THE SELECTION OF MATERIALS IN ESP CLASSES

Ana-Maria Demetrian, Lecturer, PhD, University of University of Craiova

Abstract: The selection of materials in ESP classes and implicitly the success of the class fall upon the shoulders of professors and learners alike, each party having to respect their roles though. It is a joint responsibility to get the best possible outcome out of the ESP lessons. It must be stressed also that all the materials have to respond to the study needs and interests of the learners; the materials are not limited to subject specific information as there are many skills that learners have to improve, to refine, to acquire and a variety of materials would perfectly serve such purposes. It is also vital to specify at this point that learners do not start from scratch but they can do with some guidance – especially with professional and specialized guidance – and definitelywith some extra knowledge which should be carefully interconnected with previous knowledge like in a network.
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The choice of materials to use during the ESP class is of paramount importance for the process of learning. Materials are not only important for the content they carry but also for the language used as well as for the opportunity they offer to learners to develop. As texts plus audio andvideo files are part of the means through which learners acquire the necessary skills in order to be able to communicate in English at work and in life, they should be carefully chosen so that ESP professors can meet the objectives of the lesson(s) being taught. Nevertheless, the selection of study materials should be based on the features of the material – the type of material, its length and the level of the language used in addition to the information put forward – and on the human factor issues – the environmental, organizational, educational aspects as well as the human and individual characteristics of the people involved, i.e. the interaction between course participants and the other elements in the class system.

There are several aspects to cover when selecting the written and spoken discourse to be studied. With the help of the type of discourse chosen for teaching,professors can make learners work on improving their receptive skills and on gaining the necessary knowledge to be able to communicate fluently as well as accurately and as a consequence to be capable of producing written and spoken discourse themselves for there is not and should not be such a thing as an ESP class without integrated skills activities – both work and life situations require competence, even proficiency in using all skills. Moreover,the discourse under the learners' "magnifying glasses" must be not onlyan excellent source of information and a way of broadening

horizonsbut also the basis for exercises of reasoning,of logical thinking, of problem-solving, ofinterpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, of creativity. ESP professorsindeed have a very difficult and challenging task in deciding what materials to choose for the teaching-learning process to be successful and so they should ask the learners to make suggestions and share their thoughts on this matter in the class. However, ESP professors should not rely entirely on this collaboration for the material selection; they should have a strategy well-thought of for the course and their own selection of materials. The idea is that professors are like the managers in a company, they should be authority figures but not authoritative if they want to attain their goals because any company ruled by a person who is not interested in his/ her people'sopinions and thinking and does not behave professionally and in accordance with his/ her role as a specialist and leader is doomed to failure. Hence, in order to serve the interests of ESP learners and the goals of ESP professors, the materials proposed for studying should include:

- useful information encompassing a wide range of themes presented in various ways;
- new vocabulary, specific and general as well;
- functional grammar structures;

and they should be introduced in such a manner as to allow for:

- frequent possibilities to enhancelanguage skills and other hard skills[1] needed by learners;
- several opportunities to discover the embedded soft skills[2];
- numeroussituations to trigger attention tocommunicative competences.

Contrary to what many might believe, such materials are not taken and should not be taken only from sources specific to the learner's field of study. Not only would they be limiting the learning process but they would also make the lesson dull. On the one hand materials extracted from or about the learner's field of study are indeed relevant to the learners' studies or careers but on the other hand ESP learners' needs go far beyond what these materials can offer. In today's world successful employees and/ or entrepreneurs have to be able to communicate efficiently in an international environment as well as to think out of the box and to empathize with those that interact with them. As ESP learners are the people who aim to be part of this world and who want to take action in this world so that their careers can take off, they must be exposed to complex pieces of information to be used in the introduction of cross-curricular and comprehensive activities, projects and/ or programs.

All of the above can definitely contribute to achieving a successful teaching and learning experience. Nevertheless, there is more to effective teaching and learning than appropriate

[1]"specific, teachable abilities that can be defined and measured, such as typing, writing, math, reading and the ability to use software programs" plus "the proficiency in a foreign language" (https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hard skills.asp#ixzz5R95hXbXf) and so on; abilities referring thus to "a person's knowledge and occupational skills" (https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/soft-skills.asp) – Accessed in May 2016

[2] "character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationships with other people" being by comparison to hard skills "more difficult to acquire and change"(https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/soft-skills.asp#ixzz5R96X6yxN) and "less tangible and harder to quantify, such as etiquette, getting along with others, listening and engaging in small" (https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/hard-skills.asp#ixzz5R96ESiAE) plus all thought processing skills clearly seen as subjective skills – Accessed in May 2016

material selection based on relevant themes, purposeful tasks, correct language level, and suitable length. When it comes to the study of the written and spoken discourse ESP professors should take into consideration both their role and the role of their learners in the process as well as the possible ramifications of any reading or listening material presented.

ESP classes where reading and listening time can entail progress are classes where reading and listening activities are complex and flexible in the same time. Complexity is not to be perceived as a negative characteristic but as an opportunity to use and develop cognitive skills and many other skills, a factwhich is very likely to imply high intellectual effort but as long as there is willingness to embrace flexibility and a strong passion for teaching on the part of professors and for learning on the part of learners there are benefits. A choice of complex materials and open-ended tasks implies that professors are able to rethink their strategy and adapt quickly to newly created situations while learners are open-minded and determined to learn meaning that lessons are neither dull, nor repetitive and encourage soft and hard skills development along with the improvement and the refinement of existing reading and listening skills. If professors are the ones who are meant to find ways for lessons to be meaningful and engaging, it does not signify that learners are there to be convinced to acquire and/ or to sharpencertain skills. Professors should keep their learners involved and always connected as well as give them confidence during the learning acts. Learners should have the desire to improve their skills and show readiness to do such a thing. Moreover, there should be a strong collaboration between professors and learners in order to make sure that the educational process serves its purpose.

In today's classrooms, teaching performance is translated as orientation towards student activity and acquisition. A good lesson is learner-centered with a focus on the intellect not on memory. Maryellen Weimer also emphasizestoday's learner-centered teaching and its benefits. The class should never contain boring elements; it should be interactive and unexpected. It should cater for its learners' needs, feed its learners' interests and satisfy its learners' curiosity. Additionally, we can say that all classes should be filled with their learners' joy to be there and to study because enjoyment is more than compatible with learning. In such classes, professors are inspiring as well as innovative and have a participative style of management. In *Essential Teacher Knowledge*, often shortened *ETK*, Jeremy Harmer stresses the idea that professors are "at all times facilitators of learning" (146) and in *The Practice of English Language Teaching* he explains that "any role which the teacher adopts – and which is designed to help students learn – is to some extent facilitative" (57). According to him if teachers are "fluent at" changing these roles, then their "effectiveness as teachers is greatly enhanced" (57). Harmer also mentions the term "scaffolding" (*ETK*, 147) to support and in a way to enrich the idea of teachers as facilitators saying that such teaching helps students advance during their developmental process by "providing the framework to hang their knowledge on, just as we use scaffolding to support a structure that is being built" (*ETK*, 147) and he suggests that professors should stay close to provide emotional support to their learners until they are truly independent. Tom Hutchinson, in his article "Making Materials Work in the ESP Classroom," focuses on the educational process from another angle and brings forward some ideas, some "fundamental principles of learning" (71) as he calls them, to show how professors can have positive results with their learners. He affirms that a thorough analysis of learners' needs so as to make materials as relevant as possible

to the learners' necessities and as applicable as possible to the class requirements is what matters in education. Hutchinson further differentiates between targeting "language needs" and "learning needs," i.e. between knowing to identify the needed language items and being able to find the right method to lead learners to gain competence, even proficiency, in English as well as in others skills, we might add.It is a well-known fact that in ESP classesthe materials to be studied are not mere linguistic containers but also carriers of information which is a thought to be properly grasped. ESP professors and learners have to focus both on content and on language because there is no successful outcome in communication without language knowledge and without combining soft skills and hard skills.If we takereading as example, language knowledge is not enough for understanding the message transmitted, other skills are also necessary in order to be able to comprehend texts and to be able to produce any follow-up discourse or engage in any follow-up discourse.

In *Essential Teacher Knowledge* (ETK) Harmer describes the roles professors can have from activity to activity. They can:

- be involved in "transmission teaching" "giving the students information or explaining things" (146);
- be "controllers" during the explanation parts of the class and during the announcement times (146) or while "leading a question and answer session" and "restoring order" if the case may be (58) as he writes in *The Practice of English Language Teaching* or while using scaffolding to instruct and guide in certain situations we canadd;
- be "organizers" to set up, start, demonstrate, provide feedback (146);
- be "evidence gatherers" in group work activity by monitoring (146) no matter if the activity is meant to end in peer evaluation or professor evaluation, an evaluation which has to be focused on what it is known, what has been learned, and what needs further clarifying in both cases;
- be "prompters" encouraging learners to produce new sentences (146) as well as to be creative and analytical both in terms of language acts and ideas or approaches, as it shall be proved that they need;
- be a "resource" for students when necessary (146), a spring of knowledge even;
- be "feedback providers" and carefully correct learners without forgetting to praise efforts (146) and acknowledge development;
- be "editors" and comment, ask, suggest something to make learners think or overthink about what they want to say or do (146), the thing being not to always ask questions so as to get a definite answer, not to judge but maybe to give advice or make suggestions to help learners look at a certain situation from another angle or even challenge learners' assumptions to trigger argumentation;
- be "tutors" if need be (146) or if asked and according to the case indicate another course of action for tutoring such as accessing tutorials online and immersing in further individual practice so that learners can develop autonomy – sometimes professors can tutor by teaming up with other experts from online or with their colleagues who teach the subject of interest in the learners' mother tongue;

- be "comprehensible input providers" (146) exposing learners to "language that is just above their level but which they more or less understand" (82) in order to "acquire language" some say and to "learn" new language others say, but there should not be any exaggeration with involvement during classes on the professors' part.

And in *The Practice of English Language Teaching* Harmer talks also about professors who can:

- be "participants" and join in the learners' "discussions, role-plays, or group decision-making activities" (60) to "enliven things from inside instead of always having to prompt or organize from outsidethe group" (61) because sometimes it can be more enjoyable and more useful to have the professor participating than acting as a resource and indeed this can help give learners a boost;
- be "performers" not only by being active participants in the lessons like shown above but by inspiring through reading aloud for example and thus be also that "teaching aid" learners might need sometimes to realize something or even have an epiphany.

In addition to all these roles, ESP professors have to:

- be course designers as there is no such course as to suit all particular needs and be suitable in all situations, thus an ESP course – even if there is a main English course for a specific subject – should be tailored to correspond with the age, desires, language level, speed of learning, manner of learning, and necessities of the learners being taught especially because we now have "limitless opportunities to engage people's imagination and to provide forms of teaching and learning that are highly customized to them" (Robinson and Aronica, xx);
- be material providers as there is always a must to introduce new pieces of audio and/ or visual material, new texts along with the core material, the subject literature, i.e. new themes to be explored and even subject literature to be updated given the fact that we live in a rapidly changing world characterized by a globalized market dominated by fluctuations in tastes and avidity for state-of-the-art things; and yet professors should not always be the only material providers meaning that sometimes they should team up with their learners in choosing materials or/ and allow their learners to bring materials for study.

Professors should always share their roles with their learners and let them be part of the material selection as well as of the creation of materials to be studied in order to assure the success of the educational process. It is not such a bad idea to team up with learners regarding the way the course unfolds and the materials are used. The English language used in the context of preferred themes becomes easier to learn and motivation increases, which makes of the ESP class the class sought. Both the professor and the learner take turns in being consultants for each other. The professor has the ability to balance skills and language development whereas the learner is the one who has more knowledge and understanding of the subject studied as he is a specialist or preparing to become one. Nonetheless, there are times when even the ESP professor can help the learner with the subject comprehension and the subject orientation because the learner might be a beginner in the field not to mention that the professor can also have the support of field specialists and/ or professors. What is being taught in addition to the specialized subject can be

again the result of professor-learner collaboration and not only. The professor can suggest additional themes to be studied along with the specialized themes and present these extra themes through tasks which are convincing per se, intriguing, thought-provoking and exciting.

In his article about materials that work in ESP classes, Hutchinson enumerates the points to be considered in the teaching process by professors so that ESP classes can become a rewarding experience for learners and pedagogues alike. He implies that good management and understanding of the teaching and the learning process can be beneficial to all participants be them professors or learners. Hutchinson stresses the importance of these aspects of the educational process by drawing up some self-explanatory guidelines:

- "learning is development"
- "learning is a thinking process"
- "learning is an active process"
- "learning involves making decisions"
- "learning a language is not just a matter of linguistic knowledge"
- "second language learners are already communicatively competent"
- "learning is an emotional experience"
- "learning is not systematic"
- "learning needs should be considered at every stage of the learning process" (71-75)

His guidelines do not refer solely to learners but to professors too because once the concept of learning is fully understood by professors and by learners, the educational act entails achievement of goals.

With all this being said, it is much more obvious now that in the selection of materials professors should bear in mind the importance not only of intensive but also of extensive reading and listening during course time and of genres as Harmer points out in his book on *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. As far as the differences are concerned, he makes it clear that in the case of the former learners use their receptive skills with a fixed purpose in mind usually under close supervision of professors who are there to offer guidance if necessary whereas in the case of the latter learners exercise their receptive skills in a more relaxed way without worrying about each word as long as they can get the general meaning, they can decode the message, and they can enjoy the experience. In *Learning Teaching: A Guide for English Language*James Scrivener supports Harmer's claims about reading and listening intensively and extensively by insisting on the idea that the material used for study can be read or listened to with the intention of discovering specific details and giving them thoughtful consideration bygoing back to double-check certain details as much as they can in order to discover/ get the gist. Usually extensive reading as well asextensive listening take up a lot of time and cannot be done entirely during the class but professors can ask learners to do this practice at home and can check learners by having them present summaries or syntheses of the material covered. In his book, Scrivener sheds light on the fact that without accurately understanding the finer details in a piece of material there is no gain when aiming at an intensive study of it and on the fact that extensive reading or extensive listening of any material can become pointless if the aim is not to acquire fluency and get the big picture.

Reading and listening skills are essential skills no matter the educational purpose or the life circumstance, but they are mandatory skills to master especially when it comes to ESP learners because theyhave to be able to succeed in a vast array of situations. ESP learnersneed to be active readers and/or listeners, that isto comprehend, to gather and to process information be it in a top-down manner – "the reader or listener gets a general view" of the material "absorbing the overall picture" (*The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 201) or in a bottom-up manner – "the reader or listener focuses on individual phrases, and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole" (*The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 201) in order to establish rapport, to solve issues, and to be productive. So, it is not far-fetched to see "interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing" of the material studied (*The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 201) which means that sometimes learners need to go back to the material to see if there are relevant elements skipped that can help with the general idea transmitted. And there are times when learners have to combine top-down skills, the skimming and the scanning skills as Scrivener shows too. He mentions that "although scanning is involved with finding individual points from the text without reading carefully through every word of the text, the way that a reader finds that information involves some degree of processing of the overall shape and structure of the text, moving [his/ her] eyes quickly over the whole page, searching for key words or clues from the textual layout and the content that will enable [him/ her] to focus on smaller sections of text that [he/ she] is likely to get answers from" (265). It is all about alternating reading speeds or about increasing or decreasing the level of concentration in the case of listening. For example ESP learners might be in one of the following situations: they have to check whether or not the material given/ found is the needed one and then they quickly listen to or read it while trying to pick up one or two things that can help them differentiate between different materials on the same topic; or they have to listen to many tutorials/ lengthy tutorials or read a lot of materials/ large pieces of text which include specific details, worthy of attention, those bits that they actually need so as to identify the subject and its value meaning that they use their skimming skills but they are also able to notice those points that matter as their scanning skills are running in the background; or they have to decide whether or not to read something in depth, whether or not they have the information needed after covering a piece of material.

ESP professors have to give learners the chance to practice these skills by either bringing materials to class or by asking their learners to bring materials to class. Once in possession of the study materials, professors devise reading and listening activities with a given focus divided into three parts and think of all suitable task types for before, during and after the activity chosen so that learners can exercise and improve their receptive skills and sub-skills. Furthermore, professors should introduce the idea of extensive reading and listening for vocabulary development, for polishing existing knowledge, for broadening horizons, for enhancing thought processing skills be them of an analytical or a creative nature or both.

Reading is defined beautifully and revealingly by McNamara in *Reading Comprehension Strategies: Theory, Interventions, and Technologies*. McNamara writes that "reading is an extraordinary achievement when one considers the number of levels and components that must be mastered" (3) and so can it be said about listening. Written discourse and spoken discourse do

not receive enough attention from ESP professors and are not explored enoughin ESP classes,mainly because teaching materials are usually limited to specialized themes. Any reading and listening material can entail exercises of reasoning, of logical thinking, of problem-solving, of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, or/ and of creativity as well as exercises which are task-oriented and which Harmer describes as sub-skills such as: identifying the topic, predicting and guessing the content, looking for general understanding (skimming),locating specific information (scanning), finding detailed information, interpreting the message(s) (*The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 201-202). Dudley-Evans and St. Johns (1998) pinpoint a few extra crucial skills that should be dealt with in ESP classes and these are:selecting what is relevant for the current purpose; using all the features of the text suchas headings, layout; identifying organizational patterns; understanding relations within a sentence and between sentences; using cohesive and discourse markers; inferring; supporting ideas and examples; processing andevaluating the information during reading/ listening; transferring or using the information while or after reading and/ or listening.

In the world of ESP learners, there is an abundance of tasks which have to be done within a given interval of time, usually a rather short one just as it should happen during ESP classes which should be a recreation of the outside world where the learners live and work. There is need for information analysis in an objective way; for reasoned judgment; for evaluations of dates, facts, figures, phenomena, criteria, research findings; for reasonable conclusions extracted from a set of information; for differentiating between useful and less useful data; for solution findings or problem-solving; for decision-making; for innovation. Every situation has two aspects: one refers to the way people get to a resultin good time and the other refers to the correctness of this result.Therefore, ESP teaching and learning should encompass quite a wide range of activities, most of which are based on reading and listening material covered at a given point in time, and these activities should give learners the possibility of practicing open-mindedness and flexibility;getting involved in collaborative work; using deductive reasoning (as a top-down approach to move from the general to the specific) or inductive reasoning (as a bottom-up approach to generalize based on specific observations) well or combining the two if possible; looking for and choosing new ways to solve something rather than applying the norm which might not work hand in hand with the new tendencies; selecting (the main) ideas from certain materials; taking notes; asking questions so as to reach certain goals be them indirect questions for politeness or thoughtful questions for making analyses, for seeking information or for justly interpreting cases; selecting/ thinking about probing questions for offering support in drawing conclusions which should never be made in haste by ignoring evidence or arguments; avoiding biased input; making plans and arrangements; conducting brainstorming sessions; taking evasive actions and providing evasive answers/ replies, comments; speaking and writing in accordance with the circumstances and the people involved which also implies being aware that register is one thing and politeness level is another; showing cultural sensitivity; rephrasing; drafting and editing; reviewing; and so on.

It is must be acknowledged that ESP materials have to include texts as well as audio andvideo files containing subject specific topics but also the fact that there should be chances for ESP learners to access materials that go beyond general English, are necessary in communication acts

and allow for practice in hard skills and soft skills vital for surviving successfully at work and even in life. Such materials can be literary materials among which novels, poems, films, TV series, and non-literary materials such as (auto)biographies, diaries and blogs, text messages and tweets, articles and editorials, reviews, travel guides, advertisements or commercials, TV shows, news, documentaries, tables and diagrams, face to face lectures and online lessons, etc.

Literary and non-literary materials can be studied, taken as examples and used methodologically to teach various skills. For instance, the interests of the learners of exact sciences or of the employees in the industry or business sectors are not entirely opposed to those of the people activating in the arts fields. Science is not the opposite of art and creativity but on the contrary. Studying literature can help improve creativity, imagination, emotional and social intelligence along with summarizing and storytelling skills. TV shows can be examples of good debates and can contain examples of tackling dilemmas. Critical literary studies, reviews, blogs can be excellent sources for teaching and learning how to draw parallels and make comparisons. Documentaries, advertisements and commercials, travel guides can contain proof of ingenuity as they can exemplify the idea of selection criteria and of accuracy, the principles of emotive language and exaggerations, the features of interpretation given by circumstances, and the necessity and the relevance of details. Articles and editorials, face to face lectures and online lessons, as well as news can draw attention to the difference between something being genuine and something being fake. And the enumeration can continue; there are so many variables that we cannot include them all. From this wealth of sources every type of learner can benefit.

Everything included in ESP classes must have immediate applicability and so it should not be difficult to prove that the types of materials presented above have this characteristic. Working with such materials makes it more than easy to acquire new skills or to polish skills which can be used immediately in daily life, at work, at school: writing an innovative computer program or writing shorter code lines can serve for various technologies and faster processing and implies a high level of creativity used to match or even surpass clients' expectations; showing ingenuity in problem-solving activities just as characters in a bookor in a movie can save the day and make managers, colleagues and/ or clients feel admiration and respect; developing arguments for those negotiation instances encountered often in various books, lectures, on TV and experienced at work and outside work can increase the chances to succeed; having the gift of storytellingcanbe an asset when it comes to hooking the audience during presentations; having cultural knowledge and thusadopting a suitable behavior with clients can help with closing good deals and with working efficiently; processing theoretical aspects and definitions in order to apply them to current debates and issues can make the difference between success and failure in business situations; being endowed with social and emotional intelligencecan help with building good networks and with maintaining rapport with the people around; drawing parallels and making comparisons to prove a pointcan translated as excellent marketing strategies sometimes; being able to read between the lines can uncover hidden message(s) and can be of great importance in risk analysis processes or in SWOT analyses; knowing how to tackle dilemmas can lead to good solutions and thus to overcoming stumbling blocks; dealing with conflicts successfully can enable the continuation of collaboration; being capable of summarizing discourse well can save time and money as summaries are needed in updates and commentaries; identifying narrators and

differentiating between the narrator's opinions and that of somebody else's in a correct manner can help with thepresentation of research findings accurately; working swiftly with direct and indirect speech can be valuable in writing minutes;etc. Moreover, studying facts, opinions and bias can be useful in all domains of life and what better way than that of looking at works of fiction and even non-fictionas explained above so that learners can study better the fine differences between them and see that sometimes a mix of facts, opinionsand even bias are inserted in one type of material (e.g. fiction – historical novels; non-fiction – articles, editorials, reviews, news) whereas other times it is almost impossible or even prohibited, as the case may be, to combine any of these (e.g. fiction – novels, poems; non-fiction – reports, documentaries). The decision to study long or short pieces of material, full or short version of texts and audio/ video files rests with both the professor and the learner once time and needs are considered.

Fiction and non-fiction materials such as those offered as examples here can also serve as examples of discourse types, i.e. descriptive discourse, informative discourse, instructive discourse, persuasive discourse, so much needed in the ESP world and in daily life. Learners have to find out how to identify their characteristics and purpose as well as how to manage to produce their own written or spoken discourse keeping these things in mind because they also need to write reports, emails, memos; to make presentations; to talk at meetings; to help new team members; to communicate internally with colleagues about various subjects; to cope with life challenges among which lectures, tests, rapport building, writing and speaking to people in an array of circumstances; etc. All this require knowledge aboutmaking descriptions, providing information, giving instructions, or using persuasion techniques to obtain the desired outcome.

In addition to the reasons provided above for studying different genres during ESP classes, professors can also think of the reasons given by Harmer in his book on the practice of English language teaching. He mentions introducing interesting topics, having variation in class, being exposed to authentic material, exercising already existing knowledge which is further used to acquire new knowledge, and enriching the possibilities of working on many challenging comprehension tasks.

Instead of a conclusion we could say that there exists a bulk of materials to choose from and as long as the choice is based on sound reasons, good time management, and mutual understanding between professors and learners for the benefit of the educational actprospects are wonderful.In addition, it worth noting also that all the parties involved in ESP classes should realize that success comes only if attention is equally divided between language learning and content interpretation and only if culture sensitivity is taken into account. And last but not least, in order to avoid disappointment, professors and learners alike should understand that the educational process is a team effort and, as James Scrivener points out, "'teaching' does not equal 'learning'" (21), i.e. "teaching does not necessarily lead to learning" (21). It is not enough for professors to do their jobs; learners must put in all their energy and attention as well.

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