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MOTIVATIONAL POWER OF TEXTBOOKS AND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGES

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Abstract:

The teaching and learning of a second language can be a complex process that is influenced by many different factors among which it is worth mentioning the degree of motivation of the students, their personal interests both present and future, personal or professional; the quality and usefulness of materials or textbooks used in order to teach the language; the students' own personalities; and the relationships and interactions inside the class, not only among students but also with the teacher. However, combining all these factors at the same time proves to be a complex endeavor as textbooks, often considered a staple for language instruction, encounter limitations in effectively addressing this intricate web of considerations. These limitations, characterized by a constrained repertoire of topics and a format that might not resonate with students' specific needs and inclinations, can potentially dilute the level of intrinsic motivation among students. The present paper seeks to undertake a thorough exploration of the motivation concept and its interplay within the realm of second language acquisition and pedagogy. It aims to dissect the notable impact of instructional materials and textbooks on motivation. In tandem, an investigation will delve into the insights provided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages pertaining to the utility of educational resources for second language teaching. Subsequently, a comprehensive assessment will be conducted to juxtapose the topic prevalent in B2 English textbooks with the findings obtained from a survey targeting B2-level English as a second language students. The objective is to discern the extent to which commercial textbooks effectively cater to the needs, interests, and expectations of this specific student population. The final section will discuss the use of Open Educational Resources as a feasible way for both students and teachers to find and use materials that can fulfil their needs and be more motivating.

Keywords: textbook; open educational resources, motivation; materials design

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Resumen:

La enseñanza y el aprendizaje de un segundo idioma pueden ser un proceso complejo que se ve influenciado por diversos factores, entre los cuales vale la pena mencionar el grado de motivación de los estudiantes, sus intereses personales presentes y futuros, personales o profesionales; la calidad y utilidad de los materiales o libros de texto utilizados para enseñar el idioma; las personalidades de los propios estudiantes; y las relaciones e interacciones dentro del aula, no solo entre estudiantes, sino también con el profesor. Sin embargo, combinar todos estos factores al mismo tiempo demuestra ser un esfuerzo complejo, ya que los libros de texto, a menudo considerados como un elemento fundamental para la enseñanza de idiomas, encuentran limitaciones para abordar de manera efectiva esta intrincada red de consideraciones. Estas limitaciones, caracterizadas por un repertorio limitado de temas y un formato que quizás no resuene con las necesidades e intereses específicos de los estudiantes, pueden diluir potencialmente el nivel de motivación intrínseca entre los alumnos. El presente artículo busca explorar el concepto de motivación y su interacción dentro del ámbito de la adquisición y pedagogía de un segundo idioma. Su objetivo es analizar el impacto de los materiales de instrucción y los libros de texto en la motivación. Al mismo tiempo, se investigarán las puntualizaciones proporcionadas por el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas en relación con la utilidad de los recursos educativos para la enseñanza de un segundo idioma. Posteriormente, se llevará a cabo una evaluación integral para comparar los temas prevalentes en los libros de texto de inglés de nivel B2 con los resultados obtenidos de una encuesta dirigida a estudiantes de inglés como segundo idioma a nivel B2. El objetivo es discernir hasta qué punto los libros de texto comerciales satisfacen de manera efectiva las necesidades, intereses y expectativas de esta población estudiantil específica. La sección final discutirá el uso de Recursos Educativos Abiertos como una forma factible para que tanto estudiantes como profesores encuentren y utilicen materiales que puedan satisfacer sus necesidades y ser más motivadores.

Palabras clave: libro de texto; recursos educativos abiertos, motivación; diseño de materiales

1. Introduction

Textbooks have historically held a prominent role in educational contexts across diverse subjects, including language instruction. The enduring appeal of textbooks stems from their inherent advantages, benefiting both educators and learners. These resources offer a structured compilation of content tailored to varying proficiency levels, effectively addressing students' academic needs. Additionally, textbooks serve as navigational guides, delineating the course trajectory for both educators and students, thereby facilitating a cohesive learning journey throughout the academic term.

However, despite the manifold merits related to academic objectives and curriculum organization, the aspect of motivational efficacy warrants thoughtful

consideration. This concern is particularly pronounced within the realm of language textbooks, where a notable misalignment between covered topics and students' interests can engender diminished motivation.

In response to this motivational quandary, the integration of Open Educational Resources (OER) presents a prospective solution. These publicly accessible and freely available online resources offer a way for curating instructional materials attuned to students' preferences, consequently enhancing engagement levels. Whether employed as supplementary complements to traditional textbooks or as autonomous pedagogical tools, OERs hold the potential to infuse lessons with heightened vibrancy.

Nonetheless, as this paper endeavors to explore, the process of seamlessly integrating OER into pedagogical paradigms is not devoid of complexities and potential controversies.

2. Motivation and Second Language Acquisition

As explained by Dörnyei (1994: 273), motivation constitutes a paramount driving force in the acquisition of a second language. Before exploring the intricacies of motivation, however, it is imperative to grasp its conceptual underpinnings and the factors that wield influence over students' motivational levels. Kong (2009: 146) defines motivation as "something like the engine and steering wheel of an automobile that can move students from boredom to interest". Rodriguez-Perez (2012: 383), in her analysis of pertinent literature, concludes that there are various concepts or ideas that are recurrently used to define motivation such as: impulses, incentives, stimuli, desires, needs, or interests. Evidently, the construct of motivation appears closely intertwined with the realm of students' needs and interests.

Transitioning to the determinants that orchestrate students' motivation, Dörnyei (1994: 277) explains that there are three principal clusters of factors that wield impact: 1) those related to the instructor's personality and pedagogical approach, 2) those linked with the students themselves and their interpersonal dynamics, and 3) those associated with the course content and instructional materials employed.

As observed, instructional content and materials can be a strong motivational force in the trajectory of second language acquisition. This assertion is substantiated by Rodriguez-Perez (2012: 238) in her empirical study involving 58 educators across diverse academic settings, wherein family and socio-cultural contexts emerged as the main motivational factors, followed by the use of captivating pedagogical methodologies and the adaptation of instructional materials to cater to students' needs.

With the recognition of materials as a pivotal motivational tool in second language acquisition, it becomes imperative to ascertain the attributes that endow these materials with a motivational impetus. Dörnyei (1994: 277-278) delineates four salient characteristics that educational materials must embody to guarantee their motivational potency: the ability to heighten students' interest, relevance, and utility in assisting students in achieving their individual objectives, cultivation of positive expectations so

that students believe that their possibilities of success in achieving their goals are optimal and the amount of effort required is fair, and ultimately, engendering a sense of satisfaction among students regarding task outcomes.

To ensure the alignment of materials with these requisites, Dörnyei (1994: 281-282) outlines an array of guidelines to be heeded when designing or selecting instructional materials:

- 1) Make the syllabus of the course relevant by basing it on a needs analysis, and involving the students in the actual planning of the course program.
- 2) Increase the attractiveness of the course content by using authentic materials that are within students' grasp.
- 3) Discuss with the students the choice of teaching materials for the course.
- 4) Arouse and sustain curiosity and attention by introducing unexpected, novel, unfamiliar, and even paradoxical events; not allowing lessons to settle into too regular a routine.
- 5) Increase students' interest and involvement in the tasks by designing or selecting varied and challenging activities.
- 6) Match the difficulty of tasks with students' abilities so that students can expect to succeed if they put in reasonable effort.
- 7) Increase student expectancy of task fulfillment by familiarizing students with the task type, sufficiently preparing them for coping with the task content.
- 8) Facilitate student satisfaction by allowing students to create finished products that they can perform or display, encouraging them to be proud of themselves after accomplishing a task.

Clearly, creating engaging class materials takes careful thought and should be built upon understanding students' needs and interests. This approach guarantees that these materials are not only useful but also motivating and interesting for the users.

3. Common European Framework and Materials Design

When addressing the pedagogy of second language instruction, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) emerges as the definitive guide for educators to both impart and assess students' linguistic skills and competencies. Nevertheless, this document transcends its role as a mere compendium of criteria pertaining to language mastery; it is also a comprehensive resource offering insights into various concepts integral to second language instruction and the judicious selection of appropriate pedagogical materials.

Among these pivotal concepts is that of domains. The CEFR defines domains as "spheres of action or areas of concern in which social life is organized" (CEFR, p. 45). It delineates four distinct domains: personal, public, educational, and professional. Furthermore, with regard to the exploration of these diverse domains and the concomitant selection of instructional materials, the CEFR explains:

"The choice of the domains in which learners are being prepared to operate has far-reaching implications for the selection of situations, purposes, tasks, themes, and texts for teaching and testing materials and activities. Users may have to bear in mind the motivational effects of choosing domains of present relevance in relation to their future utility." (CEFR, p 45)

Accordingly, in the context of choosing or crafting materials for second language classes, it assumes paramount significance that these materials not only serve as a source of motivation for students but also as effective tools for imparting the necessary linguistic skills tailored to the diverse domains in which language competence is essential.

Similarly, the meticulous selection of materials and topics for instructional purposes should not be based exclusively on the teacher's own preferences or opinions, but to involve students in the decision-making process as endorsed by the CEFR.

"Users of the Framework, including where possible the actual learners concerned, will, of course, make their own decisions based on their assessment of learner needs, motivations, characteristics, and resources in the relevant domain or domains with which they are concerned." (CERF, p. 53)

Consequently, based on this concise exploration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), it becomes evident that the process of selecting or designing materials for teaching a second language is notably more intricate than it may initially appear. This intricacy arises from the need to consider not only the practicality of these materials in preparing students for various real-life language contexts but also their specific needs and preferences.

This juncture also highlights a potential conflict. On one hand, students' interests, although relevant to their language learning, might not align perfectly with their future language requirements. On the other hand, materials that are practical for students might lack the appeal needed for motivation and engagement. This tension underscores the nuanced balance that materials designers and educators must strike.

Moreover, even when students' interests and needs correlate well with the language domains they will encounter, there's a common issue - mainstream textbooks often do not adequately cover these engaging topics. This gap often results in reduced motivation or a lack of interest in the learning process.

To empirically validate this interplay between student interests and the content usually found in textbooks, the following sections of this paper focus on two key aspects: first, a comparative analysis of different B2 English textbooks to evaluate the range of subjects covered in various units; and second, a thorough examination of the interests of a group of B2-level English students.

4. Textbooks and Topics

Textbooks have stood as a common cornerstone within language education, a role they have held for a considerable duration. Despite the emergence of modern technologies, such as online platforms, websites, and mobile applications, which seemingly pose a challenge to their prominence, textbooks remain resilient, maintaining their essential role in teaching.

The inherent advantages of textbooks for both students and educators are undeniable. Beyond offering a repository of exercises designed to hone diverse linguistic skills, they serve as a reliable instrument to ensure the acquisition of the desired level of mastery. They also serve as a guide in cases where different instructors or groups are covering the same material ensuring a congruent coverage of content, and thereby harmonizing the final evaluation of the subject across all students.

However, textbooks can sometimes pose challenges. As discussed in sections 2 and 3 of this paper, effective and engaging materials, including textbooks, need to tackle topics that both pique students' interest and prepare them for practical language use. Unfortunately, this does not always happen, as it will be seen in the next section. Textbooks can limit the range of topics covered in language classes as teachers might feel obligated to cover specific topics from the book rather than others for several reasons: 1) course requirements set by the institution, 2) ensuring consistency across different classes, 3) the feeling that they need to cover as much of the textbook as possible due to student investment, 4) students needing to prepare for standardized exams with fixed formats and content. This sometimes means teachers or self-directed learners have to cover units or topics that might not be interesting or motivating, but are hard to avoid.

In this section, four B2 English textbooks will be compared: SpeakOut Upper Intermediate (Pearson), English in Mind 5 (Cambridge), Prepare 7 (Cambridge), and English File B2.1 (Oxford). This analysis will look not just at the general themes in each unit, but also at subtopics covered in reading comprehension, speaking, and vocabulary exercises – basically, any topic that could be expanded upon in class. Note that some topics might repeat within the same textbook, but this has not been contemplated in this study.

Table 1: Topics covered in B2 English textbooks

	SpeakOut Upper Intermediate	English in Mind 5	Prepare 7	English File B2.1
Advertising	X	Χ	X	Χ
Age/life stages	X	X		X
Animals		Χ	X	
Art	X			
Beauty		Χ		
Behaviour	X	Χ		
Biology/the body			X	
Business/entrepreneurs			X	

Charities/volunteering	Х		Х	
City/town life				Х
Crimes/justice	Х	Х		
Environment/recycling	7.			Х
Family			Х	7.
Fashion/clothes			X	Х
Feelings	Х	Х	X	X
Food/restaurants	7.		7.1	X
Gaming/computers/technology	Х	Х		X
Happiness	X	7.	Х	X
Intelligence/skills	A		X	A
Inventions	Х		, A	
Life hacks/DIY	Α			Х
Literature			Х	A
Making decisions		Х	X	
Money		X	Λ	Х
Museums/history		X	Х	X
Music		Λ	X	Α
Names			X	Х
Opinions/beliefs			Х	Λ
Optimism/pessimism	X		X	
Personality	^		Λ	X
Photography				X
Pop culture/shows	X		X	Λ
Shopping	^		Λ	X
Sleep/dreams			X	^
Social issues	X	X	Λ	
	^	X	X	X
Sports Superheroes		X	^	Λ
*		^	V	
Surprising/unexpected events			X	
Talling atomics	v	V		V
Telling stories	X	X	X	X
The news		V	X	V
Time alone/socializing	X	X	V	X
Traveling/living abroad	_	V	X	X
TV/movies	X	X	X	X
Ways of speaking/accents			X	Y.
Work/jobs			X	X
Looking after yourself				X
Memory				X
Weddings				X
Customs/cultural facts				X
British and American English				X
Studies/exams				X

As evident from the data, the most recurrent themes in all four textbooks are advertising, feelings, and TV/movies. The next step in evaluating the motivational impact of these

books involves analyzing whether students could potentially be interested in any of these topics.

5. Topics of Student Interest

After thoroughly examining the prevalent themes in the textbooks, the subsequent phase delves into gauging the alignment of these themes with students' preferences. To accomplish this, a comprehensive needs analysis was conducted among students at the University of Castilla la Mancha (Spain). This analysis includes 122 participants, aged between 17 and 35, all possessing an English proficiency level of B2. The survey pertains to delving into the topics that this particular group of students find interesting and motivating.

The survey required participants to identify topics they would prefer to explore within their classroom experiences. The subsequent table presents these topics, which students found engaging for in-class discussions, along with the frequency of each topic's mention within the surveys. It is noteworthy that some students indicated multiple topics of interest, while others refrained from responding.

Table 2: Topics students find most interesting

Topics of interest	Number of times they topic			
Topics of interest	was mentioned in the surveys			
Work	1			
Videogames	1			
Vegetarianism	1			
Science	1			
Optimism	1			
Movies	1			
Movies	1			
Languages	1			
History	1			
Gender identity	1			
Food	1			
Feelings	1			
Euthanasia	1			
Education	1			
Economy	1			
Celebrities	1			
Cars	1			
Capitalism	1			
Animals	1			
Stereotypes	2			
Politics	2			
Literature	2			
Health/medicine/illnesses	2			
Fashion	2			
Art/theatre	2			

Social networks	3
Expectations about the future	3
Everyday life	3
Technology	4
Environment	4
Sports	6
Other cultures	6
Music	6
World problems (sexism, discrimination, racism)	8
Traveling	8
Current affairs	23

This study brings to light an intriguing insight into student preferences. Notably, the topic that garners the most interest is "current affairs," followed closely by "world problems" and "travel." A comparison of these findings with the content of conventional textbooks reveals a marked disparity between student interests and the material typically presented in textbooks.

Moreover, the prominence of "current affairs" as the most frequently mentioned subject highlights a significant challenge. Finding suitable reading materials becomes complicated due to the swiftly changing nature of contemporary events. Subjects that are intensely debated today might lose their relevance in a matter of months, or even weeks. Consequently, it is unlikely that textbooks will cover such rapidly evolving topics in their curriculum.

Interestingly, while commercial publishers often shy away from controversial topics, it is paradoxical that these are the topics that resonate the most with students.

Lastly, it is important to note that the appeal of these subjects is specific to this particular group of students. Different student groups, varying in age, cultural backgrounds, nationalities, or language proficiency levels, might exhibit diverse interests. Therefore, expecting a single textbook to encompass topics universally interesting to all students might not be realistic.

In conclusion, it seems obvious that students' preferences in terms of topics do not align with those offered by commercial textbooks, which could result in a lack of interest on the part of the students. Especially when considering that "current affairs" is by far the topic that engenders the most interest, it seems unlikely that commercial textbooks will ever cater to students' true interests.

6. Open Educational Resources

As illustrated earlier, conventional textbooks often fail to address the diverse needs and interests of students. One viable approach to comprehensively address course content, impart valuable skills and linguistic resources, and stimulate student engagement through the incorporation of captivating subjects is the utilization of Open Educational Resources. Coined by UNESCO in the year 2000 (Yuan et al., 2008), this concept

encompasses resources that are inherently accessible (typically online), devoid of any monetary charges, and without any constraints such as subscriptions or permissions, as explained by both Yuan et al. (2008) and Hylén (2021). Furthermore, these resources allow end users to customize and tailor materials to cater to the distinct needs and interests of their students or classes, with due attribution to the original creators, as explained by Tuomi (2005). Described as "open fountains of goods" by Tuomi (2005), this collaborative sharing model enhances the value of the final product through subsequent adaptations and modifications.

Theoretically, the extensive availability and diverse array of Open Educational Resources possess the potential to overcome the challenges inherent in traditional textbooks, as discussed previously. The accessibility and wide availability of these resources allow both students and educators to readily identify materials that facilitate coverage of course content while engaging with topics of particular significance to them.

However, in spite of the discussed benefits, several key considerations warrant examination in the context of Open Educational Resources:

- Licensing Complexities: On one hand, as outlined by Hylén (2012), a substantial portion of educators may feel ill-equipped to navigate the intricacies of securing essential licenses or rights for their creations. Conversely, some individuals may express reservations about online sharing due to concerns about relinquishing control over their intellectual property (Hylén, 2012). One potential solution, as proposed by Yuan et al. (2008), involves obtaining a Creative Commons license (http://creativecommons.org/), affording content creators a means to share their work while retaining specified authorship rights. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that Open Educational Resources exist in the digital realm, opening avenues for unauthorized downloads, alterations, and misuse without the creators' knowledge.
- Quality Concerns: Hylén (2012) emphasizes the potential for users to encounter difficulties in assessing the quality or relevance of open educational resources. A potential approach to mitigating this challenge could entail relying on the reputation of educational institutions as a gauge of quality or, alternatively, implementing user-driven evaluation mechanisms such as ratings, comments, or download metrics to provide a more objective assessment.
- Financial Impediments: Hylén (2012) underscores the role of financial constraints in inhibiting the creation of Open Educational Resources. The development of such resources might necessitate specialized expertise, software, or infrastructure, and sustaining creator motivation often requires incentives. Importantly, Open Educational Resources are inherently devoid of monetization, necessitating careful navigation of funding challenges.
- Time Allocation: In addition to Hylén's observations, another noteworthy
 consideration pertains to the investment of time. Identifying resources that align
 with students' and educators' specific requirements for a given class can prove
 time-intensive. While an abundance of materials is available, pinpointing those

- that simultaneously cater to topic relevance, students' language proficiency, and requisite skills can be a time-consuming process. This might prompt some educators to revert to conventional textbooks due to perceived convenience.
- Technological Proficiency: Lastly, a salient challenge pertains to educators' familiarity with technology. While many teachers possess innovative teaching concepts, translating these ideas into digital formats can pose challenges. Some educators might opt for traditional methods due to technological apprehension. In today's landscape, digital literacy is increasingly pivotal in all spheres, including education. Consequently, training educators, both current and prospective, in the usage of diverse applications, software, and online platforms for content creation is imperative.

In conclusion, Open Educational Resources offer considerable potential for enriching language instruction by affording educators and students access to materials that are engaging and motivating. Whether serving as the central resource or a supplementary tool alongside traditional materials, Open Educational Resources have the potential to reshape educational paradigms. However, the effective implementation of Open Educational Resources necessitates a nuanced approach that addresses the aforementioned considerations.

7. Conclusions

The process of crafting or selecting materials for second language instruction reveals a complexity not immediately apparent. Effective materials wield a considerable impact in terms of motivation, contingent upon their ability to captivate students' interest. The creation of such materials should ideally emanate from an analysis of students' needs and preferences. However, while conventional textbooks offer organizational structure and proficiency benchmarks, they often fall short in fostering motivation due to a dearth of alignment with students' interests. The result can be feelings of tedium or diminished enthusiasm among students.

Given the challenge of finding a textbook perfectly tailored to a specific student group, a promising option for enhancing interest in the subject is the integration of Open Educational Resources. These resources, readily accessible and free, facilitate the discovery of materials that pique greater interest for particular group of learners. They can serve as the core instructional materials or provide a more captivating supplement to traditional textbooks.

However, the journey of creating and disseminating these resources is not devoid of contentious aspects. While some solutions have been initiated to address certain challenges, issues like funding, incentivization, and creators' familiarity with the domain still require strategic attention. This is essential to ensure the genuine accessibility of these resources and their continued proliferation, potentially positioning them as the primary reservoir of educational materials. If the considerable expansion of these resources were to transpire and gain substantial adoption among educators and relevant authorities

within the realm of language instruction, it is highly plausible that there would be a corresponding elevation in the levels of motivation observed among language learners.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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