

Abstract

Finding the most suitable teaching materials and the most appropriate methods of teaching for a particular class of learners has always been an important consideration for language teachers. Often these decisions are based on teachers' previous teaching/learning experience, and their intuition. However, as the literature suggests, there may be mismatches between learners' and teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of learning tasks and materials (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Spratt, 1999; Hawkey, 2006; Stewart, 2007). The aim of this research project was to minimise such mismatches by finding out directly from the learners their perceived needs and preferences in order to co-construct a curriculum that best supports their language learning.

This research report is an account of an action research project carried out at a language school in Johannesburg, with the participation of teachers and learners from three EFL classes. Action research was chosen as appropriate for an intervention which aimed to improve teaching practices. However, one of the key findings from the research is that action research may not be well suited to language schools, where there are seldom the same learners for three or more consecutive short courses, so that at least two cycles of data can be gathered while working with the same participants. Another key finding is that negotiating with EFL learners is difficult when their ability to communicate is limited. Despite the unanticipated challenges of this action research project, there has been important learning for the researchers, and this is described and discussed in the report.