

## **‘Your guide but not your master’ - adapting the textbook to increase learning and motivation**

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### **1. Abstract**

Textbooks are a key resource that all teachers have access to and are provided to all learners island-wide in Sri Lanka. However, the textbook should not be seen as the master but rather as a guide, a collection of activities or resources that can be exploited by the teacher to enhance learning and help learners to achieve the learning outcomes of competency levels in the syllabus. Therefore, how can teachers exploit textbooks with realistic, achievable adaptations that will have maximum impact on a particular group's learning and motivation? How can teachers ensure a balance of skills? If we want our learners to succeed in today's world of work, education and communication, they will need to be competent speakers and listeners so how can teachers integrate more speaking and listening practice into their classes and help learners to develop these skills? The numerous texts contained within school textbooks can be used for comprehension and to carry meaning, to present language in context, to develop skills and also to get learners responding on a given topic. This paper explores different approaches to exploiting textbook materials, in particular texts, to support learners' understanding, production and engagement with tasks that are transferable to any grade.

### **2. Sub-theme**

This paper relates to the sub theme of ‘the speaking and listening challenge’. In order to provide Sri Lankan school children with a fit-for-purpose, relevant education, where they are confident and competent communicators, the inclusion of more speaking and listening is key and adapting textbooks to achieve this is therefore of vital importance.

### **3. Story**

As the name suggests, textbooks contain a large amount of texts and are a key classroom resource. Texts such as newspaper and magazine articles, stories, comic strips and brochures are also readily available outside the classroom and online and can be chosen to motivate and engage learners. That said, as Clandfield (2020) rightly points out, ‘the gap between a teacher finding a text and successfully using it in class can be quite large’.

Three approaches to using texts in the classroom can help teachers to really make the most of texts, increase motivation, integrate skills (especially by incorporating more speaking and listening development and practice), integrate language and help

learners to become more confident communicators: these approaches are TAVI, TALO and TASP.

### **TAVI:**

TAVI refers to using the text as a vehicle for information. Put simply, this means that the information or content found in the text is focused on first. A classic example would be a story or dialogue in a textbook. Learners read or listen to the story and focus on the meaning of the text, or to put it another way, on comprehending the information/message in the text itself. If teachers want to provide their learners with more listening practice than the textbook has, readings can easily be adapted into listening texts with the teacher reading the text aloud using gestures, voices and intonation to aid comprehension. A simple but effective lesson shape for skills is 'pre', 'while' and 'post': pre-reading/listening tasks to help prepare the learners, while-reading/listening tasks to help them develop their reading/listening skills and a post-reading/listening task to allow learners to respond to the text. Textbooks may have comprehension questions or a task for the 'while' stage, though not all do and some might need adapting. Motivating and useful 'pre' and 'post' tasks may well need to be added.

Typical TAVI tasks to help learners understand the meaning of the text itself, as Clandfield suggests, include:

- comprehension questions (simple questions, multiple choice questions, true/false questions etc).
- predict the content of the text e.g. using pictures or key words/phrases, then read/listen and check.
- read/listen and identify new information (e.g. a text about historical sites in Sri Lanka)
- put the events in order (e.g. a story).

### **TALO:**

The TALO approach focuses on using the text as a language object. Basically, this means the learners focus on the language in the text i.e. the grammar or the vocabulary. Texts are an excellent way to present language (e.g. a grammar point) in context and this is extremely beneficial for aiding learners' understanding. Of course, learners need to understand the meaning of the text first (TAVI) and then can look at the grammar or vocabulary in the text (TALO). Sri Lankan textbooks often use texts to present language e.g. a role-play/act out dialogue of a unit might contain a lot of examples of the present continuous, prepositions of place or vocabulary related to sports. Authentic texts, or texts not written for pedagogical purposes could be used, such as from a magazine or a teacher could adapt an authentic text (making it 'semi-authentic') to include more examples of the target grammar or vocabulary.

Examples of TALO activities include:

- the teacher copies examples of the target language (grammar or vocabulary) from the text onto the board to present new language. The teacher can then ask guiding questions to help learners discover the meaning and form.
- learners find all the examples of X (e.g. the present continuous) in the text.
- learners find all the words in the text related to a particular topic e.g. sports (e.g. net, ball, racquet etc).
- the teacher gives learners a list of synonyms/antonyms to find in the text.

- learners complete the half expressions on the board using examples in the text (e.g. playing / cricket; riding / a pony; sitting / on the grass).

### **TASP:**

Finally, the TASP approach uses the text as a springboard for production. This means that the topic of the text is used to get the learners speaking or writing after they have read/listened to the text. Here the topic of the text is key; the teacher needs to find ways to get the learners responding to the text in a way that is achievable for their level and will motivate them to want to talk. Texts from the textbooks could be used, as could authentic or semi-authentic materials.

Examples of TASP include:

- learners talk about the topic of the text, ideally in a way that is relevant and personalised to them (e.g. after a role-play/act-out text about families, they talk about their families. Note that here the focus is not on speaking accurately. This is an opportunity for learners to communicate with each other, so they are developing their fluency in speaking).
- learners have a debate using the topic of the text (e.g. the advantages and disadvantages of using the internet; deciding on 5 places to visit in Sri Lanka on a school trip).
- learners do a role-play using the topic of the text (e.g. the text is about school. The learners take on different roles e.g. student, teacher, principal, parent and have to organise a school festival).
- learners retell the content of the text/describe pictures using language from the text.
- learners ask each other questions about the text (e.g. a text about famous places in Sri Lanka: Galle Fort was built in 1588. True or false?).

## **4. Lessons and/or Recommendations**

Texts, either in textbooks or from other sources, can therefore be used to help learners develop their reading/listening skills, improve their grammar and vocabulary and develop those all-important communication and speaking skills. Clandfield highlights the fact that successful lessons and programmes combine these three approaches to develop receptive, productive and linguistic skills depending on the needs of the learners and the type of text. The challenge and opportunity for teachers is to constantly evaluate texts and learner needs in order to make full use of the textbook as a resource, not their master.

## **5. References**

*Clandfield, L. 'Text in language classrooms: TALO, TAVI and TASP'*  
<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/text-language-classrooms-talo-tavi-tasp> (accessed 27 May 2020).