



Fecha de presentación: 30/05/2021 Fecha de aceptación: 20/09/2021 Fecha de publicación: 21/01/2022

**¿Cómo citar este artículo?**

Pérez Perdomo T., Orellana Orellana, E. E. y Mendoza de la Cruz, A. (enero-abril, 2022). La adaptación de materiales. Una vía para facilitar el proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua inglesa. Revista *Márgenes*, 10(1), 60-76. Recuperado de <http://revistas.uniss.edu.cu/index.php/margenes/issue/view/1409>

**TITLE: ENGLISH MATERIAL ADAPTATION. A WAY OF FACILITATING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS**

**TÍTULO: LA ADAPTACIÓN DE MATERIALES. UNA VÍA PARA FACILITAR EL PROCESO DE APRENDIZAJE DE LA LENGUA INGLESA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The application of the policy for the improvement of English teaching in Cuban universities brings about a series of changes in the curriculum, in the syllabi, in everything related to this subject. The present article is related to the adaptation of materials, which is a key element in any subject that is taught, because each group is a new universe. The University of Sancti Spiritus has worked on it and has also achieved a better performance of the students from Physical Culture Major with an adaptation to the Elementary book of the Face2Face series.

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The objective of this article is to make an analysis of different elements that must be taken into account to carry out material adaptation and to present the results of the analysis that was developed in the Language Center to achieve better performance in the courses that are taught in José Martí University as part of the English policy.

In this study, methods like: documental analysis, interview and pedagogical test were put into practice. This experience was applied to the Physical Culture Faculty students at José Martí University, by means of which the majority of third year students achieved the graduation requisite of A-2 level in the English Language.

**Keywords:** material adaptation; material modification; English Policy.

### RESUMEN

La aplicación de la política para el perfeccionamiento de la formación en inglés en las universidades cubanas conlleva a una serie de modificaciones en los planes de estudio, en los programas, en todo lo relacionado con esta asignatura. El presente artículo proporciona elementos relacionados con la adaptación de materiales, lo cual es elemento clave en cualquier asignatura que se imparte, ya que en cada grupo es un universo nuevo. La Universidad de Sancti Spiritus (UNISS) ha trabajado en base a esto y así ha logrado un mejor rendimiento de los estudiantes de la carrera de Cultura Física, con los que se experimentó una adaptación en el libro Elementary, de la serie Face2Face.

El objetivo del artículo es analizar los diferentes elementos que se deben tener en cuenta para la adaptación de materiales, en función de presentar los resultados del análisis desarrollado en el Centro de Idiomas para alcanzar mejores resultados en los cursos que se imparten en la UNISS, como parte de la Política de inglés.

En este estudio, se utilizaron métodos como: el análisis documental, entrevista y la prueba pedagógica. Esta experiencia se aplicó a los estudiantes de la Facultad de Cultura Física, mediante la cual, la mayoría de los estudiantes obtuvieron el requisito de graduación del nivel A-2 en el idioma inglés.

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**Palabras clave:** adaptación de materiales; modificación de materiales; política de inglés.

## INTRODUCTION

The application of the policy of English as a foreign language for the improvement of English learning in the Cuban university students that is being carried out since the 2016-2017 academic course, has demanded from the teachers, effort and changes not only in the syllabi but also in the ways of action to help them adjust to new perspectives. It is a fact that Cuba is already aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) and, therefore, great changes have been implemented.

Within the last 15 years, syllabus adaptation has become a more systematic field of research in higher education, in which the institutional and systemic dimensions have been thoroughly searched by authors like: Jacobs, Seago, & Koellner, (2017); Roesken-Winter, Hoyles, & Bloemeke, (2015). In many foreign language teaching-learning processes, the adaptation of the syllabus of English as a foreign language has become one of the most necessary procedures put into practice in many countries, taking into account the students' needs and characteristics. Jacobs et al (2017); Tekkumru-Kisa & Stein, (2017).

In Cuba, during the application of English as a foreign language policy since 2016, one of the changes that have to be applied is that students are subjected to a diagnostic and placement test in their first year in order to find out what level of the language they are at (Below A-1, A-1, A-2, B1).

Another change has been concerning the syllabi. Previously, no syllabus that was calibrated in such a way that students could face an exam by levels was taught. Currently, thanks to the agreements and collaboration that have been carried out with the British Council, the Face2Face syllabi began to be taught, which consists of several volumes according to the level for which students are being trained.

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When following these syllabi, of course, adaptations must be made and these have been developed taking into account the specificities of the different universities of the country, and in this case, the experience in the University of Sancti Spiritus.

The current work aims at making an analysis of different elements that must be taken into consideration to carry out some syllabus adaptation and to present the results of the analysis that was made in the Language Center to achieve better performance in the courses that are taught in José Martí University as part of the English policy.

### **DEVELOPMENT**

Understanding syllabus adaptation practices has become even more important since resources for English materials are offered as open educational resources (Trouche, Guedet, & Pepin, 2018). The current adaptation refers to open access, sharing sources, and especially, the flexibility and adaptability of materials by all sorts of different users. Hence, the idea of adapting the syllabi explicitly rejects the idea of strict fidelity. This new quality of distributing materials has been promoted by UNESCO since 2002 in order to enhance scaling-up processes and is also highly relevant in our scaling-up contexts.

#### **Why to adapt materials or syllabi?**

Coursebook authors and publishers work very hard to ensure their product meets their customers' needs. The reasons, as McDonough (2013), cited by Pareja-Roblin, N (2018) highlights, depend on a whole range of factors operating in each teaching situation and one teacher's priorities may well differ considerably from another's.

Arias, A. M, et.al (2016) point out that due to individual differences among the learners and to teacher's factors, there will never be a perfect fit between the materials, the teacher and the learners. Such teacher's factors include:

- disagreement of language proficiency and confidence
- previous personal learning experience as learners rather than as teachers
- own personality (introvert/extrovert, open/closed etc)
- preferred teaching style (directive/consultative, etc)

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– cultural background.

Mishan and Timmis (2015), however, question if it is right to adapt materials according to the teacher's own preferences and insist that adaptation must be driven by learners' needs instead of teachers' 'whims' or preferences. They go on to highlight that 'for reasons to do with the economics of publishing amongst other things, the materials are intended to be used by the largest possible number of learners'. But in reality, the wider the area publishers try to cover, the more diverse the learner's state is likely to be. As a result, the teacher has to bridge the gap between the materials and his/her learners' need. Nick Robinson in his talk "An introduction to Learner Experience Design in ELT" urges EdTech companies to avoid going "wide and shallow" and to go "narrow and deep" instead. He talks about creating Learners' group – a specific group of learners with certain characteristics. However, he argues that 'what is needed is not just decentralization of materials production, but a fundamental change in the design of materials in the direction of providing greater flexibility in decisions about content, order, pace and procedures'.

For the development of this research, Banilower, E. R. and others' (2018) criteria were taken into account. They talk about different techniques that can be applied to content in order to bring about change. These are:

1. Adding
2. Deleting or omitting
3. Modifying
4. Simplifying
5. Re-ordering

Banilower, E. R. and others' (2018) also offer the following strategies to make course books more effective:

1. Give it a rest
2. Change it (a number of options include omission, addition, reduction, extension, rewriting/modification, replacement, reordering, branching)

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### 3. Do it yourself

After a deep analysis of the changes made, the application of these strategies could bring about:

Making it fun

Increasing communication

Making it simpler

Translating L1-L2 to save time

Finding the learner's needs

Fitting the context

Finding the learner's interest

Modernizing

Changing dynamics

Helping comprehension

Finally, prior to this session, a task was given for analyzing a unit from the course book that is currently used, and had to be adapted or supplemented. Here are the questions to answer:

The authors of this work believe that helping students to develop their digital literacy skills is extremely important since, especially for younger people, technology will continue to play a significant role in their lives as students and in their professional lives. So, teachers have to accept this as fact and try to ensure that the role technology plays in their lives is as positive and empowering for them as they can.

From the pedagogical point of view, the reasons behind the changes made were the following:

- Changing the order of the task: production instead of discovery.
- Adding missing skills: students write the sentences describing the pictures instead of matching them.
- Changing the task: students speculate about the story instead of reading it which makes it more communicative.

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The current research is based on the conceptualization of professional expertise for operationalizing adaptation practices and the structure of the underlying perspectives. Thus, professional expertise is characterized as the competence to cope with the typical demands of professional life, such as noticing student thinking, mediating between materials and participants, and adapting materials to specific contexts and participants. Usually, individual professionals have a much wider non-propositional conceptual knowledge than the parts they really refer to in their practices (other non-activated parts are called inert knowledge; approach, analyzing the situational demands with respect to the relevant practices and their underlying categories). In this paper, the situational demand in view is adapting English syllabi materials to specific contexts and participants, using a series of categories for the non-propositional knowledge that teachers activate implicitly or explicitly when making decisions on adaptations. The establishment of a concretized framework can start by drawing insightful findings from teachers' practices on the classroom level. To describe relevant reference points in teacher's practices, the authors rely on the Three-Tetrahedron Model established by Prediger, Roesken-Winter and Leuders (2019). Whereas, little is known about syllabus adaptation practices for English curriculum materials, teachers' adaptation practices for classroom curriculum materials have been studied very carefully. Although working with different theoretical frameworks, the authors can find justification for the general research focus for typical adaptation actions, which are transferred to the teachers' practices according to the students' level, distinguished into two kinds of actions, and synthesized into a specific scheme. The literature on teachers' adaptations also provides some points of reference for disentangling underlying categories for one kind, the so-called material adaptation actions, with the purpose of conceptualizing underlying categories for thematic adaptation actions.

In the early years of this study, teachers' adaptation practices were mainly searched in terms of controlling the fidelity of implementation for research overviews. Early studies (e.g., Prediger, Roesken-Winter (2019) have described some teachers who followed the

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intended pathways very closely, especially when first using the material, while others adopt a more flexible use of materials, some going as far as detaching them from their original intentions.

Later, researchers suggested avoiding deficit-oriented perspectives and instead studying the teachers' practices in their own right. In this new perspective, Bernstein (2016) conceptualizes teaching as a design activity that involves "a process of design in which teachers uses curriculum materials in unique ways as they craft instructional episodes" (p. 18). Consequently, he defines the widely cited construct of teachers' "pedagogical design capacity" as teachers' capacity to perceive and mobilize existing resources in order to craft instructional episodes. He thereby suggests expecting adaptations rather than strict fidelity.

Bernstein (2016) was also taken as a basis for this study, who also lists several characteristics of curriculum materials that usually influence instruction, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the practices as curriculum materials rely heavily on interpretation: "Curriculum materials require craft in their use; they are inert objects that come alive only through interpretation and use by a practitioner" (p. 22).

Bernstein (2016) proposes a list of characteristics which supported a shift of research focus, not if the teachers adapt curriculum materials, but how they do it and by making use of which underlying personal resources (knowledge, categories, etc.). The subsequent research used interviews and narratives with teachers' self-reports about their intended curriculum (e.g., Davis et al., 2016) and classroom observations to capture the enacted curriculum and the teachers' underlying reasoning.

To establish a framework for teachers' adaptation practices, the authors have adopted the approach (reported on the classroom level for teachers) of disentangling adaptation practices into well-defined adaptation actions to the teachers' practices. Taking into account the different nature of adaptations found for teachers, a new distinction into materialized and thematic adaptation actions has been introduced. Thematic adaptation actions are defined as those referring to the themes within the materials, even if the

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material is not materially modified. Materialized adaptation actions are defined as those that refer to concrete pieces of materials with actions visible in the material.

For developing the current Face2face syllabus adaptation practice, some rules have been taken into consideration:

FOLLOW, e.g., following one thematic block of the material as originally designed in the syllabus, in such a way that the main students' learning goals can be fulfilled.

OMIT, e.g., omitting a certain activity or thematic block that is not so necessary for the students taking into account the importance, the context and their real life needs.

MODIFY, e.g., modifying a module, which always implies other adaptation actions on the material elements of which the module consists (one module can consist of several thematic blocks), but just suggesting actions that facilitate the fulfillment of the learning goals established in the original syllabus.

SORT, e.g., modifying a module by resorting its thematic blocks into a new order.

CREATE, i.e., developing a new activity within a thematic block, for students to develop their language skills in a creative and productive way, which facilitates them facing the tasks that appear in the placement tests.

Thematic adaptation actions can involve giving the curriculum material another meaning without materially changing it. For example, the function of an illustrative example changes when its meaning gets detached from the theoretical construct it was originally meant to explain. So far, different thematic adaptation actions have not been classified, although they may also be important for teachers. Thus, identifying different thematic adaptation actions is an empirical task calling for an inductive research approach.

Since the teacher's important roles in adapting curriculum materials have already been problematized briefly by Puttick & Drayton (2017), each implementation study seeking quantitative evidence of effectiveness while scaling up must control the teachers' adaptations in a fidelity perspective (more recently in Jacobs et al., 2017).

However, only one study was found that researched both teachers' adaptation practices and teachers' underlying perspectives, from which we can draw possibly relevant

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categories: In a preliminary case study with 11 teachers, Zwetzschler, Rösike, Prediger, and Barzel (2016) provided insights into the adaptation practices of two teachers. While both teachers report that they do not technically modify the given materials (no reported materialized adaptation actions), they also report that they mainly prioritize the classroom task examples while neglecting the more general ideas and theoretical constructs behind the examples. These empirical insights into thematic shifts have motivated the introduction of the construct thematic adaptation action.

According to Drayton & Puttick (2016), who were also analyzed for the changes made in the curriculum, adapting the materials can span a range of procedures, from adding carefully contextualized role-plays with the goal of providing more opportunities to communicate to not completing a pronunciation exercise due to time constraints. A teacher has to feel comfortable inside the classroom and therefore a book or a syllabus cannot be a straitjacket, that you cannot vary, it must be like a compass that guides him on his way, to bring the knowledge of the best and as enjoyable as possible to your students.

It is very important to remark that the teacher must select, adapt or create materials taking into account the objectives of the syllabus, as well as the teaching strategies and learning styles of the students. The use of suitable materials can motivate students in their learning process. Bearing in mind that the purpose of teaching materials is to facilitate language learning, their adaptation and development must be based on a set of principles that guarantee their success. These principles involve the impact that teaching materials will have on students. The teaching materials should help students to feel comfortable and develop confidence. It should also give them the perception that what has been taught is relevant (McKenney, & Reeves, 2019).

These authors said, even though the writers of published materials are aware that all students, teachers and classroom situations are different and unpredictable, they must predetermine all these aspects. Also, between the three main elements: the materials, the teacher and the students, there may be a perfect fit, but there will never be a perfect

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fit. Sometimes there is also a gap between the materials and the needs of the students at a given time. Therefore, "the materials can be conceived as a restriction in the individual teacher's sense of what may be appropriate at a given pedagogical moment".

The study corroborated that Face2face textbook book has limitations that sometimes force the teacher to adapt it, for example:

- What are the typical shortcomings of your course books? What can't they provide? (In this case the choice of an exercise, a situation, the variety, the actuality, the phonology.)
- What are the typical shortcomings of your course books? What do they not provide enough of? (Practice, assessment, work productive skills).
- What can you expect the course book to provide? (Texts, linguistic information, visuals, structure).
- What should the teacher contribute? (Motivation, presentation, practice, consolidation).

But in this whole process, what could the students provide?

According to McKenney & Reeves (2019), five basic principles can be mentioned before making any kind of material or syllabus adaptation:

1. Student's commitment.
2. Student as writer and contributor to materials.
3. The student as a problem solver.
4. The student as a knower.
5. Student as evaluator and advisor. These must be taken into account by the teacher because if these principles are met, they will be able to better achieve their final objective and as the fifth says at the end, it will also be evaluated by the student because if he does not feel comfortable with the activity, the objective of adaptation it is not fulfilled.

As a preliminary result of the research, the authors agreed that four important principles to achieve a good adaptation should also be taken into consideration:

1. Integrate traditional and communicative methods.
2. Group the needs of the students.

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3. Integrate listening and speaking skills into reading-based lessons.

4. Satisfy teachers' own preferences and needs.

If these adaptations are well achieved, the adaptation must be successful because all the fundamental elements are taken into account within a classroom, since the integration of traditional and communicative methods, the positive and fundamental elements of each one, the needs, would be taken into account. In this way, it contributes to the students' motivation, therefore their attention and interest are guaranteed because they are learning what interests them, and integrating the skills because there is a more complete development of their language level, and thus the objective of the activity and therefore the teacher will be satisfied.

But for achieving this satisfaction, you also have to take into account Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017) suggestions related to what the reasons for the modification of a certain material are.

- Classroom dynamics.
- Student personalities.
- Curriculum restrictions.
- Availability of resources.
- Motivations and expectations of the students. These are elements that when analyzed, they can be seen very clearly in this activity for it to be achieved well, since a teacher must know perfectly how his students are and how they behave in the classroom to carry out one activity or another. For this, a deep study was essential because you can adapt a material, but if you lose sight of the fundamental elements of the syllabi as well as the availability of resources, nothing can be adapted without the necessary resources for said activity.

A material must be adapted at a certain time to:

- Provide more systematic grammar coverage.
- Provide more practice activities.
- Make texts more accessible.

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- To provide more challenge / more support.
- Do more meaningful tasks.
- To replace inappropriate content.
- Provide greater visual impact.
- To provide a more authentic language input.
- Provide variety, timeliness, commitment.

All this is done to achieve the following:

- Add a real choice.
- Cater to different learning preferences.
- Provide more autonomy to the student.
- To make language input more accessible.
- Make language entry more attractive.

What can be adapted in a material?

- The language: instructions, explanations, texts, exercises, performance.
- Processes: handling within the classroom, modes of interaction, activities, tasks, learning styles.
- Content: themes, contexts, cultural references.
- Level: linguistic and cognitive demands.

Procedure proposed for material adaptation:

1. Textbook evaluation and analysis: the first because in order to make an adaptation, the syllabus that was taught previously must be well and later because it cannot be something isolated that can break the dynamics of the syllabus.
2. Identifying strengths and weaknesses: to be able to place more emphasis on those weaknesses.
3. Considering the principles for adaptation: this activity is not something that should be done in isolation and therefore the principles outlined above should be taken into account.

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4. Deciding what the specific adaptations are: and it is then that the adaptation that must be carried out is made.

According to National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2018) adapting a material can be a very good activity, because it helps the teacher to achieve his goals in a more exact way according to the conditions he has in the classroom, but if it is exceeded, it can ruin the syllabi and far from doing good, it would be a complete disaster. Therefore, there are some considerations that should not be forgotten:

1. Do not adapt or change too much.
2. Make sure the adaptation is in accordance with the principles.
3. Avoid changing one method by another.
4. Be congruent!

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

At the University of Sancti Spiritus, the policy of improving English language learning is being applied, as in most of the universities in the country, and a British course called Face2Face has begun to be used. As a method, it is very good but, in this case, an adaptation was made in one of its books to make it more feasible to teach according to the times proposed in the syllabi.

According to the resolution, the student must graduate with a requirement of level A2 for students who are in second to fourth years of their major, and in this academic year, 2021, the requisite for graduation is level B1. For this, they can enroll in the Language Center of the university that works with those syllabi by teaching the first book "Starter" with students who enter level courses A1 and Book 2 "Elementary" for students enrolled at levels A2 or B1.

For the development of the study, a combination of the qualitative and quantitative research was used to obtain the results of the syllabus adaptation. In the different stages of the research, a survey and a pedagogical test were the main techniques applied for determining the initial and final level of the students' level of communicative



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skills in the foreign language development and their training for achieving the requisite of A-2 level for graduation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After making a thorough analysis of these textbooks, by the **documental analysis method**, it was detected that in book 2, from units 1 to 5 there are many coincidences in the contents with book 1 only with small new additions of grammar and vocabulary, which led the authors of this work to make a detailed analysis of them since this caused the students who enrolled in the center from level A1 to withdraw from the A2 courses and cause withdrawal because they claimed, by means of an **interview** that they were being taught the same thing, thus new content that cannot be stopped being taught in the units of volume 1, which were at the end with them, was incorporated as part of the classes of the first level in order to start at level A2 in unit 6. This way, time is not wasted. In order for the student to see their progress in a more feasible way, more time is devoted to the contents of those units that are much more complex making it possible for them to meet their requirements or with more comfort and better use of classes.

In the application of the new policy, throughout a **pedagogical test**, students are placed in their first year through a diagnostic examination at a level according to the preceding knowledge. This modification is made for those who enroll in the center from level A1 because their levels of language are very low, those students who reach level A1 in the exam and enroll in level A2 directly if the complete book must be taught.

This experience was carried out in the Physical Culture major, which had almost all its students below level A1 and by applying this modification, most of the students of third year, close to graduating, will achieve their graduation requirement.

With these results there is an element that should not be overlooked and that is that the teacher must always be consistent in this work, since "an effective adaptation is one way to achieve 'congruence'... The good teacher is constantly striving for 'congruence' between variables: teaching materials, methodologies, students, course objectives, specific language and its content, and the teacher's own personality and teaching style.

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## CONCLUSIONS

- The adaptation of materials is an activity that requires a thorough study of them, taking into account different elements that cannot be ignored.
- Face2Face is an excellent syllabus that contains elements very well arranged so that the student gradually reaches his knowledge, but the feedback he gives in the second book is very extensive. Therefore, in the language center, adaptations were made to achieve a better performance of students who enroll in the courses.
- The application of these adaptations in the Physical Culture major resulted in a high percentage of students meeting the graduation requirement and remaining in the courses.

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