

The creation of a CD to teach grammar: the use of *in-on-at*

María José Rodas Luque

Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador in Esmeraldas

maria.josecool@live.com

Abstract

This study has as its main objective to create an innovative and modern material, applying some approaches of second language acquisition and different language methods. The chosen topic to create the material was the use of prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at*. These prepositions are words used daily, and can be confusing for English language learners. The creation of this material takes into account theories about second language acquisition, language teaching methods, teachers and learners' characteristics, and how they are related. The CD contains theory and practice. In the theory section, users are able to read explanations and examples about how the prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at* work. Meanwhile, in the practice section, there are controlled and free exercises. This CD is designed for beginners and intermediate teenagers' students. It is developed according to their context and environment. The content used in the examples and exercises are related to facts or students know about their country or city. Also, the CD is based on the idea that repetition helps students to use the language automatically. In summary, the results obtained in the questionnaire applied to twenty English teachers in Esmeraldas, who gave their opinions and points of view about the CD, show that it could give positive outcomes if it is designed and used in the classroom. However, it is necessary to use more pictures or videos to make it more interactive.

Key words:

Prepositions- CD- English- Language- Teaching- Methods

Introduction

Teaching a language has evolved by appearing new methods and approaches to teach a second language. An old method to teach a foreign language was based on grammatical rules and memorization, similar way how Latin and Greek, ancient languages, were taught (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). However, the appearance of modern research helps some people, specifically teachers, to think differently and adopt different methods and teaching styles. Many instructors start establishing communication as the basis for learning a language. So, grammar was left out.

Nowadays, it is very difficult for teachers to make students pay attention to grammar. According to Folega (2012) “grammar is a way in which we organize words, clauses and phrases into meaningful conversation and communication”. This denotes that grammar allows putting words into sentences to express a significant meaning in order to communicate in a correct way. Chomsky (1928) said that “grammar must be a system of rules that can help to generate an indefinitely large number of structures” (p. 15). In other words, grammar refers to rules which allow producing infinite utterances. Consequently, teachers need to find and adopt different methods and styles of teaching grammar.

One way to do this is through technology. Most people in this century use it, subsequently it is important that teachers involve these tools in the teaching and learning process. There are a lot of ways to apply technology in language classes. For example, a CD with interactive activities could help students to develop and improve their knowledge and skills of the second language.

Each language should be taught using actual methods and one language that has a global acceptance is English. Mair (2003) said that “English has become a language (though not the only language) of global disparity and communication” (p. 6). English is an international language spoken and written around the world. This language as well as others present different issues to be studied. One topic which is common and used daily for everybody is the prepositions *in*, *on* and *at*. These words are among the twenty five most common used words in English according to Word Frequency Data Corpus (according to O’Keefe, McCarthy & Carter (2007), a corpus is a collection of texts,

written or spoken, which is stored on a computer) of the Contemporary American English. So, this grammatical point has to be taught in an interactive and dynamic way because sometimes, these small words could be misunderstood by students.

There are a lot of web pages that have different exercises regardless to *in*, *on* and *at*. However, there are not previous studies which explain the process how to create a material to teach grammar, especially one involving a CD. But, there is a research called “The Use of Multimedia Material in Teaching Material in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language and Pedagogical Implications” by Zhongyuan C. Williams (2014) that explains the benefits of using multimedia. Also, there is another study called “Teaching Grammar to Young Learners using Interactive Whiteboard” by Alexandra Povjakalová (2012) that showed steps and procedures how to create a material.

As a result the main objective of this research is to create an interactive material that helps to improve the teaching of English grammar skills, in this case the use of *in*, *on*, and *at*. In order to accomplish the principal goal, it is necessary to analyze the different stages that people go through when learning a second language. Also, it is indispensable to describe the techniques and methods for the teaching of English grammar abilities. Finally, the second language acquisition as well as different techniques and methods put them together to develop activities that will help teachers and students focus on *in*, *on*, and *at*.

Methodology

It is necessary to explain the steps this project used to fulfill the mentioned objectives. Also, it indicates materials, sample and population, and ways to recollect information (data analysis). In addition, there is a CD and activities description. The following steps are helpful to accomplish the objectives:

- The first step deals with researching for information. It is important to talk about different theories and teaching-learning process about second language acquisition. This step also explains the teaching of a language through technology which refers to the use of computers and multimedia tools.
- The second step concerns the analysis of all obtained data during the investigation and applied in the CD to create and elaborate activities to reinforce students' knowledge.

These activities are going to be found in the CD annexed in this research project. In this step, it is important to find a graphic designer who knows how to put all the activities in a multimedia program. The researcher of this project has to explain to the graphic designer how each activity must work and which functions (audio, feedback, music, and so on) the CD must have.

- As an additional information, there is a third step which consists of asking English teachers, through a questionnaire, what they think about this material and if they would work with it. Teachers will receive the CD and a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 15 questions in which 13 are close questions and the rest are open questions.
- The last step consists of analyzing the obtained data to complete the final results and make conclusions.

In addition to the mentioned steps, it is essential to indicate the materials used in this project and give a description of its use and content. In this case, the principal materials are the CD and questionnaire.

- CD:

The CD is going to be designed through a program called Adobe Flash by a graphic designer. This program allows the combination and creation of interactive elements with sounds and pictures. So, the graphic designer is going to store the activities and rules of *in*, *on*, and *at* in the CD.

However, he/she has to delimit specific functions that the CD should have such as:

- Feedback: when the program tells the users if their answers are right or wrong.
- Playing instrumental music: it is related to Desuggestopedia method, which says that music can create a relaxed environment and facilitate the learning, but there is a button to turn it off if it is students' wish.
- Help: it is represented with a question mark button in the CD, which is in Spanish because it explains how English language students (some of them could have a low English level) should navigate through the CD.

In addition to the cited functions, the content of the CD includes more characteristics. In the CD, there are three buttons called EXERCISES, LISTENING, and EXTRA ACTIVITIES.

- **EXERCISES:** controlled exercises, each exercise with a number. Also, there are two small buttons on the right side of the page. One says “THEORY” and the other “NAVIGATE”. In “THEORY”, there are 14 pages about the use of *in*, *on*, and *at* divided into time and place. The other button, “NAVIGATE”, has numbers which correspond to the number of each exercise.
- **LISTENING:** Learners are going to find different listening activities. The answers of these activities will appear immediately. The activities are fill-in-the blanks (to write short and long sentences, and multiple choice activities).
- **EXTRA ACTIVITIES:** Students are going to find 3 options “WRITING”, “SPEAKING” and “QUESTIONS”. In the writing and speaking sections, students can do it outside the CD, which implies using hand-writing or using computer programs like Microsoft Word or the recorder of each computer. In this way, students could send their answers to teachers to be corrected. In the “QUESTIONS” button, learners will find a test related to the rules about the use of *in*, *on*, and *at*.

It has already mentioned the CD’s characteristics and functions as well as the CD itself and the content. For this reason, it is important to explain what the content has. The following list describes the different activities used in the CD:

- **Fill-in-the blanks:** Students have to select the correct prepositions or/and select a phrase to complete the sentences, or/and relate the completed sentences to a picture.
- **Choose and mark:** Students have to select the correct answer among quite similar options in order to make students clarify their knowledge.
- **Word search:** Students look for words to complete the sentences adding the correct preposition. This activity helps students to stimulate their brains and to recognize old or new words. Also, it is different and entertaining.
- **Unscramble and complete:** This activity is mixed with fill-in-the-blanks, because students have to complete and arrange the paragraph. It allows students to improve their reading skills.

- Choose and transform: In this activity, students are asked to transform some sentences from positive to negative writing the correct preposition.
- Correct the mistakes: Students are asked to write the correct preposition. This activity could allow students to differentiate the different uses of *in*, *on*, and *at*.
- Listening comprehension: There are dialogues and conversations where students have to complete and select the correct answer.
- Writing activities: Students are asked to write sentences according to some specified rules. Although, teachers could ask students to write a paragraph or an essay using all rules together. If students want to check their answers, they have to write in paper or in the computer using Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, Paint, etc.
- Speaking activities: Students are asked to produce oral sentences based on the rules of “in-on-at”. They can record their voices through the recorder of a computer in order to send them to their teachers.
- There is a test which mixes exercises and theories. It is useful due to teachers and students can have a general idea about the understanding of the topic.
- QUESTIONNAIRE:

In this study, the researcher asked the respondents to answer a 15 questions survey, in which 9 questions are based on a five-point scale (5 for always/completely agree, 4 for most of the time/ agree, 3 for sometimes/neutral, 2 for hardly ever/ disagree, 1 for never/completely disagree); questions from 10 to 11 are multiple-choice and 12 to 13 are yes/no questions, which teachers have to choose according to what they think would be better; and the last two are open questions. These questions are written to examine English teachers’ comments about the CD.

The questionnaire will be given to 20 English teachers in Esmeraldas. They work in school, high school or university. They are going to be asked about the CD in order to give their comments and opinions about it because they are who decide what, how, when and why to work with any material and also they know their students’ interests and needs.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to demonstrate CD’s characteristics and uses. There are some questions which have similar features. For this reason, these questions are going

to be grouped to determine specific and general CD's faces. The following aspects show how these questions are going to be grouped:

- Usage of technology in class: This is related to how teachers use technology.
- Appropriateness of the CD: This expresses the content of the CD itself. It is connected with teaching methods, activities, instructions, and the practice of the 4 skills.
- Benefits of the CD: This establishes concrete teachers' opinions about the CD and its advantages.
- Students' levels: This states which levels students should have to use the CD.
- Students' age: This states which age students should have to use the CD.
- Teacher's use of the CD: This aspect assures if the CD will be used by English teachers.
- Suggestions and comments: Teachers express what they think and also, what they do with the CD.

The researcher will tabulate in Microsoft Excel the answers, writing each question and summing the answers. Then, he/she will interpret the answers according to each group of questions.

Results

These results are based on the questionnaire taken to English teachers in Esmeraldas. There are six tables and the explanation of the two open questions from the questionnaire.

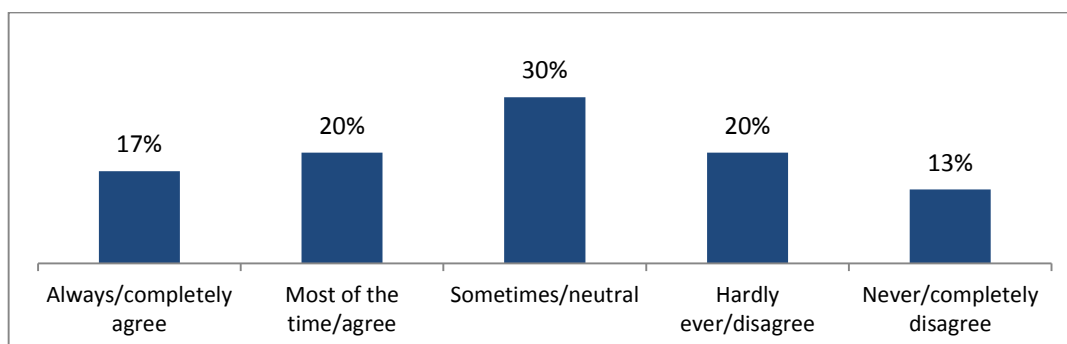


Figure 1. – Usage of technology in class.

Figure 1 is related to the use of technology by teachers in the classroom. This demonstrates if teachers have previous experiences working with technology. This graph

shows that teachers use technology in 67%, at least in some degree. Nevertheless, the 33% represents to teachers who almost never use technology.

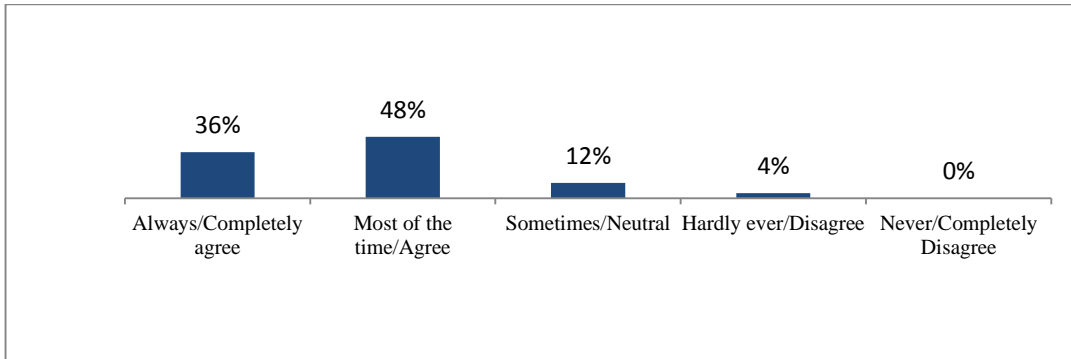


Figure 2. – Appropriateness of the CD.

Figure 2 is related specifically to the content of the CD. The appropriateness of the CD refers to the use of different teaching methods, varied activities with different intelligences, clear instructions and the practice of the 4 skills. The graph shows that teachers consider that this CD is appropriated to work with students in 84%. On the other hand, the 4% represents to teachers who think that this CD is not appropriated.

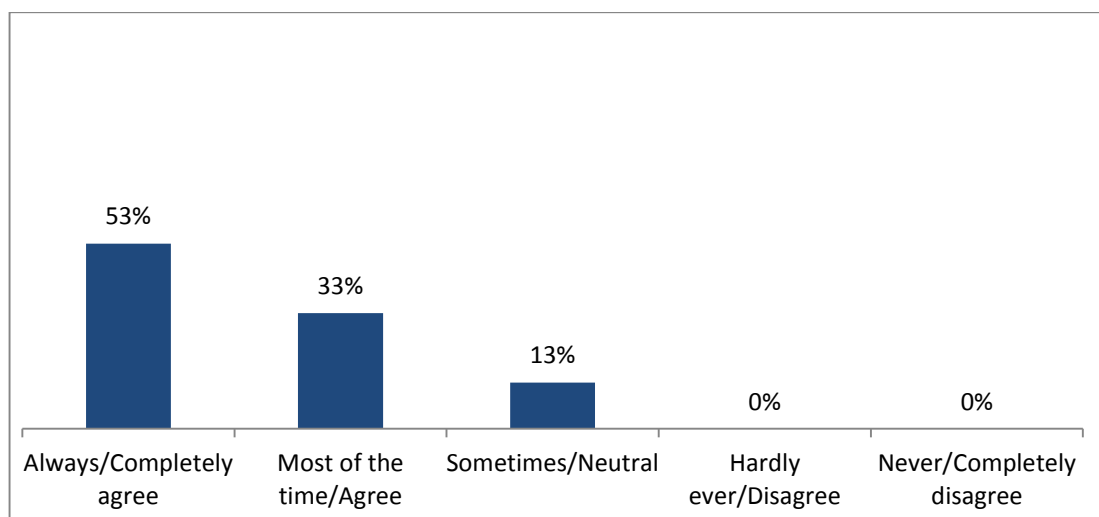


Figure 3. - Benefits of the CD.

Figure 3 demonstrates if teachers consider this CD useful and helpful to work with their students. The highest result gets 53%, while the lowest is 0%. This shows that teachers

think that the CD would be useful and will help them to teach the use of “on”, “at” and, “in”, and that in some degree it could be used to reinforce other aspects of the English language.

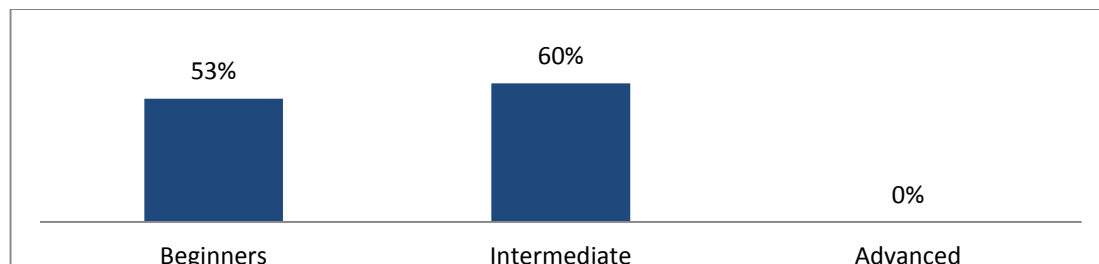


Figure 4. - Students' level to use the CD.

Figure 4 wants to establish the level teachers believe students should have to use the CD. The results show that the level “beginners” gets 53% and intermediate” gets 60% while “advanced” gets 0%. In conclusion, according to teachers' opinions the CD could be used with beginners and intermediate students.

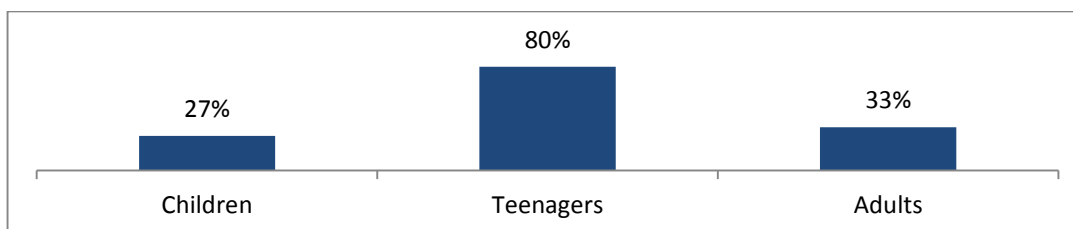


Figure 5. - Students' age to use the CD.

Figure 5 wants to demonstrate which age group the CD should be used with. In the questionnaire, some teachers chose more than one choice. So, in this graph all teachers' answers are taken into account. As a result, “children” gets 27%, “adults” gets 33% while “teenagers” gets 80%.

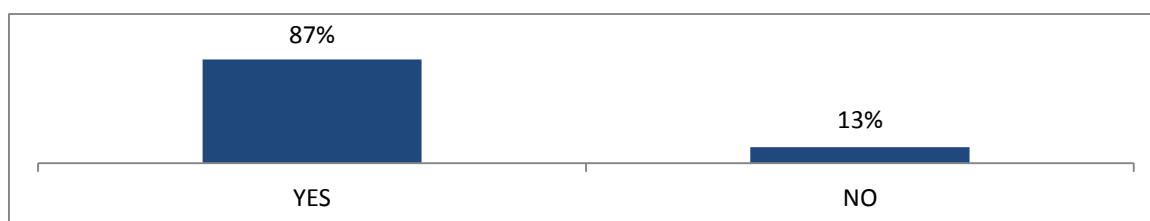


Figure 6. - Teachers would use the CD.

Figure 6 is related to whether teachers would use the CD in the future. There is an 87% of answers affirming that teachers would use the CD to teach English; either prepositions, or other topics.

In addition to the mentioned questions, there are two open questions which try to summarize what other things they could do with the CD and all suggestions and comments teachers wrote about the CD.

1. If your answer is yes (in the question # 13), please specify what other aspects of English could be taught with the CD.

The answers given by teachers are quite similar among them. Teachers mentioned that they would also teach vocabulary, listening comprehension, vocabulary practice, writing, reading, and grammar. Teachers explained that they would take sentences and readings to teach new words and grammatical structures. Also, they mentioned that they would use the CD to reinforce some grammatical skills.

2. Write suggestions and comments about the CD.

- The sound could change more according to the activities.
- It would be better if students drag the answer to the place, not only write.
- It would be better if the program could record the students' answers
- The listening activities should have slower or simpler conversations
- It would have more diversity if students could write paragraphs instead of just sentences.
- It would be better if the grammar rules would be presented before doing the exercises.
- It would be better to use more pictures.

Discussion

This study had as its main objective to create a CD to teach grammar: the use of *in*, *on*, and *at*. Teachers have previous experience using technology in classroom, which shows they can use the CD as an extra tool. Therefore, teachers consider that the CD can be used by English language students. The reason for this is that it presents different teaching methods, diverse activities with different intelligences and styles, the basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and also students can understand what they have to do and how to use the CD.

Most teachers agree that the CD could help to improve students' knowledge about the English language, and understand the use of *in*, *on*, and *at*. This idea is also sustained by Williams (2014) who explained in his study "The Use of Multimedia Material in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language and Pedagogical Implications" that multimedia materials have better results than other types of materials according to the experiment done to three groups. This experiment was about using three different materials in three groups. One group used only texts, the other texts and pictures, while the last one text and videos. The group who worked with texts and videos were outperformed than the others two groups.

The CD is appropriate for beginners and intermediate students according to teachers' opinions. Also, they think that the CD is appropriate for "teenagers", it refers to 12-17 years old students. Although, teenagers age vary depending on physical and emotional changes and there are some people who consider 16 years old students as young adults. In general terms, teachers like the CD, and they stated that they would use it in the future.

According to the theoretical framework and results from the questionnaire, the following are characteristics presented in the CD

- Different methods which are used in the CD like: Direct method: The CD contains some techniques based on this method like fill-in-the-blanks, transform, multiple-choice, and so on. Desuggestopedia: The instrumental music represents this method. The attempt to use it is to create an enjoyable atmosphere. Audio-lingual: There are some similar sentences and exercises in which their aim is the repetition. Community Language Learning: The CD puts diverse intelligences claiming to consider students' interests.
- Different intelligences and learning styles: Musical, visual, verbal, logical and so on.
- Different activities: fill-in-the-blank, unscramble, transform sentences, free activity (their own ideas, opinions and creativity), listening, reading comprehension.
- Instructions are clear: Students will be able to know and easily understand what they have to do.
- Students can practice and reinforce all skills and their knowledge about the English language, especially the use of *in*, *on* and *at*.
- Teachers can teach this topic (*in*, *on*, and *at*) with beginners and intermediate levels.
- Results show that most teachers think that this CD should be used with teenagers. According to the theories presented in learner's characteristics:

-Children learn different things at the same time, although their attention is short; grammar is not for younger children. This denotes that if they work with it, they are not going to spend too much time concentrating on the content or/and the activities, and they are going to get bored easily.

-Teenagers know the need for learning and they commit to the things they are interested in. If they are interesting in English prepositions, they are going to pay attention and concentrate in what they are studying.

-Adults know why they are learning. So, if they really want to learn, they are going to effort to accomplish their goal.

In conclusion, this CD could be used with teenagers and adults. They could comprehend and internalize the grammar rules in order to produce them easily.

- One difficulty that this study had was the lack of technological understanding to create the CD. One person who has been trained and prepared to teach and to create materials does not have enough knowledge to create an innovative technological material. For this reason, it was necessary to ask a graphic designer to put all the activities from this topic in a CD, and make it interactive. This designer did not have any idea about the English language, teaching methods, language skills, and learners' characteristics, and so on. When the CD was starting to be designed, it started with a software which did not allow the use of the activities that had originally been created. So, this had to be changed for a program in which the creation process was very long.

Teachers have technological knowledge but not to create this type of material. For example, Povjakalová (2012) did a study about teaching grammar using an interactive whiteboard. She designed the activities but the technological device allowed her not to implement them without further complication.

In general, the CD accomplishes all the mentioned objectives.

- Teaching methods follow their concepts and definitions about how a second language should be taught throughout a research line based on theories about second language acquisition.
- Activities were created taking into account these teaching methods.

Conclusions

- An interactive material was created to help to develop English teaching and learning grammar skills: the use of *in*, *on* and *at*.
- There is not a specific or a unique theory which explains how people acquire the second language. However, the CD was based on Barry McLaughlin's hypothesis (1987) that explained if people keep using or practicing the language, this will become automatic. These theories are similar to psychological research about SLA: Information Processing and Connectionism (cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2008).
- This tool has taken some ideas and techniques about some methods and has been combined to work together. The methods chosen were:
 - Direct method: The CD emphasizes language patterns (IN,ON, and AT). Also, it has the option to learn inductively. So, students or teachers can check the rules or theories about *in*, *on* and *at* if they want or need to. This will be a student or teacher's decision.
 - Desuggestopedia: Students can learn at home or where they feel more relaxed, without pressure. One technique that is useful is instrumental music, which could make students feel relaxed.
 - Audio-lingual: It uses drills and repetition to shape and reinforce students' knowledge about the language.
 - Community Language learning: The CD used all students' intelligences and different backgrounds and cultures. The goal of the CD wants to make students practice and produce these prepositions in their daily life.
- All the theories and acquired knowledge made it possible to create the activities used in the CD.

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