and using materials.

Research participants

Since this study is a theoretical review, it did not involve human participants. The research solely analyzed academic literature, with the focus on conceptual analysis rather than collecting empirical data from teachers or learners.

Research materials

The main data for this study consisted of scholarly articles, academic books, research reports, and published reviews within ELT, curriculum design, and materials evaluation. These sources were chosen for their relevance, credibility, and contribution to understanding the theoretical foundations of language education.

Data collection procedures

The data collection methodically identified, retrieved, and reviewed relevant literature from academic databases, digital libraries, and institutional repositories. Key search terms like “materials evaluation” and “learner-centered” were used. The gathered literature was then categorized and organized by theme to enable thorough analysis and synthesis.

Data analysis

The collected literature employed descriptive qualitative analysis to identify themes, theoretical frameworks, and teaching implications. This involved interpreting and comparing ideas from various sources, synthesizing central principles, and building a unified understanding of how theoretical viewpoints can inform teaching materials evaluation.

Research Findings

Keep your learners at the center of your materials evaluation process

Effective materials evaluation starts with thoroughly understanding learners’ linguistic and personal needs (Al-Busaidi, 2018). Teaching materials should align with their cognitive and emotional levels (Huang et al., 2023; Taylor & Statler, 2013), breaking down language learning into manageable steps. According to Taber (2018), this involves presenting content in logically sequenced units that build upon students’ prior knowledge, enabling gradual comprehension. Beyond language itself, materials should be intellectually engaging and personally relevant to maintain learner motivation and involvement (Howard & Major, 2004; Zhuomin, 2010).

Furthermore, coursebooks and additional resources should accommodate various classroom interaction styles, supporting both individual, pair and group work (Ellederová, 2021; Uyar et al.,



2014). Learners' roles shift based on tasks, skill focus, or preferred learning strategies. Materials that recognize this dynamic classroom and offer flexible participation options better support a learner-centered approach, catering to diverse student profiles and promoting a more personalized language learning experience (Ly, 2024b; Sun, 2010; Tareva, 2021).

Ensure your materials are appropriate for your specific teaching and learning context

Materials should fit the specific teaching context. Language learning is shaped by local factors like culture, institutional rules, and available resources (Case, 2023; Kuo & Lai, 2006). A successful coursebook in one setting might fail elsewhere due to these differences. Materials need to reflect learners' real-world environments (Dja'far, 2023; Treve, 2023).

Context-appropriate resources should also support relevant content and language students will likely use outside the classroom (Richards, 2015; Sadam, 2022). This includes authentic materials and activities which reflect real communication. When materials mirror learners' future language needs, they become more meaningful and practical, strengthening the link between classroom learning and real-life use (Al-Busaidi, 2018; Dja'far, 2023).

Relate the teaching materials directly to your instructional aims and objectives

The selection and evaluation of teaching materials should be guided by clearly defined learning objectives (Bundsgaard & Hansen, 2011; Handayani et al., 2025). Materials are not ends in themselves; they are tools to facilitate learners' progress toward specific outcomes (Minto, 2024). Therefore, materials must be carefully examined for how directly they support the instructional goals of a course (Manurung, 2017). This alignment ensures a coherent and focused learning experience, increasing the probability of successful language acquisition (Meng, 2023; Ly, 2025).

Rather than adapting objectives to suit pre-existing materials, educators should start with pedagogical goals and then choose or adapt resources accordingly (Hanifa & Yusra, 2023; Hanifa et al., 2024). This principle highlights the importance of intentional design in curriculum planning. Teaching is most effective when materials are not only high in quality but also purposefully selected to move learners closer to their communicative, academic, or professional language goals.

Provide a balanced focus on language skills and language systems in your materials

A robust set of teaching materials must address both macro language skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - and micro components such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. A well-rounded language course does not isolate these elements but weaves them together in meaningful contexts. This integrated approach ensures that learners can apply knowledge of linguistic forms in actual communication.

However, an overemphasis on either end of the spectrum can undermine language development. Traditional materials may focus too much on form, while others may prioritize expression at the cost of linguistic accuracy. The challenge lies in finding or adapting resources that balance structure with function. Effective materials ensure systematic progression in skills and subsystems, supporting comprehensive language development without neglecting any key component.

Choose and adapt materials flexibly to suit different learners and situations

Learners vary in their preferences, strategies, and learning trajectories. Thus, teaching materials should be adaptable rather than prescriptive. Materials that promote rigid methods or assume



uniform learner behavior often fail to accommodate the diversity within classrooms. Effective materials allow teachers to modify content, sequence, or format to better align with student needs and classroom realities.

Flexible resources also support differentiated instruction, enabling educators to address various proficiency levels, learning styles, and interests. Whether the lesson involves a whole class, small group, or individual tasks, materials should be versatile enough to support all these arrangements. This adaptability enhances learner engagement and enables more responsive teaching practices that center on the learners' evolving needs (Green, 2023).

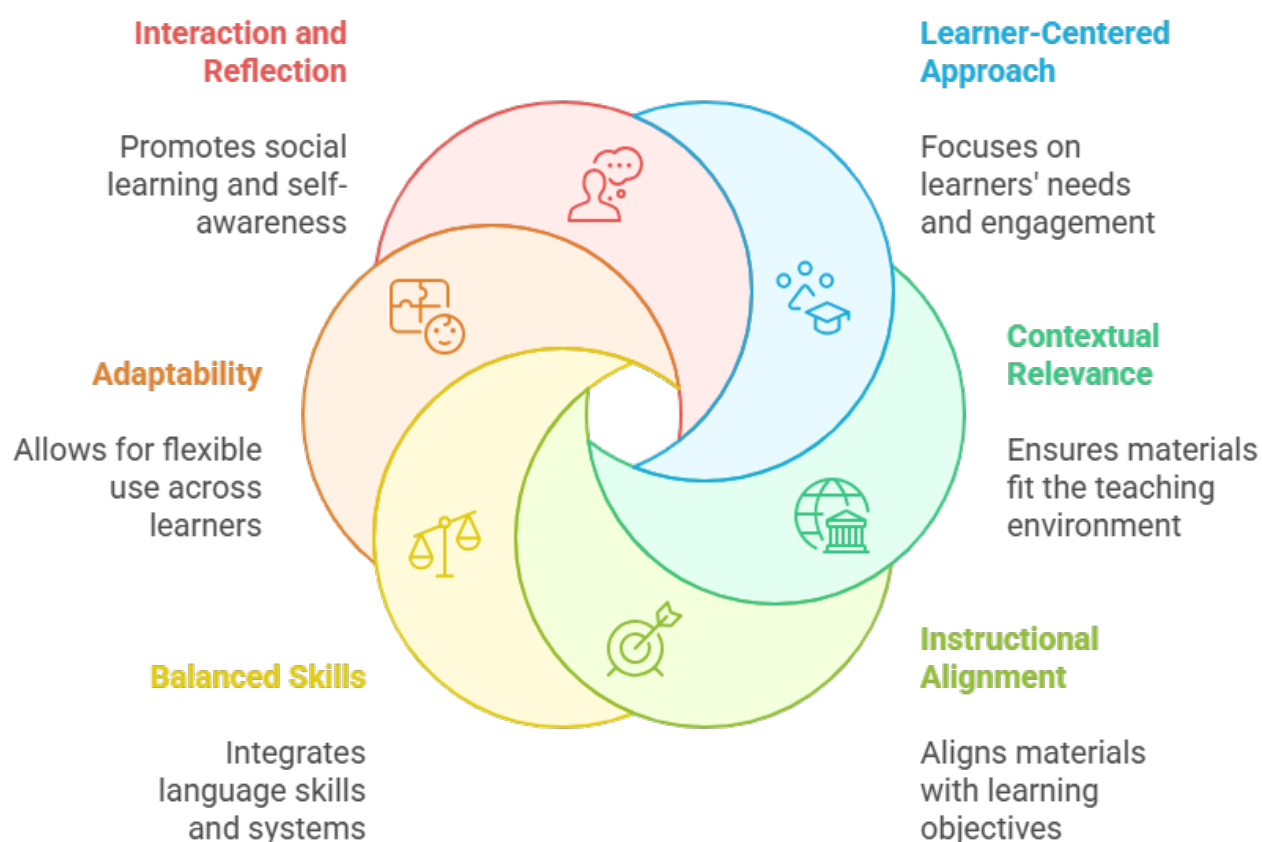
Include opportunities for meaningful interaction and reflective learning

Language use is naturally social, and teaching materials should promote authentic communicative interaction (Mugimu & Sekiziyivu, 2016; Losada et al., 2017). Tasks such as simulations (Perez & Poole, 2019), role-plays (Ly, 2024a), and discussions (Fatima et al., 2023) offer students chances to express thoughts, negotiate meaning, and use language purposefully. While drills and controlled practice play a role in developing fluency and accuracy (Khetaguri & Albay, 2016; Mukhlisin, 2023), they should not dominate classroom time at the expense of authentic language use.

Moreover, materials should encourage learners to reflect on their language learning processes and outcomes. Reflection fosters greater autonomy and awareness (Sandeman, 2024), which allows students to connect classroom experiences with real-life application. Activities that integrate interaction and reflection - such as journaling (Brown, 2024), peer feedback (Janesarvatan & Asoodar, 2024), and project-based work (Cao, 2024) - enhance both language proficiency and metacognitive skills, essential for lifelong learning.

Discussion

This theoretical review identifies six key principles for evaluating teaching materials to support learner-centered instruction (see Figure 3). At the core is prioritizing the learner's cognitive, emotional, and contextual needs. Materials should match their goals and facilitate language acquisition and application inside and outside the classroom. These findings are consistent with those reported by Trinh and Pham (2015), Tomlinson (2012), and Tomlinson (2023). Effective evaluation considers how well materials scaffold learning, spark interest, and accommodate varied learning styles and roles, keeping students active in their learning.

Figure 3*Comprehensive Materials Evaluation Framework*

Putting materials in the appropriate educational settings and curricula is equally important. Resources that reflect how learners communicate in the real world make them more relevant. Furthermore, materials should not only be general tools; they should also be in line with the instructional goals of the pedagogical lesson. These findings are in line with previous research conducted by Li and Xu (2021), Wotring et al. (2021), and Dja'far (2023). To have meaningful communicative competence, evaluation must be based on purposeful selection, adaption, and implementation.

Lastly, in order to foster learners' proficiency and autonomy, materials are required to balance skill development with interaction and reflection. Resources that are too strict or entertaining but lack enough educational depth generally fail. A flexible, integrated strategy that supports both structured input and communicative output serves better in classes with diverse students. The current study confirms the conclusions drawn by Mugimu and Sekiziyivu (2016), Losada et al. (2017), and Sandeman (2024). Ultimately, learner-centered materials evaluation demands a holistic view which considers language, pedagogy, learner diversity, and communicative purpose equally.

Conclusion

This article explored the theoretical bases of effective language teaching material evaluation, especially for learner-centered instruction. By reviewing key pedagogical texts and frameworks, the study identified core principles to help educators match materials with learner needs and teaching goals. The methodology involved a qualitative synthesis of theoretical literature, examining how materials can be assessed concerning learning processes, language use, and learner characteristics.



The aim was to provide a conceptual framework for teachers to critically and adaptively evaluate resources, not just summarize best practices.

The findings highlighted six interconnected principles: learner centrality, contextual appropriateness, compatibility with learning goals, balancing skills and systems, promoting flexibility, and fostering interaction and reflection. These emphasize a holistic view which values learner individuality and language's communicative purpose. The discussion underlined that evaluation should go beyond content coverage to consider pedagogical alignment and adaptability, encouraging reflective teaching and knowledgeable decisions for better learning outcomes.

Despite its theoretical contribution, this review relied on conceptual sources, not classroom data. Future research should explore these principles in various teaching contexts using observations, interviews, or learner feedback. Comparative studies across educational systems could also reveal contextual influences on evaluation practices. Expanding with empirical evidence will further support dynamic, responsive, and learner-centered evaluation frameworks.

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