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Introduction

Recently, as far as action research is concerned, scholarly interest begins to show in the way people being studied make sense of their own experience (Peirce, 1995). However, until today little is known of how second language *teachers* themselves view and carry out their own research as well as what conditions support or hinder their innovative performance (Burns, 1999). To make a contribution in this perspective, this paper presents a specific case of classroom intervention conducted by a local teacher in Vietnam in an attempt to bring the syllabus closer to the local culture of learning – a process known as materials localisation.

Taking place in a real, non-laboratory classroom setting in which the existing material offers little opportunity for learners to personalise their learning process, the experiment investigated how realistic it might be for a traditional practitioner to modify his teaching habits to link the existing material to local interests and tested how far students are capable of emitting specific behaviours that are not part of their previous learning experience. This was also a chance to observe how teacher and learner beliefs are revealed through innovation.

Overview: the need to localise ELT materials

Although ‘localisation’ is not a common terminology in ELT discourse, scholarly concern has recently begun to highlight the need to bring materials closer to local cultures, especially in situations where the material is recognised as ineffective in the classroom due to its primary focus on mainstream cultural assumptions. Course materials are sometimes criticised for neglecting how the local educational environment has influenced learning (Lin & Warden, 1998) and for treating all teaching situations across the globe as if they were similar (Maley, 1998). In light of this realisation, there have been appeals for a rethinking of more cross-cultural comparisons in course content to leave more room for learners to express the values important to them (Langley & Maingay, 1984; Lin & Warden, 1998; Sridhar, 1994; Breen & Candlin, 1987). As global ELT courses over the past many years have become increasingly sophisticated with multi-dimensional syllabus design that caters to a more diversified range of learners and more teacher-friendly guidance that reduces teacher preparation (Tomlinson, Bao, Masuhara & Rubdy, 2001), many of them continue to deny learners of their contextual use. Such lack of flexibility amidst all progressive trends seems to make the act of localising materials become, more than ever, an urgent task.

Localisation of second language teaching materials means repairing materials that have problems working in the real classroom because they are composed within the writer's subjective vision of the classroom process and thus fail to harmonise with learners' needs in their own contexts.

Localisation means conceptualising local learners' culture by linking language study not only to their future use but also to their present receptivity. In other words, it aims at matching materials not only with learners' potential relevance and utility in real-life situations but also with their personality and preferences so as to achieve personal contact (Tomlinson, 1998; Brindley, 1989).

Localisation means helping learners to express their identity by providing them with the tools to reflect the type of people they are, by allowing them to utilise their personal knowledge and to take control of their own performance from their own perspective rather than one being dictated by the course material. It is essential that task content should not be so uninformed to learners that they do not fully understand and thus do not know how to discuss it (Hutchison & Waters, 1980; Hunter & Hofbauer, 1989).

Localisation concerns with local learners' right to decide what they need and do not need from what is provided (Breen & Candlin, 1987). To facilitate this right, it aims at making materials inspiring enough to stir and enhance individual learners' interests, needs and abilities as well as their affective involvement (Brumfit & Robert, 1993; Breen & Candlin, 1987) because 'there is, after all, no better motivation for learning a language than a burning desire to express an opinion in that language or on a subject that one really cares about' (Eskey, 1984: 67).

Background of the study

This experiment arose from the need to solve a real problem in many classrooms where students are verbally unresponsive and unenthusiastic during classroom discussion despite teacher attempts to encourage participation. To begin with, a survey was conducted on 44 Vietnamese learners of intermediate English in which they were invited to respond to two questions:

In your personal experience as a learner, what factors often take away your interest in the lesson and intimidate you from participating in classroom discussions?

Would you like to make suggestions so that the teacher can help you feel good and participate better?

Collating answers to the first question shows learner dissatisfaction with the course regarding learning content, target language level, and classroom atmosphere. Much of the content of the present course is not only uninteresting to the students' taste but also alien to their everyday concerns and knowledge, causing them to feel somewhat handicapped for class discussions. The English book being prescribed for the course seems too difficult for the actual proficiency of the class. In addition, classroom climate is not inspiring enough to involve verbal interaction, with little opportunity for learners to communicate with each other.

In response to the second question, the students in the study offered some recommendations in which they desired to see more practical lesson content with topics that they had sufficient knowledge to discuss comfortably, more teaching of appropriate language required for such participation, more opportunities to interact with peers, and more diversified activities that are fresh and exciting rather than routine and predictable.

What inspired me to select this particular classroom for an experiment came from two features. First, the teacher of this class seemed to be deeply traditional in his lecturing style, but was willing to modify his performance for my research. Second, my observations prior to the intervention demonstrated that the 44 students of this class were extremely quiet during their lesson, but through a survey also expressed a cooperative attitude toward plans for an experiment to facilitate better participation. By choosing a more or less conservative teacher and a deeply reticent group, I hoped to investigate how realistic it might be for a traditional classroom to move toward a more flexible, innovative style. In a word, both the teacher and students of this class represented significant challenges that were worth overcoming.

The original lesson script in the coursebook

The lesson used for the experiment was chosen not only because it was part of the syllabus but also because the local teacher felt that it was quite a difficult lesson to teach well. It begins with a reading text called 'A Family in Beirut,' which talks about how a family still manages to maintain its traditional lifestyle and everyday habits despite the ongoing context of a war. This is what the original reading passage looks like (Greenall & Swan, 1993: 27):

Eight years of civil war in Lebanon, of shooting and shelling and bombing, have not deterred the Saidi family from gathering around the table of Mme Saidi, the 72-year-old matriarch of the clan, for the customary Friday lunch. And from the busy activity in Mme Saidi's kitchen, the iron pot bubbling on the stove, the cornucopia of fresh vegetables on the kitchen table, the aroma of herbs and spices, garlic and peppers, you would not know that Beirut was still a beleaguered city, or that the population of this once enchanting Mediterranean paradise still lives under the pressure of random violence and dangerous uncertainty.

It is a mark of resilience and determination that the Lebanese and of the families like the Saidis that they have been able to maintain a semblance of normal life and family customs.

Today's meal is to be a feast of many traditional Lebanese dishes: kibbinayeh (a tartare-like dish of raw ground mutton with ground heat and spices), kibbeh meshweh (balls of grilled meat fat, walnuts, spices and onions), 'mjederah (cooked lentils, fried onions and ground wheat), lbnimu (a cooked yoghurt sauce with meat and onions), mnezeleh (a casserole-like dish of cooked aubergines, onions, houmous, tomatoes, green peppers, garlic and olive oil), fareek (ground wheat), a chicken and macaroni dish in a milk sauce and salad, followed by melon and fresh fruit and a choice of five flavours of ice cream and sherbet.

Lebanese cooking is flavourful and imaginative. From four or five basic things, Mme Saidi points out, the Lebanese make 50 different dishes. From

lentils, perhaps five varieties of soup and a half dozen variations of 'mjederah. From aubergines, more than ten.

The troubles in Lebanon over the past eight years have, inevitably, made some ingredients of Lebanese cooking scarce and others prohibitively expensive.

'I keep books,' says Mme Saidi, 'and I find things have gone up more than 100 times. Meat was difficult the past few years and fresh meat is still expensive. Most of our lamb comes from Turkey, the beef from Europe. It can cost as much as 50 Lebanese pounds (£8) per kilo. A red fish we like, sultan ibrahim, cost 150 Lebanese pounds (£25) for one kilo.'

Mme Saidi makes quick forays out of the kitchen to greet them with hugs and kisses, warm welcomes, then hurries back to watch over the cooking.

It has just gone 2.30 pm and everyone is together. Baskets full of flat, round Lebanese bread are passed around. The food comes not so much in courses, starters, main dishes, but in waves of flavours. Everyone helps themselves.

Plates are filled and refilled. The many dishes, family favourites, the kibbinayeh, kibbeh meshweh, and 'mjederah, all so carefully and painstakingly prepared, disappeared as if by a conjuror's trick. So that for a while at least, on Friday afternoons, the troubles of their country can be put aside and the illusion of normal life, of laughter and living well can go on.

(James Horowitz in the *Mail* on Sunday *YOU* Magazine)

My classroom observation prior to the experiment and interviews with the teacher showed that the existing syllabus for his class remained beyond the proficiency level of most students. Inadequate assimilation of the language, as Madsen & Bowen (1978) observe, sometimes stems from the choice of material used. Besides, although the exercises following the passage are well designed, they remain unattractive to many Vietnamese students and thus the teacher and I decided to not to employ them in this experiment.

Unsuitable components in the script

From my perspective and based on consultation with the teacher in charge, the lesson from the coursebook seemed unsuitable for the target students for several reasons: its cultural content did not arouse learner interest, its target language input seemed too ambitious, and affective impact was seriously lacking.

Although the passage is set in a socio-cultural context unfamiliar to Vietnamese everyday life, the material does not set the scene to arouse a desire to learn about it. Besides, the exercises offer little opportunity for students to personalise what they read, and according to the teacher in charge, the subject matter was not well received by his students in many previous courses. As Hunter & Hofbauer (1989) remark, interaction in the classroom often fails because it relies on texts that emphasise topics in which students are not interested. Learner interest in the subject matter is considered as a factor that increases motivation and enjoyment, and enriches the whole learning process (Cunningsworth, 1984; Dubin & Olshtain, 1977).

Linguistically, the reading above is filled with too many new words, which often makes exploring it quite painful a task and takes away all the reading pleasure. Although many new expressions can be guessed or even ignored, certain key terms which remain essential for comprehending the passage are difficult for students of this level to

discover the meanings of such as: deterred, beleaguered, resilience, illusion, among others. This situation is made more complicated by the students' learning habits. According to the teacher, no matter how he insisted on the need to focus more on text ideas, his students would never be happy until they had every new word fully explained. In case a text proved too difficult, such explanation might take up the entire class time so that before all the words were clear it would be time to go home.

Not only did the teacher's previous students dislike the passage for being too difficult, the teacher himself did not like the vocabulary in the reading for two reasons. One, its language is full of elaborate vocabulary describing detailed Lebanese food ingredients which stay outside of the students' cooking experience and do not meet their needs in the real world (such as kibbinayeh, tartare, kibbeh meshweh, mjederah, lentils, mnezeleh, houmous, fareek, sherbet, etc.). Two, although the subject matter deals with relationships between people, the text concentrates only on facts and object items, and is almost completely devoid of words and expressions that describe personal feelings. Over many courses, the teacher had never felt that he liked this lesson.

Given all the above complications, one may wonder why such an irrelevant script should not be skipped over altogether to be replaced by a more manageable one. Unfortunately, this is part of the syllabus assigned by the institute and teachers have no other option but teach it to their students.

Repairing unsuited components

To adapt this lesson, the teacher and I decided to carry out three tasks: adjusting linguistic input to cater for pleasure reading, modifying activities to suit the students' culture, and building more spontaneous, dynamic communication to enhance the classroom atmosphere.

To begin with, the lesson script was reformulated to step closer to what the target class could cope with. As Clamb (1996) recommends, among methods to effectively motivate learners the teacher should consider an appropriate level of difficulty. We agreed to provide the class with a simplified version of the text and explain that the two reasons for this adaptation are to make the reading task more linguistically suitable and to make the text more concise to save time for more interaction. Below is the adaptation:

(a) Eight years of civil war in Lebanon, of shooting and bombing, have not deterred the Saidi family from gathering around the table of Madam Saidi, the 72-year-old head of the family, for the customary Friday lunch. And from the busy activity in Mme Saidi's kitchen, the iron pot bubbling on the stove, the large supply of fresh vegetables on the kitchen table, the aroma of herbs and spices, garlic and peppers, you would not know that Beirut was still a city surrounded by the enemy, or that the population of this once delightful Mediterranean paradise still lives under the pressure of violence and danger.

(b) It is a mark of flexibility and determination that the Lebanese and of the families like the Saidis that they have been able to maintain an outward appearance of normal life and family customs.

Today's meal comprises many traditional Lebanese dishes: kibbinayeh (cooked with mutton), kibbeh meshweh (balls of grilled meat fat), 'mjederah (lentils and wheat), lbnimu (yoghurt sauce with meat and onions), mnezeleh (aubergines

and different vegetables), fareek (ground wheat), a chicken and macaroni dish in a milk sauce and salad, followed by melon and fresh fruit and a choice of five flavours of ice cream.

(c) Lebanese cooking is flavourful and imaginative. From four or five basic things, Mme Saidi points out, the Lebanese make 50 different dishes. However, the troubles in Lebanon over the past eight years have made some ingredients of Lebanese cooking scarce and expensive. 'I keep books,' says Mme Saidi, 'and I find things have gone up more than 100 times. Meat was difficult the past few years and fresh meat is still expensive.'

(d) Mme Saidi came quickly out of the kitchen to greet them with hugs and kisses, warm welcomes, then hurries back to watch over the cooking. It has just gone 2.30 pm and everyone is together. Baskets full of flat, round Lebanese bread are passed around. The food comes not so much in courses, starters, main dishes, but in flavours. Everyone helps themselves.

Plates are filled and refilled. The many dishes, family favourites all so carefully prepared, disappeared as if by magic. So that for a while at least, on Friday afternoons, the troubles of their country can be put aside and the illusion of normal life, of laughter and living well can go on.

In addition, the exercises were redesigned with more stimulation toward the students' interest. An introductory activity was added prior to the reading task for the teacher and students to chat about their eating experiences to brainstorm relevant language for the lesson theme. Comprehension questions related to the reading were planned in a way that would enable students to compare the life and habits of characters in the passage with those in their own family. We also created a cooperative activity in which students could form groups and discuss how to best cook a Vietnamese dish that they felt like having for dinner that evening. This, in the end, would be transformed to a game for each team to describe its recipe to other teams and challenge them to guess the name of that dish by utilising their previous knowledge about cookery.

The teacher and I had several discussions from which we arrived at a number of strategies to improve classroom atmosphere and enhance participation quality. To build interest and trust, we decided to set the scene for the main topic in a way that would arouse learner curiosity and establish the right expectation to avoid confusion when the adapted lesson seemed different from routine. To facilitate but still keep some degree of challenge, the teacher would pre-teach a number of key words essential for comprehension but would leave the rest for students to guess meanings of. To give students more space to be themselves, some time was allocated for silent reading to enable students to control of their own reading speed and, from such reading, could interact with peers for a sense of sharing. To create spontaneous communication and a friendly classroom climate, the teacher would have more personal and impulsive chats with the class in which his talk would be constructed on student talk to inspire further contribution. Having agreed on the objectives that were going to guide his performance, the teacher was encouraged to make personal decisions to modify the experiment according to the actual development of his lesson. It has been acknowledged that teaching requires both decisions made prior to the classroom and actual moment-to-moment teaching techniques that can move beyond the lesson plan itself (Richards & Rodgers 1986, in Littlewood, 1992; Richards & Lockhart, 1999; William & Burden, 1997).

The experiment in action

5:30 PM

Setting up the mood

Cam [the teacher's name] began the lesson by telling his class about the purpose of the experiment. He emphasised that today's lesson was specially designed to meet their suggestions to provide better conditions for their participation and hoped that everyone would be willing to cooperate. At this many students looked attentive and seemed to be eagerly waiting to see what the new lesson had to offer. Arguably, making such appeal is one way to seek learner responsibility as participants in the experiment. Establishing the right expectation from the beginning is an important act because it helps tackle a sense of will (Leontiev, 1981) and a readiness for learning (Gagne, 1970). It also builds mutual trust to reduce fear of leaping into the unknown (Stern, 1983; Savignon, 1983; Prabhu, 1992) and reduce conflict between teacher and student perceptions (Nunan, 1989).

Compared to the session I had observed earlier, the number of students today was reduced from 44 to only 29 members. The teacher also noticed this change, and in the next minute began to comment on it.

Teacher: How come there are so few students today?

Class: (no response)

Teacher: It's ten minutes past five now. Why?

Class: (no response)

Teachers: Did you expect that it would rain tonight? Did you know that it was going to rain?

Class: No.

Teacher: You like this weather?

Class: No.

Teacher: Some of you like rain very much, right?

Class: (shook their heads)

Teacher: Why not?

Class: Bad weather...

Teacher: Bad weather? I agree. I don't like to go teach in this weather. How about you?

Class: (some students) No, I don't like...

Teacher: Why not? Some people say the rain is romantic

Class: The rain make difficult go to school...

Teacher: The rain makes going to school difficult... That's why many people come late today...

The above extract shows how difficult it was for the teacher to elicit student talk. But it also demonstrates that when the teacher attempted to communicate beyond a pedagogical purpose, he at least was able to stimulate several spontaneous responses. Although early in this dialogue the teacher sounded as if he was complaining about the students' tardiness, as the topic of weather developed further its content gradually took on a more light-hearted and friendly effect that led the students to open up better. After a few minutes, Cam began to organise a topic-oriented discussion by talking about his eating experience.

Teacher: Guess what? I went to a great restaurant before this class! It was a small family-restaurant but the food was wonderful... I had cha gio... I can tell you it was the best cha gio I ever had in years!

Class: (Silent but looked interested)

Teacher: Any of you like cha gio?

Class: Yes.

Teacher: Do you want to know what restaurant it was?

Class: Yes...

As students were getting curious to know the name of the restaurant, they listened attentively and jotted down the address. Cam continued to tell the class how he preferred to eat out due to his lack of time for cooking. He then asked the students about their eating habits, to which they replied in short phrases. I was pleased to see Cam began the lesson with a personal voice. In my impression, although this initial interaction was still dominated by teacher talk and did not evoke an overwhelming reaction, it was a positive shift from the conventional refrain 'Open your book to lesson four on page...' which often begins many lessons in Vietnamese classrooms. Putting myself in the students' shoes at this point allowed me to sense a comfortable feeling in the classroom climate which I hoped would develop further into authentic interaction. Such moments are captured in a comment by Fu (1995: 199):

What and how teachers do and say things greatly affects the atmosphere of the class community. Teachers' sharing of their own stories is an important way to set an intimate tone for their classes and is a good model for a learning community of equal partners.

5: 40 PM Resisting the lesson plan

Although the teacher and I had planned to keep the class informed of the lesson procedure to form the right expectation and build a climate of trust, this step did not take place. Instead, Cam distributed the class with the simplified version of the text without explaining the reasons for this adaptation to avoid confusion. Since there was no clear instruction that the revised reading passage was supposed to replace the original one, many students for a few minutes still referred to their textbook version. This was the first instant of the experiment that the teacher displayed some degree of resistance to the innovation. Later on, in a subsequent interview, the teacher's elaboration of this moment demonstrates how he does not believe in learners' role in sharing classroom decision:

I don't think unnecessary to explain our plan to the students because both the teaching procedure and change of materials belong in the teacher's responsibility...

As the lesson proceeded further, I realised that the teacher and I did not seem to understand the objectives of this intervention in the same manner, especially when he suddenly reverted to a lecturing mode with intense focus on language form. Cam began to read the passage aloud and then paused at nearly every new word, instead of some key words as prearranged, to explain or translate the meanings. This unexpected presentation, which took about 20 minutes, delayed what had been designed to save

time for more interaction and contradicted with what Littlewood (1992: 99) suggests, 'the first step toward making space for the learner is to reduce the dominance of the teacher.' This was the second time the teacher's habitual style strongly interfered into the experiment. My follow-up interview with Cam later revealed how torn he must have felt between implementing change and sustaining his previous classroom routine. Part of him regretted this decision and yet the other part felt the need to defend his own choice:

... I shouldn't have spent so much time on every new word but I knew that my students would never accept a different way of teaching! They always wanted all the new expressions explained clearly before the reading task...

I respected Cam's belief in student behaviour and understood his hesitation in making an abrupt modification. However, his decision to smooth out the lesson by indulging the students' habitual style happened to take away my chance to find out more about how far the students were capable of coping with a different way of handling the lesson. Arguably, during these minutes, the teacher found himself in a predicament that posed a psychological barrier to any pedagogical innovation. Such barrier is prompted by the teacher's own beliefs, which are described by Williams & Burden (1997) as affecting classroom action more than a particular methodology one is told to adopt or a coursebook one follows. Agyris & Schon (1974, in Williams & Burden, 1997) further warns that teacher beliefs, which notoriously tend to be culturally bound and can be far more influential than knowledge in deciding classroom actions, are highly resistant to change. From this realisation, Fu (1995: 199) appeals for teachers' re-evaluation of their own practice:

I do not think teachers should be afraid of doing something incongruent with the ways students were raised, as every culture has room for improvement and every nation progresses by adopting other strengths for its own benefit.

6:00 PM

Skipping learner preparation

After providing new language, during the subsequent 15 minutes it is noticed that the teacher happened to neglect learner need for silent reading. Instead, he promptly raised comprehension questions that demand learners' instant participation while leaving them with no space for actual preparation. As a result, the students either stayed quiet or struggled to seek for the right detail from the text to produce answers. Furthermore, when they managed to find the details, many questions turned out to be so simple that the students, instead of inferring meanings, could read out their answers directly from the script. The classroom atmosphere somehow grew monotonous, and the ways in which the lesson was conducted seemed to be a glaring contrast with how it was started off in the first 10 minutes. On a critical note, Piper (1998) observes that the reason why conversational skills fail to develop in the classroom is because many teachers tend to control learner talk not by helping it to meet learners' purpose but by directing it to the teacher's purpose.

Interestingly, this was the third time during the experiment that the teacher resisted the plans and reverted back to his usual teaching habits. Teacher resistance to change, in fact, has been a significant concern in empirical research. Merrett & Wheldall (1986) recognise enormous difficulty in getting teachers to emit specific behaviours that are not part of their teaching experience. This is because it is often not easy for teachers with deeply engrained habits and assumptions about language teaching to accept other views and to employ other methods which would require confidence in them to exercise effectively (Bamber, 1987). Kenny & Savage (1997: 291-292) also notes:

All human systems tend to seek stability and hence preserve themselves from undesirable or unnecessary change. Except in dire situations where it is a choice between changing and perishing, it is much easier to stay the same.

6:20 PM

Making improved efforts

After focusing on various details in the reading, Cam's questions began to invite more learner inference and no longer simply pulled out words directly from the script. The discussion gradually moved beyond the reading text and the nature of the interaction started to improve as some of the questions touched on the students' interest and were received with better responsiveness. The teacher also welcomed student response more warmly with compliments and further conversational development. The following transcript shows one moment of teacher-student interaction lit up by a more natural spark of authentic communication:

Teacher: ...Now for dinner, how many people cook? Do many people help Madam Saidi to cook or does she cook alone?
Class: She cook alone.
Teacher: Do you like it when one person has to cook alone for so many people?
Class: (silent)
Teacher: (Receiving no response, the teacher then translated the above question) Okay... Now, if you were Madam Saidi, would you cook alone or would you get someone to help you?
Class: Get someone to help...
Teacher: That's a good idea. At your home who cooks?
Class: (silent)
Teacher: At your home who cooks the meals?
Student 1: (volunteered to answer) My mother.
Teacher: Does your father help her?
Student 1: Yes...
Teacher: When?
Student 1: When she ask him...
Teacher: Only when she asks him!
Student 1: Yes.
Teacher: What if she never asks?... Do you think most mothers cook in the family?
Several students: Yes.
Teacher: (looked at student 2) Who cooks for you at home?
Student 2: My sister. My sister cook...
Teacher: That's good. So your sister makes meals for your mother, I mean for the whole family?
Student 2: My mother died...

Teacher: Oh, your mother passed away already. I'm sorry... But... how come only mothers and sisters do the cooking? What about your father and brother? Do they cook sometimes?

Student 3: (volunteered) What about you, teacher?

Student 4: Do you cook for your wife?

Class: (laughed)

Teacher: Do I cook? What do you think? Can you guess?

Student 5: (volunteered) You don't cook!

Class: (laughed loudly)

Teacher: (smiled) Well, I teach all day, and I eat out. How can you cook when you eat in a restaurant?

Class: (laughed)

...

What brightened up this brief discussion was the fact that the teacher had managed to construct further interaction based on student contribution and stir up the classroom climate in a natural moment of unplanned discourse. He also stimulated the students' imagination by personalising the reading content. Being inspired by more authentic and meaningful discourse, the students were noticed to voluntarily express their thoughts without waiting for teacher nomination. As the teacher showed sincere interest in participants' ideas by inviting their personal responses, he was able to link the conversation to what the class genuinely wanted to say, which allowed the teacher-student relationship to take on a more relaxed and friendly nature. Later on Cam remarked to me that his enthusiasm was influenced by learner responsiveness to his teaching in that every time students became more inclined to open up and reciprocate his effort, he felt inspired to try harder and pursue their thoughts to develop interaction.

6:35PM

Increasing learner involvement

The brief but lively discussion ended in a pleasant feeling and a suitable climate for another interactive activity. Now the teacher requested his students to put away their books and form into groups to discuss their favourite food. Since classroom space was limited and all the heavy rows of tables could not be moved, he asked many to turn around to face one another. Cam went on to explain that each group was to discuss and decide on a Vietnamese dish that all the members enjoyed eating, then without telling other groups the name of that dish, they would brainstorm the best way to cook it. Finally a representative from each group would describe to the other groups how to make this food and invite them to guess what it was.

It took a couple of minutes for the discussion to build up slowly. The four teams began to settle in their own corner and became visibly more relaxed, being released from the central authority for the first time during the lesson. They smiled, chat and grew noisier than before. Some were speaking English while others were using their mother tongue or both languages. The teacher continued to visit all the groups and reminded them that they had to stick to the target language. Although the teacher was approaching every group to attentively listen, few students seemed to aware of his presence as most of them were simply drawn into interacting with their partners. Soon student voices filled the classroom climate and were inaudible to me, however it became clear that each team was enjoying the activity by talking more and smiling more than before. There

was a brief moment when a few students were noticed to discuss other things when the teacher came and reminded them to talk about food. This incident showed that student talk could flow more easily when the students decided for themselves what they wished to say.

It was now only 10 minutes before the end of the lesson. Cam was trying to get everyone to stop their discussion to report what they had; yet the students were so drawn into their group conversation to notice the time or the reminder. Finally the teacher had to convince one person to represent her group and show up in front of the class. As he managed to quiet the class down, the student took charge, describing in her own words the cooking procedure of her favourite dish. As she drew everyone's good attention, some class members volunteered to ask questions. Unfortunately, the time left was limited. Some students suddenly became more involved and communicated well with the speaker when the bell started ringing. Many others looked as if they were now in the mood to participate more.

7:00 PM
Ending the experiment

The class was now supposed to stop, and yet the student still continued speaking. Her English flowed more easily than when she first started. I was amused and fascinated by this individual performance. Finally the teacher had to stop this activity because they had to move out for the next class to use the room. I really wish they could have had more time to talk. What stood out in my notes at the moment was the fact that toward the end of the experiment, during the last half an hour more than 70 % of students were seen to open their mouth and speak to the teacher or to one another. Although their contribution was more occasional than intensive, it was a positive change compared to a mere figure of 30% participation as observed in the previous lesson.

Learner reaction to the experiment

By and large, the learners involved in the innovation take pleasure in the experiment and gain good impression of the classroom atmosphere. Beyond what the teacher and I had anticipated, 84% of the students express positive feelings towards the experiment and admit that they have managed to speak more and enjoy the lesson process. Many also comment that the experiment saw everyone, including the teacher, become friendlier to each other and suggest that this cheerful climate should be maintained in future courses.

72% of the students support the nature of many interactions and recognised the discussion about their favourite food as what they enjoyed doing the most throughout the entire lesson. This support falls in line with recent research which discovers that cooperative learning is particularly suitable to many collectivist cultures where a sense of belonging to the group is important and a feeling of positive interdependence allows no individual to dominate (Rodgers, 1988; Fu 1995; Williams & Burden, 1997). Kagan (1986, in Rodgers, 1988) reports that in the United States co-operative learning methods are presently employed to address the failure of its educational system to cater to minority students who verbalise less than Americans. In a study of Lao students in the English language classroom, Fu (1995) also observes that Asian students do better

and are more active in cooperative than in individual situations. Another 8% of the students support the teacher in organising discussions outside of the material, especially when they are guided to communicate in contexts that are interesting, entertaining, and realistic to them. As Fu (1995) notes, if students see the value and enjoy a new kind of learning, they tend to try hard to accommodate themselves to what should be expected of them.

Despite all this, a small group does not support the experiment. 4% of the students state that they dislike the teaching style and 12% did not write down their opinion about the teacher's methods. Regarding conditions for class participation, 10.5% says the teacher pay more attention to the students sit in the front rows than the rest of the class. 21% complain that many of their classmates are still silent throughout most of the lesson. In addition, many students experience difficulty with spoken English. In particular, 16% comment that in this experiment the teacher spoke more English than usual which seems beyond their comprehension and 47% suggest that this method should continue yet the teacher should speak English more slowly and clearly so that everyone could understand. Other students express more concern for more explicit knowledge to be taught. Specifically, 26% wish that the teacher had taught as carefully as usual, corrected their mistakes, and trained them in their pronunciation such as reading out loud for everyone to repeat. These students felt that they fail to learn properly because the teacher did not make judgment of their English.

Concluding remarks

In general, the case study has achieved positive results in incorporating local learners' culture into ELT materials by taking learner suggestions seriously, by making the linguistic input more appropriate, and by exploiting what learners know best. Such achievements testify the value of teaching resources taken from learner background, which provides better conditions for learner interaction in the target language, including spontaneous discourse and self-selected participation.

The experiment has highlighted some samples of resistance from both local teachers and students in attempting preliminary innovation in their own classroom. Learner resistance comes from the fact that many reticent students continue to stay silent throughout most discussions, as this behaviour stems from a matter of poor proficiency, dissatisfaction with the method, intimidation by many eloquent class members, and the lack of explicit grammar teaching. Teacher resistance is shown through how teacher beliefs interfered into the experiment. By comparing the teachers' actual implementation of the lesson plan with its original objectives, it is found that some of the conditions designed to increase learner participation (such as allowing peer discussion of the reading passage and organising for the class to guess the meanings of vocabulary) in fact were not provided. Despite all this, it is important to also acknowledge and praise the teacher's willingness in moving away from his dominant role during the lesson.

The innovation also shows some logic dependence between teacher performance and student participation. When teacher performance provides better conditions for students to open up, they became more responsive. Conversely, when they see that the teacher while conducting the experiment still maintained the tendency to lecture or focus on

linguistic form, they would act accordingly by keeping quiet and concentrating on note-taking. This observable link between teacher and student behaviours suggests that participants' mutual interpretation is an important aspect of the experiment that should extend implications to other empirical research.

Among the most thought-provoking moments was the lively flow of interaction at the end of the lesson when the students were organised to talk about what they liked best and knew best. This spark of enhanced performance, brief as it was, is a reminder that local teachers should not underestimate learner competence in the classroom. Such potential, once given the right condition, is always capable of stretching beyond learners' established habits and regular attitudes. As Fu (1995: 207) observes:

When our students come to school, they do not come in a vacuum. They carry their home culture and literary and life experiences with them. They come to us full of curiosity and imagination (...) They are filled with hopes and dreams, and also questions and wonders. What each of our students carries with him or her should be the resource for our teaching as well as the starting point of the students' learning.

The innovation has tested the realisability of change by showing, to a certain extent, that both the teacher and learners have potential to move beyond their traditional role and modify behaviour. It also testifies the important role of local knowledge in bringing the syllabus closer to the local classroom, as learners are able to voice their concern and the teacher is able to recognise and understand that concern.

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A case study of localised approaches to the. Concept of method at a rural vietnamese college. Dan Tam Thi Nguyen. A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences University of Technology Sydney February 2018. Certificate of authorship. In researching the field, I noticed that nearly all the studies in Vietnam exploring the topic of the communicative approach were based on participants (students) in programs where English was not the students' major field of study. The majority of these studies reported the failure of the communicative approach and confirmed that the grammar translation method was dominant. PDF | In efforts to make English language teaching (ELT) congruent with global and regional trends, Vietnamese education leaders have introduced a national policy. in which English is made compulsory from Year 3 at primary level. The goals. curiosity and interest. This way of adapting materials has a great impact on learning. outcomes, as teachers can make their classroom a non-threatening, comfortable and. stress-free environment (Moon, 2000). Compared to the teaching and learning practices in urban areas, PEFL education. Localizing ELT materials in Vietnam: A case study. In W. A. Renandya (Ed.), Methodology and materials design in language teaching: Current perceptions and practices and their implications (pp. 170-191). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre. Day, R. (2003). Authenticity in the design and development of materials. In W. A. Renandya. (Ed.), Methodology and materials design in language teaching (pp. 1-11). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre. Localising ELT materials in Vietnam: A case study. In W. A. Renandya (Ed.), Methodology and materials design in language teaching: Current perceptions and practices and their implications, Anthology series 44 (pp. 170-191). Singapore: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Regional Language Centre. Google Scholar. Doyle, P., Cheng, E., & Koh, J. (2011). Cite this chapter as: Wu S.M., Navera G.S. (2018) ELT Materials as Sites of Values Education: A Preliminary Observation of Secondary School Materials. In: Widodo H., Perfecto M., Van Canh L., Buripakdi A. (eds) Situating Moral and Cultural Values in ELT Materials. English Language Education, vol 9. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63677-1_4.