

Japanese university EFL teachers' perspectives on EAP coursebooks and authentic EP/OP supplementary materials

Soyhan Egitim, Faculty of Human Life Design, Toyo University, Saitama, Japan

Email: soyhan@toyo.jp;



Gregory Price, Faculty of Science and Technology, Tokyo University of Science, Chiba, Japan

Email: grendel.t@rs.tus.ac.jp

Abstract.

This paper aims to understand the perspectives of Japanese university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers on the use of varying authentic supplementary materials while following standard English for Academic Purposes (EAP) coursebooks. A series of narrative interviews were conducted with Japanese university EFL teachers, in order to gain deeper insights into how they perceive and make meaning of their material preferences and teaching approaches. The responses suggest that EAP coursebooks can serve as a valuable guide due to their structured outline of the main teaching and learning points. In addition, incorporating authentic supplementary materials designed for the purposes of Professional and Occupational English (EP/OP), alongside EAP coursebook contents can be beneficial as they can bring diversity to class activities, provide exposure to authentic language, and connect the classroom environment to the professional world. With an understanding of the specialized needs and goals of their students, foreign language teachers can maximize the creative potential of their materials, making them relevant to fulfill those specific objectives.

Keywords: coursebooks, EAP, EFL, Japanese, materials, occupational, professional, teaching, university.

Coursebooks as the main component of EAP materials.

Language teachers in Japanese universities are faced with disseminating information to groups of students who have developed study and learning patterns throughout their grade school and secondary school years. In a study of foreign language instruction at the Japanese high school level, Gorsuch (1998) focuses on *yakudoku* teaching, which is akin to the grammar/translation method. The research is based on interviews with teachers. Their main concern is the university entrance exams, and they develop lectures accordingly. One of the teachers in the study commented that "for students to create their own English sentences would be too difficult, but he believed that if given a model to follow, students could copy that" (Gorsuch, 1998, p. 29). Japanese

students develop teacher-centered learning habits with a heavy focus on achievements in standardized exams prior to entering universities (King, 2013). Such learning habits lend themselves to EAP coursebook reliance.

When considering stereotypical Japanese grade school English classes and their focus on passing standardized tests, it becomes evident why there has been a history of a text-based approach in Japanese classrooms. For many years, linguistic knowledge in the communicative approach mainly came from examination of the written form. However, in recent years, advanced audio technology has made it possible to bring a wide variety of authentic spoken language into the classroom. According to Gilmore (2008), this has helped shift the focus from grammar to oral communication and revealed that coursebooks have lacked quality examples of spoken language (p. 24-25).

Using authentic supplementary materials in EFL classes.

Duarte and Escobar (2008) state that many students lose interest in the material covered if they are not cognitively and emotionally challenged. This negative effect on the students' motivation can harm the efforts they make to meet their specific language learning goals. Gilmore (2008) found, in research involving English major students at a Japanese university, that authentic supplementary materials in the context of EAP can have positive effects on motivation. Ninety-two students were split into two groups. The input that the control group used for their English study came from two EFL coursebooks which can regularly be found at Japanese universities. They were deliberately created for the classroom and comprised exercises lacking in authenticity.

In contrast to this, the experimental group was taught using a variety of supplementary materials specified to the learning goals. These including films, TV clips, internet sources, relevant newspaper stories and even videos created especially for the classes using native speakers. The results were favorable with the latter conditions. Gilmore (2008) found the experimental group

was more successful than the control group in 62.5% of assessments. The experimental group also reported more interest in the materials, than the control group, and that it was likely useful for their life goals.

The positive effects of authentic supplementary materials on learner motivation in an EAP context stem from their potential relevance and diverse contents. Bahumaid (2008) praises the growing variety of materials that come with English coursebooks produced for the global market yet notes that they often fall short when it comes to providing authenticity or relevance. Some of the materials do not take into account certain cultural taboos and often show evidence of blindness beyond “idealized white middle-class views” (p. 431). This point is echoed in other reports, as well. Duarte and Escobar (2008) give an example of a coursebook illustrating verb tenses through describing everyday routines of the British royal family. They indicate that being royalty is not the norm for most students using the materials. Therefore, it is likely to be more of a hurdle than a cultural lesson.

Since university courses are designed to offer specialized knowledge and training for students, exposing EFL students to authentic language used in a range of professional and/or academic settings would only support this endeavor (Hyland, 2006). In this regard, students do not only learn specific content and language used in their respective disciplinary genre but they are also given an opportunity to engage in interesting and pedagogically sound tasks (Krajka, 2007; Stoller & Robinson, 2018).

Tomlinson (2012) sums up much of the ideas read in preparation for this study by saying that coursebooks are beneficial in that they can save time and money. They are useful in scheduling and achieving goals and, if encapsulated in one all-encompassing source, can be incredibly effective. The benefits of coursebooks are strong enough to warrant their use. Introducing authentic supplementary materials for EP/OP alongside the structure of coursebooks could enhance the overall results in a college EFL classroom.

Methodology.

Since the main intent of this study was to understand how EFL teachers perceived and made meaning of their material preferences and teaching approaches, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was determined to be an appropriate qualitative research method (Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, a series of narrative interviews were performed with five EFL instructors to understand the essence of participants’ personal experiences and how they made meaning of those experiences. During the analysis phase, certain differences and commonalities were identified to make interpretations of the emergent themes. In addition, in vivo coding was used to capture the essence of participants’ experiences through their own words.

The participants (see Figure 1) were purposely selected from varying age groups and ethnic backgrounds to bring different perspectives into this study. The unifying condition was that all participants were teachers at Japanese universities during the time of the interviews. Before each interview was held, the participants were provided with the background and the objectives of the study. The conversations were recorded via journal entries and voice recordings.

Interview data analysis.

Participant information.

Figure 1. Participant Information

NAME	AGE	NATIONALITY	POSITION
RAJ	Early 30’s	India	Lecturer
CHRIS	Early 50’s	Canada	Assistant Professor
TRACY	Mid 40’s	USA	Lecturer
MEG	Mid 50’s	Hungary	Lecturer
MARC	Early 40’s	USA	Assistant Professor

EAP coursebooks as a guide.

All participants (n=5) in this study mentioned they use EAP coursebooks in their English language classes. One of the reasons is that selecting an EAP coursebook is generally a requirement for most Japanese university English classes. The participants also emphasized that students may feel a sense of security when they study with a textbook. Marc, an EFL teacher at a Japanese university, noted that these books offer structure and an outline of the fundamental teaching and learning points. They provide both teachers and students a base point and act as a guide when they study together.

Marc mentioned that he often uses the grammar section of a chapter as a springboard. He designs games and fun activities based on that grammar section instead of directly teaching what is readily available in the coursebook. He considers the coursebook as a suggestion around which to build activities while still maintaining structure. According to Chris, EAP coursebooks are carefully designed, covering key grammar and vocabulary points in a systematic way, making it easier from which to study and learn. Raj believes that EAP coursebooks serve a purpose and should be used as a guide due to their methodical and standardized nature. He also argued that if coursebooks were removed from the syllabus, students may feel discomfort and confusion.

Despite the requirement, Meg decided not to use a coursebook in one of her lower-level classes during an entire semester to experiment with supplementary materials focusing on discussion and presentation activities. At the end of the semester, some of her students complained about not using a coursebook.

Meg believes that lower-level students in Japan may need a coursebook due to the feeling of insecurity. She attributes that to their long-term exposure to lecture-based instruction and heavy reliance on coursebooks. Therefore, they may feel the need to use standardized materials for support.

Raj acknowledged this and attributes the feeling of insecurity to his university's prescribed test-oriented syllabuses as the EAP coursebook contents may sometimes be tied to tests. Students could become anxious about failing the class if the teacher suddenly stopped using the coursebook.

Marc particularly emphasized that some students might feel insecure without a coursebook as they have been accustomed to using one in their English classes since junior high school. Attempting to instantly change long-term habits may not be feasible in EFL classes. Instead, teachers may benefit from using an EAP coursebook as a base point and expand on it by designing their own activities.

As a result, they can create opportunities to engage their students. Marc argued that the presentation of the material matters as much as the content itself. Therefore, if teachers focus heavily on textbook exercises, they may neglect to interact and engage with their students.

Incorporating authentic EP/OP supplementary materials.

All five participants (n=5) confirmed that they incorporate authentic supplementary materials for EP/OP in their EFL classes. The consensus was that EP/OP focused supplementary materials bring diversity into class activities, provide exposure to authentic language, and connect the classroom environment to the professional world. Raj argued that there is not a one-size-fits-all type material. Therefore, adapting materials is essential to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Both Raj and Marc mentioned that they frequently use classroom surveys as an effective strategy to gather information and determine the specific needs and interests of each student before determining their lesson plan and coursebook teaching approaches.

Marc mentioned that EAP coursebooks alone would not be enough to keep students interested in classes and often do not cover topics completely suited for their goals. Marc teaches at a science university, and as the EAP textbooks cover public speaking, they do not focus on the specifics of scientific presentations. Therefore, Marc prepares authentic supplementary materials beneficial for scientific presentations. He also uses pictures of famous scientists to springboard Q&A games and discussion activities. As a result, students can be exposed to scientific information outside their coursebooks.

Tracy uses authentic supplementary materials with students majoring in comparative cultures. She shows her

students videos on a variety of issues (i.e., cross-cultural interpretation of gestures) to help them understand intercultural differences and cross-cultural etiquette. Tracy also designed several worksheets focusing on raising her students' intercultural awareness of ethnic minorities and stereotypes.

One worksheet that stands out as the most engaging is entitled "Being Japanese". The worksheet focuses on raising students' intercultural competence on ethnic minority groups in Japan. Students are provided with a five-point Likert scale to determine how "Japanese" each group is. Once the students choose a number for each item, they discuss their interpretations. Tracy believes that such intercultural activities do not only help to increase learner engagement, but they also raise students' critical cultural competence and encourage them to think beyond stereotypical categorizations.

Chris teaches science and technology students and prepares lessons on nanotechnology and 3D printing to cater to the needs and interests of his students. He often shows them related short videos and asks them to interpret what they see. In addition, Chris prepares news articles on scientific and technological developments from around the world to help students improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension. After studying the articles, students are engaged in post-reading discussions to express their thoughts and feelings on current scientific and technological developments in ways that reflect the language tasks from the class and connect them with the tangible world.

Meg teaches history majors and often incorporates TED talks, documentaries and articles into her class activities. Some of these EP/OP focused materials challenge perceptions of history which have resulted from norms of instruction in grade school history lessons. She believes that Japanese students often tend to avoid confrontation and thus it is important to create opportunities for them to express their thoughts and feelings directly. With these specified supplementary materials her students are led to discussion and debate on various historical events (i.e., atrocities in World War II) that were likely brushed over in the standard Japanese coursebooks.

Both Tracy and Chris indicated that incorporating EP/OP focused authentic supplementary materials into class generally gives the students the impression that the teacher is well-prepared and cares about their specific needs. However, both teachers also viewed preparation time as a major downside due to the lack of remuneration for adjunct lecturers to prepare classes. Both teachers conceded that this could be a demotivating factor for some teachers who would, in turn, rely more heavily on coursebooks.

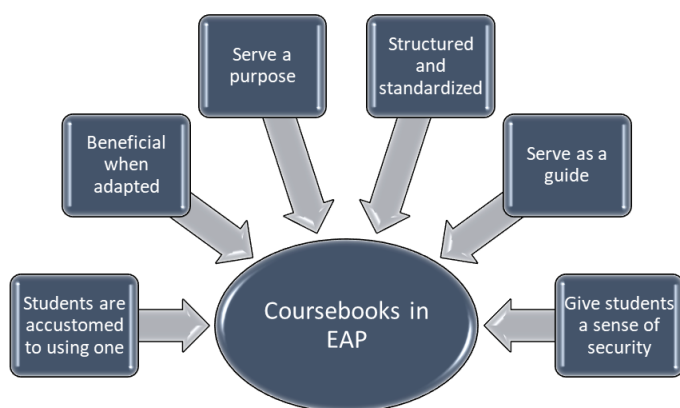
Discussion.

Since EAP coursebooks offer structure and an outline of the main teaching and learning points, it may be beneficial to use them as a base point. In this way, they can serve teachers as a valuable guide. This notion was also emphasized by Tomlinson (2012), noting that coursebooks can be powerful teaching and learning tools if teachers opt to view them as resources for borrowing ideas. Gradually, the teacher can expand outside the coursebook and incorporate other activities tailored to the EP/OP needs of students. As a result, the teacher can help students maintain their motivation and build confidence in their language acquisition. Once activities are made relevant, it is possible to achieve a higher degree of learner engagement in a more student-centered learning environment (Benson, 2011; Dornyei, 2009; Little, 2006; McKernan, 1993; Swain, 2005).

However, developing this perspective requires an entirely different approach to language teaching. McKernan (1993) notes that only teachers who have managed to free themselves from all methodological limitations and biases are capable of establishing a learning environment which can provide learners with flexibility and choice. Therefore, Japanese university EFL teachers may need to engage in self-reflection to free themselves of any boundaries. Upon introspection, they can start experimenting with EP/OP materials and incorporate their own creativity in the process. As a result, the value of the materials for their learners can be maximized and thus, their learning potential.

Overall, the benefits of coursebooks (shown in Figure 2) are strong enough to warrant their use. Introducing authentic supplementary materials for EP/OP alongside the structure of coursebooks provides benefits (shown in Figure 3) which can enhance the overall results in a college EFL classroom.

Figure 2. Interview Analysis: Coursebooks

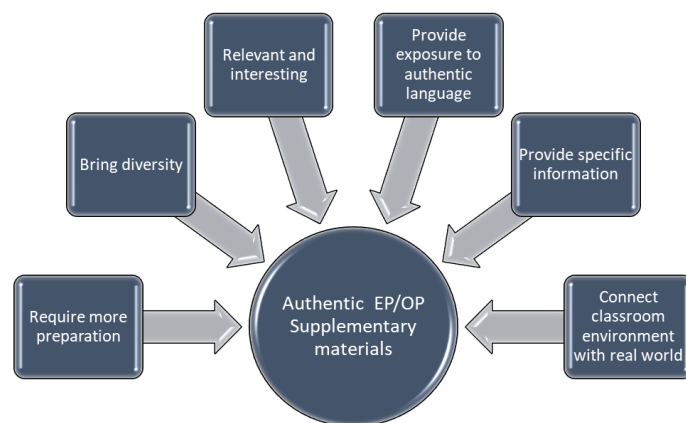


Limitations.

Due to logistic difficulties and privacy issues, it was not possible to observe the teachers' classes. Therefore,

the interview data was solely based on the teachers' responses to the open-ended interview questions. Since the responses likely reflected the teachers' idealized approaches, there was no way to prove whether their actual classroom practices were consistent with the responses. In this regard, classroom observations may prove to be a useful aid to validate the consistency of the interview data.

Figure 3. Interview Analysis: Supplementary Materials



Conclusion.

This paper aimed to understand English language teachers' perspectives on EAP coursebooks and authentic supplementary materials for EP/OP in Japanese university EFL classes. The findings indicate that it may be beneficial to use EAP coursebooks as a base point due to their structured design and learner-friendly outline. They can also serve teachers as a valuable guide. On the other hand, incorporating authentic EP/OP supplementary materials can further enhance the spectrum of lessons as they bring diversity into class activities, provide exposure to authentic language and connect the classroom environment to the outside world.

In addition., customizing materials to student needs and goals was considered useful to heighten engagement resulting in enhanced intrinsic motivation. Therefore, EFL teachers bear an important responsibility to implement a student-centered educational environment while providing learners with scaffolding and structure. With a learner-centered perspective, teachers can incorporate their own creativity to maximize the value of the materials as well as their students' learning potential.

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- Soyhan Egitim is a full-time lecturer at Toyo University. He received his MA in TESOL from Chichester University in England and is currently a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University concentrating on collaborative leadership as a pedagogical strategy in Japanese university EFL classes.
- Gregory Price is a lecturer at Tokyo University of Science. He has an MA in English (TEFL/TESL) from the University of Memphis. He has been teaching at the university level in Japan since 2002.