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Review of *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching*



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The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching edited by Julie Norton and Heather Buchanan, Routledge, 2022, 560 pp., £164.00 (Hardback) £34.39 (eBook). ISBN 9780815382577.

One may wonder why it is necessary to have an academic book on this topic, considering that materials development is practice-oriented and also there is a wealth of materials readily made accessible to all professional materials writers. Although these materials may set a good reference point for creating materials, it may also lead to undesirable inclination to clone new materials from existing materials based on the market demands. Opposing to the other views, materials development is not simply a practical undertaking, but it is a field of study which considers principles and procedures for its development (Azarnoosh et al., 2016, p.2). Following this definition, Julie Norton and Heather Buchanan jointly co-edited the current handbook with the aim to intertwine practice with theory through compiling viewpoints of over forty professional contributors from diverse international contexts.

The current book title, *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching*, might indicate its comprehensive coverage of key topics compared to the other recent book (e.g., Mishan & Ivor Timmis, 2015) in which it appears narrower and more specific to the TESOL field. Even though the word “*Handbook*” might mislead readers to believe that it is purely a practical manual, this handbook sets out to challenge the perception of materials development as an “atheoretical activity” with an emphasis on the interface between theory and practice. Overall, this book contains thirty-four chapters and systematically grouped into nine parts.

To begin, Part One of this handbook contains three chapters sketching out the changes and developments in language teaching materials. Specifically, Tomlinson traces the rapid progress of materials development in Chapter 1, while Mishan introduces criteria to evaluate technology-mediated materials in Chapter 2. However, Timmis reviews the current status between theory and practice with reference to the four skills, vocabulary and grammar in Chapter 3 which is more in line with the editors’ aim. Not only he examines the critical issues, but he also outlines the theoretical principles, justifies the rationales persuasively and the challenges involved when producing theoretically-informed materials.

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Next, Part Two discusses the recent debates in the materials development field. The debatable issues are dealt separately in six chapters: the value of global coursebooks (Chapter 4), the notion of authentic materials (Chapter 5), the language selection for materials writing (Chapter 6), the current approaches to ELT materials (Chapter 7), the cultural content of materials (Chapter 8), as well as the representation in coursebooks (Chapter 9). As the materials development is still a broadening field, all these controversies are worthy for further research. Somehow, there are still other unresolved issues that deserve our attention but regrettably not addressed in this handbook, for example, the need for humanising materials and the danger of excessively reliance on electronic language-learning materials.

Besides, this handbook covers three chapters revealing the relationship between research and materials development in Part Three. For example, Harwood emphasises researching materials development with the focus on its content (Chapter 10). And then, Harley and Hadley make use of research to inform materials development, specifically it is not purely theoretical-based but with the support of various approaches used to research in this field (Chapter 11). At last, McCarthy and McCarten explore the shift from written to spoken corpora and the valuable insights of corpus for materials development (Chapter 12). Nevertheless, this handbook should consider the possible collaboration among various stakeholders (e.g., universities and publishers) to conduct longitudinal research on the effects of using different materials based on SLA principles.

Additionally, this handbook highlights materials for language learning and skills development. They are discussed in five individual chapters such as materials for teaching grammar (Chapter 13) with the focus on the content and scope, materials for teaching vocabulary (Chapter 14) for effective learning, materials for developing speaking skills (Chapter 15) with its own unique linguistic features, materials for developing reading skills (Chapter 16) to create a more authentic reader-text interaction, and materials for developing writing skills (Chapter 17) with the emphasis on the product, process, and sociocultural activity. Since Part Four is concerned with language skills, this section is rather incomplete without including a single chapter on materials for developing listening.

Fundamentally, this handbook provides principled criteria and procedures in Part Five for teachers and materials developers for materials evaluation and adaptation. This is crucial as teachers need to evaluate the effect of the materials they are using on their students and make appropriate modifications. On one hand, Littlejohn (Chapter 18) suggests two stages that request expertise for analysing and evaluating teaching materials. On the other hand, Masuhara (Chapter 19) looks into approaches to materials adaptation and future direction in global Englishes. Personally, I would hope that this handbook advocates a more exclusive approach demonstrating how learners may play an active role with or without their teacher in adapting the materials that they are using.

There are seven chapters in Part Six exploring the materials development in various contexts. In Chapter 20, Gok deals with the primary coursebook series in Turkish. In Chapter 21, Buchanan and Norton explore versioning coursebooks to include wider audiences. In Chapter 22, Kırkgöz discloses the skills in writing English for Academic Purposes (EAP) whereas in Chapter 23, Hann calls for more ESOL-specific materials that concern with learner, contextual, and pedagogical factors. Moreover, Afitska and Clegg address the necessity for English-medium materials for learners in Europe and in Sub-Saharan Africa in Chapter 24. Even though Krantz, Norton, and Buchanan give special attention in writing coursebooks to monolinguals and teenagers in Spanish in Chapter 25, Pinard considers the challenges while writing materials for an English-speaking environment in Chapter 26.

Above all, I particularly appreciate Part Seven of this handbook for counting two chapters on the incorporation of technology in developing language-learning materials though it is fast-changing and ephemeral. First, Hartle (Chapter 27) introduces the development of blended learning materials and its current practice and principled approach to commercial and local materials development. Second, Dudeney and Hockly (Chapter 28) inspect the current mobile devices trend and how materials writers can evaluate the effectiveness of using mobile materials. With the rapid developments in technology, teachers and learners are given more choices and flexibilities to teach and learn out-of-classroom, especially many students can have access to their mobile phones but not to their physical classrooms

during the pandemic.

Furthermore, this handbook is laudable for putting in three chapters in Part Eight concerning the under-represented voices gathering the diverse viewpoints of learners, authors, and editors in materials development. Notably, they are experienced practitioners in the field, but their voices are unheard of in the academic literature. Moreover, this part is particularly practical for those who intend to delve deeper knowledge and gain insights into materials development. For instance, Choi and Nunan (Chapter 29) exemplify a learner's role in creation and adaption contributing to commercial and other types of materials. Also, Clare and Wilson (Chapter 30) explores the new trend in the publishing industry, suggesting how writers and editors may collaborate together in the process of developing materials for commercial publication. At last, MacKenzie and Baker (Chapter 31) provides recommendations for editorial training, future trends for ELT editors and publishers in developing teaching materials in the publishing business.

Finally, this handbook puts forth three chapters in Part Nine taking consideration into professional development and materials writing. Based on the experience of a teacher to a materials writer, Spiro (Chapter 32) gives an account of print materials, digital media, and real-world writing projects. And then, Holliday Hughes (Chapter 33) proposes how teachers make use of coursebook materials for professional development and suggests how publishers can lend support to teachers in this regard. Lastly, Hughes (Chapter 34) recommends an innovative syllabus to build up trainee writers concerning materials development based on various original training tasks.

To wrap up, I would like to make some recommendations based on this handbook. Hopefully, my suggestions might be useful for the improvement of future edition. First and foremost, I think the issue of humanising materials should be included in controversial issues, especially in the age of AI as there is little possibility of acquisition without affective and cognitive engagement. Also, the reliance of new technologies should ensure reliable resources and electronic delivery that should never supersede meaningful face-to-face classroom interaction. Secondly, even though it is difficult to provide conclusive empirical proof, Tomlinson (2020) stresses that materials development research should target on making discoveries which could be of great advantage for teachers and learners. Thirdly, listening skills should not be sidelined in developing materials for skills development, instead it should be treated equally important as reading.

Nonetheless, I find this handbook is rather unique in three distinct ways. First of all, it encourages greater collaboration among all stakeholders. Evidently, students, parents, teachers, coursebooks writers, editors, and publishers are invited to engage in critical discussions. Such collaborations practices are essential as Xu et al. (2023) point out, as interactions and negotiations may bring innovations in materials development. Next, it allows the minority voice to be heard. Many of the chapters are authored by experienced practitioners, teachers, or even postgraduate students in materials writing, but their names have yet been recognised in this field. Finally, since this handbook is a collection of diverse individual voices, it would certainly bring readers to the understanding of the personalised and diversified principles and beliefs. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that this handbook is able to foster possible joint collaboration, future creative discussions, and innovative ways to ensure bringing advancement in the materials development field.

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