

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECT OF TEXTBOOK ADAPTATION ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Tran Nguyen Ngan Ha^{1*}, Ta Thanh Tan² and Nguyen Minh Ngoc¹

¹*Victoria Thang Long Primary and Secondary School, Hanoi city, Vietnam*

²*Faculty of Philology, Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi city, Vietnam*

Corresponding author Tran Nguyen Ngan Ha, e-mail: trannganha7277@gmail.com.

Received May 14, 2024. Revised June 18, 2024. Accepted July 12, 2024.

Abstract. To investigate the effects of authentic English textbook adaptation in ESL classrooms, this study analyzes students' English proficiency levels before and after experiencing an adapted version of National Geographic's *Reach E* (2016). It first presents the process of adaptation (based on the Pre-While-Post model); then, it compares students' scores to demonstrate its impact through a series of statistical tests and interviews with the teacher for more information on students' in-class behaviors. The results show that students who studied the adapted version of the textbook performed better than their peers did without it. Though other uncontrollable factors are considered, the data and the teacher's perspective suggest that textbook adaptation can bolster students' language proficiency.

Keywords: textbook adaptation, ESL, English textbook adaptation, Vietnamese English learner, Reach E.

1. Introduction

With the priority of effective and ethical English education for young learners, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT on December 26th, 2018, promulgating the general education program, including the English curriculum. While the application of this curriculum can guide students to approach national standards, the demand for a higher level of competence has prompted a rise in international and bilingual private schools which adopt United States (US)-based, British, or Australian English textbooks. This call for immersive English education is common among monolinguals and non-native-speaking nations wherein foreign language competency is associated with other desirable qualities that precede academic or professional success. Supriyono *et al* (2020) study claims that English immersion programs can yield benefits parallel to language acquisition such as "cultural awareness" and a "high level of academic achievement". Irfan (2021) attributes the language to a crucial role in the country's political and socio-economical infrastructure, calling for the ESL curriculum to "develop(s) critical awareness, self-reflection, critical thinking, and learner strategies" (Irfan, 2021:976). Vietnamese private schools' momentum toward authentic teaching material is, similar to the aforementioned nations, supported on the ground that these curricula would equip its students with a skillset suitable to a globalizing world wherein English is the powerful *lingua franca* that bridges its fluent speakers to promising opportunities.

2. Content

2.1. Literature review

While the average English-speaking student uses the language as a tool to access authentic textbooks' content, English language acquisition is the main goal for an ESL learner in Vietnam. This gap in language competency necessitates adaptation of the original materials; however, a lack of official uniformity can challenge educators. According to Alih (2020), teachers report that developing high-quality teaching materials requires tremendous effort (Alih *et al*, 2020). English-speaking expatriates who teach English in Chinese universities report considerable resistance from their students who require them to know more about local testing systems, requirements, and the way they have learned English (Ling Shi, 2009). Thus, the demand for a well-structured curriculum and an understanding of local English teaching methods in ESL programs calls for further studies on how authentic textbook adaptation can best suit teachers' and students' needs. In Vietnam, the discourse concerning ESL curriculum has touched on various issues such as the effects of English programs in a private institution (Do-Na, 2017), key challenges that teachers in the Mekong Delta are facing (Nguyen et al, 2023), the connection between intentions of the national English curriculum reformation and its implementation as carried out by teachers (Vu, 2020), implications of university students' oral language production in advanced curriculum (Pham, 2017), university students' perception of Language Training Program for language majors (Le and Tran, 2021), and the relevance of English for Specific Purpose curriculum (Nguyen, 2017). These studies utilized interviews and/or observations to substantiate their claims. To add to this conversation, this study focuses on analyzing students' test scores, proposing a statistical approach to assess the effectiveness of authentic textbook adaptation.

2.2. Research question

This study focuses on how a private school adapted the K6-level National Geographic textbook - *Reach E* - to make the content more accessible for its 6th graders. The textbook, designed for K-6 students, is divided into 8 chapters, each concerning an overarching theme. One unit contains two parts (which follow the same structure) before concluding with a writing project. Initially, the institution designed the syllabus to be faithful to the original content. However, while the textbook is designed to be taught over 160 hours, ESL students aged 11 had trouble processing the content in that timeframe. Thus, the curriculum development team simplified and reorganized *Reach E's* materials, centering lessons around detailed instructions and practice. This study is then conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the changes by comparing two groups of K6 students' test scores. Between the groups, one studied the original textbook faithfully for both academic semesters whilst the other studied the first semester as planned by the textbook and the second as revised by the curriculum development team. By comparing these results, the current study seeks the answer to the question: *Can a process of simplification and reorganization of authentic English textbooks improve students' performance in a second-language education setting?*

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Theoretical framework

Several studies have revealed the importance of incorporating authentic materials into ESL education, such as Smith's (2018) investigation on the use of magazines, news stories, or articles in teaching vocabulary, or Lee's (2018) proposal to use short stories, movie clips, and advertisements to highlight grammatical structures' form and use. Shavkatovna (2024) claims that adaptation of authentic materials to meet the needs and proficiency levels of learners is needed. Since *Reach E* is a compilation of useful authentic texts accompanied by vocabulary, grammar,

and language lessons, the team approached the process of adaptation with a plan to reorganize and simplify contents without adding supplementary materials. The team decided to rearrange the lessons to follow the Pre-While-Post (PWP) model closely to ensure accessibility for learners. In a PWP model, the pre-reading stage prepares students to read the text, the while-reading stage helps students to understand the text, and the post-reading stage allows students to make connections between the text and their ideas or experiences (Davies, 2000). *Reach E*'s original organization, based on the assumption that its learners are native speakers, intertwined language, vocabulary, paragraphs, texts, and syntax lessons. Our team has reorganized the textbook in the following order: vocabulary, syntax, sentences, paragraphs, and texts. Our assumption is as follows: for ESL students to access the language, they need to approach smaller units (words and syntax) before tackling more complex units such as sentences and texts. Simplification occurs when the team removed the book's "*Fluency*" section which teaches students intonations since the school's ESL curriculum already tackled this area. Concrete examples of these textbook adaptation processes are provided in the Results section.

2.3.2. Empirical study

To investigate the effectiveness of textbook adaptation, we looked at the test scores of two groups of students who studied the original (**Group 2223**) and adapted textbook (**Group 2324**). The test scores were recorded in an Excel file before getting imported into R where we calculated the mean and standard deviation, as well as visualizing the data, and running t-tests. More information about the two groups of students and their tests are as follows:

- **Group 2223:** 18 K6 students of the year 2022-2023 who did not experience any adapted content. This group has taken two tests - the first-semester assessment test, and the second-semester assessment test.
- **Group 2324:** 24 K6 students of the year 2023-2024 who underwent the first semester of the original textbook and the second semester of the adapted textbook. This group has taken three tests - one assessment test at the beginning of the school year, a first-semester assessment test, and a second-semester assessment test.

Despite slight changes in content, each test contains (i) 10 multiple-choice vocabulary questions; (ii) 10 multiple-choice grammar questions; (iii) 6 reading comprehension questions: 4 of which are multiple-choice, 2 of which are short answer questions; and (iv) 1 essay question: 250-300 words, with a familiar topic from the textbook. Although the test aims to test two skills (reading and writing) and students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, the result of each student will be combined into one grand score totaling 20. Our purpose is to compare the result of **Group 2324**'s second semester (the only semester wherein students studied the adapted textbook) with the rest to find out whether the adaptation yields positive results. The results are presented in the following section.

2.4. Results

2.4.1. Textbook adaptation

In this subsection, we present the final production of the textbook simplification, reorganization, and adaptation process, illustrated by concrete examples.

2.4.1.1. Pre-reading

To best suit the students' level, the team simplified and reorganized the original content. *Table 1* serves to compare the original and revised pre-reading content. To illustrate how the adapted structure looks compared to its original counterpart, *Table 2* presents the content of Part 1, *Unit 5 – "Invaders!"*, *Reach E*. The colors of the boxes indicate the equivalence of the content between the two textbook versions.

Table 1. Pre-reading content

Original			Adapted		
Part	Structure	Objectives	Part	Structure	Objectives
1	Unit Introduction – Big question	Students familiarize themselves with the overarching themes	1	Introduction & Vocabulary	Introduction: Students familiarize themselves with the overarching themes
2	Language	Students learn and apply a spoken language frame			Science/Social Studies Vocabulary: Students learn the science/social studies vocabulary
					Academic vocabulary: Students learn the Academic Vocabulary
3	Science/Social Studies Vocabulary	Students learn the science/social studies vocabulary	2	Word Work Grammar and Spelling	Word Work: Students learn vocabulary strategies or concepts
4	Thinking Map	Students learn and apply a thinking map model to organize ideas			Grammar: Students learn and apply grammar structures
5	Academic Vocabulary	Students learn the Academic Vocabulary	3	Language & Thinking Map	Language: Students learn and apply spoken language frames.
					Thinking Map: Students learn and apply a thinking map model to organize ideas
6	Strategic Reading	Students learn a reading strategy and apply it to a short text	4	Strategic Reading	Students learn a reading strategy and apply it to a short text

Table 2. Pre-reading content, Part 1, Unit 5- “Invaders!”, Reach E, the original versus adapted versions

Original			Adapted		
Part	Structure	Content	Part	Structure	Content
1	Unit Introduction –Big question (p. 282-283)	The big question: “When do harmless things become harmful?”	1	Introduction & Vocabulary	Big question: “When do harmless things become harmful?”
2	Language (p.284)	Retell a story Language frames: <i>Before</i> _____. <i>During</i> _____. <i>After</i> _____.			Science vocabulary (p.285): decompose (v), experiment (n), humid (adj), mold (n), spore (n)
					Academic vocabulary (p.287): contain (v), control (v), environment (n), investigate (v), spread (v)

3	Science Vocabulary (p.285)	decompose (v), experiment (n), humid (adj), mold (n), spore (n)	2	Word Work & Grammar and Spelling	Word Work (p.304): Antonyms
4	Thinking Map (p.286)	Event Chains to show Plot			Grammar and Spelling (p. 313): Adjectives
5	Academic Vocabulary (p.287)	contain (v), control (v), environment (n), investigate (v), spread (v)	3	Language & Thinking Map	Language: Retell a story (p. 284) Language frames: <i>Before</i> _____. <i>During</i> _____. <i>After</i> _____.
					Thinking Map (p.286): Event Chains to show Plot
6	Strategic Reading (pp.288-289)	Making Inferences Language frames: <i>I read</i> _____. <i>I know</i> _____. <i>And so</i> _____.	4	Strategic Reading (pp.288-289)	Making Inferences Language frames: <i>I read</i> _____. <i>I know</i> _____. <i>And so</i> _____.

As demonstrated by Tables 1 and Table 2, after the stage of **Unit Introduction**, the original textbook presents a verbal language frame/thinking map before vocabulary. The adapted structure begins with both sets of vocabulary to ensure comprehension, introducing students first to the smallest unit of language available in the textbook. The team decided to group **Word Work** and **Grammar and Spelling** contents (originally in the post-reading section) into one part which immediately follows vocabulary, seeing as syntax is the next grammatical unit. The team then presents **Language** (oral communication using language frames) and **Thinking Map** (idea organization using a thinking map) content together. Finally, the team aims to teach students reading strategies as intended by the original textbook. In this part, students learn a language frame that they can use to communicate their assessment of a text, as well as a short reading text (roughly 100-200 words) on which they can apply the strategies. This structure allows the students to access the content with clear, condensed objectives for each lesson, ordered from smaller linguistic units (vocabulary, syntax, paragraphs) to larger ones – sample texts and text.

2.4.1.2. While- and Post-reading

Each part of a *Reach E* Unit contains one main reading text which averages 10-13 pages and one shorter reading text which averages 7-11 pages. *Table 3* shows how the adapted structure organizes while-reading and post-reading contents in contrast to the original structure.

Table 3. While-Post reading content

Original			Adapted		
Part	Structure	Objectives	Part	Structure	Objectives
1	Main Reading Text	Students apply vocabulary and reading strategies to comprehend the text's content	1	Main Reading Text	Students apply vocabulary and reading strategies to comprehend the text's content
2	Think and Respond	Talk about it: Students verbally answer reading comprehension questions	2	Think and Respond	Talk about it: Students verbally answer reading comprehension questions

	Reread and Retell	Write about it: Students write a short response about the text		Reread and Retell	Write about it: Students write a short response about the text
		Thinking Map: Students apply thinking map to present their understanding of the text			Thinking Map: Students apply thinking map to present their understanding of the text
		Fluency: Students practice fluently reading the text			Talk together: Students verbally discuss the content of the text prompted by an open-ended question
		Talk together: Students verbally discuss the content of the text prompted by an open-ended question			
3	Word Work	Students learn and apply vocabulary strategy or concept	3	Extra Reading	Students apply vocabulary and reading strategies to comprehend the text's content
4	Extra Reading	Students apply vocabulary and reading strategies to comprehend the text's content.	4	Respond and Extend	Students use a compare and contrast chart to find similarities and differences between main reading and extra reading text
					Talk together: Students verbally discuss the content of the text prompted by open-ended questions
5	Respond and Extend	Students use a compare and contrast chart to find similarities and differences between main reading and extra reading text			
		Talk together: Students verbally discuss the content of the text prompted by open-ended questions			
6	Grammar	Students learn and apply grammar structure			

To illustrate how the adapted structure looks compared to its original counterpart, *Table 4* presents the content of Part 1, *Unit 5 – “Invaders!”*, *Reach E*.

Table 4. While- and Post-Reading Content, Part 1, Unit 5- “Invaders!”, Reach E.

Original			Adapted		
Part	Structure	Content	Part	Structure	Content
1	Main Reading Text (pp. 290-301)	<i>“The Fungus that Ate Our School”</i>	1	Main Reading Text (pp. 290-301)	<i>“The Fungus that Ate Our School”</i>
2	Think and Respond (p. 302)	Talk about it	2	Think and Respond (pp. 302)	Talk about it
		Write about it			Write about it
	Reread and Retell (p. 303)	Thinking Map: Plot and Events Chain		Reread and Retell (p. 303)	Thinking Map: Plot and Events Chain
		Fluency			Talk together
	Talk together				

3	Word Work (p. 304)	Antonyms	3	Extra Reading (pp. 305-311)	“Mold Terrarium”
4	Extra Reading (p. 305-310)	“Mold Terrarium”	4	Respond and Extend (p. 312)	Compare Author’s Purpose Talk together
5	Respond and Extend (311)	Compare Author’s Purpose			
6	Grammar and Spelling (p. 312)	Adjectives			

The book organizes post-reading activities along with vocabulary strategy and grammar knowledge. The curriculum development team has put vocabulary strategy and grammar content into the pre-reading stage (as shown in *Table 1*), leaving only productive activities in this stage. The team cuts down on fluency content to capitalize on comprehension and productive activities. Students can practice pronunciation and dramatic reading in the school’s ESL program.

2.4.2. Empirical result

This section aims to provide the empirical results more comparatively to analyze the extent to which the adaptation affects students’ performance. *Table 5* provides information on the performance of students in **Group 2223** (Academic year 2022 – 2023) and **Group 2324** (Academic year 2023 – 2024), divided by semester. *Figure 1* visualizes the range and the score distribution of the tests.

Table 5. Test results of the two student groups in question. (Maximum score: 20)

Group (School year)	Test	Number of students	Mean	Standard deviation
2223 (2022 – 2023)	First Term	19	15.2	2.8
	Second Term	19	15.2	2.6
2324 (2023 – 2024)	Assessment	25	15.3	2.3
	First Term	25	15.4	2.6
	Second Term (Adapted Textbook)	25	17.0	2.1

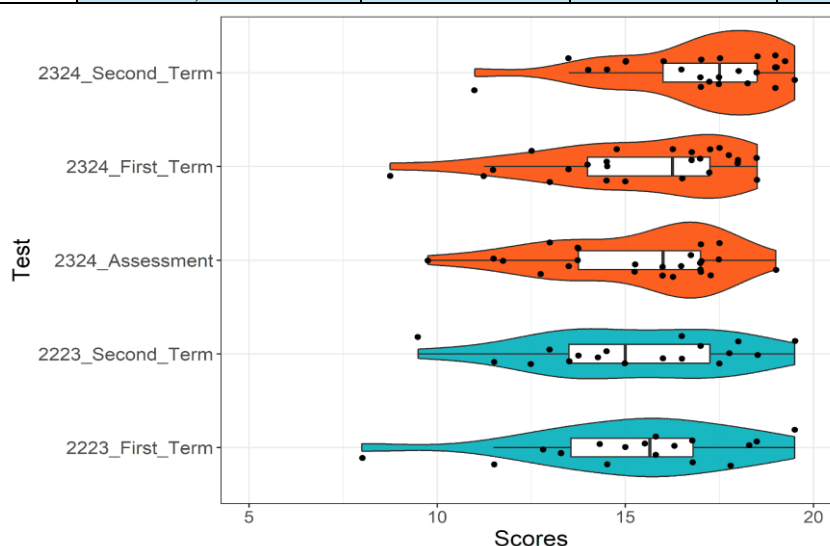


Figure 1. Test scores of the two student groups in question

Table 5 and Figure 1 show that **Group 2324**'s second-term test (conducted after the group had experienced the adapted textbook) yields the best result (mean = 17, SD = 2.1). The table reveals that the mean score of **Group 2324** rose by 1.6 over two semesters, an improvement absent in the result of their **2223** counterpart. Furthermore, the standard deviation in **Group 2324**'s second term fell to 2.1, reaching the lowest among all the figures. This means the adapted textbook has a wider-reaching impact compared to the original version.

To see whether the score differences are statistically significant, we run a sequence of paired and unpaired t-tests and the results are provided in Table 6. Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that the test score distributions between two groups in each semester are not significantly different from a normal distribution. The shaded rows are score comparisons with a notable mean difference.

Table 6. The results of t-tests on the student's test scores in different groups and semesters.

Comparison	Paired test	Degree of freedom	Mean difference	t	p-value
2223_First_Term vs. 2223_Second_Term	✓	17	0.03	0.059	0.954
2324_First_Term vs. 2324_Assessment	✓	24	0.08	-0.174	0.863
2324_Second_Term vs. 2324_Assessment	✓	24	1.7	-3.766	< 0.001
2324_First_Term vs. 2324_Second_Term	✓	24	-1.62	-4.405	< 0.001
2223_First_Term vs. 2324_First_Term			-0.14	-0.166	0.8698
2223_Second_Term vs. 2324_Second_Term			-1.8	-2.443	0.02

Table 6 shows that the test scores of **Group 2324** in the second semester (the semester when the students studied the adapted textbook) are statistically higher than their scores in the first semester and the assessment test. These scores are also higher than those of **Group 2223** in their second semester. Other comparisons show no remarkable difference. These results confirm the effectiveness of the adapted textbook on the student's performance.

2.5. Discussion

2.5.1. Improvement in students' performance

To deal with the implementation of English education in Vietnam, Do Na Chi (2017) suggested that confusion regarding textbook instructions could take away immersion for students. Considering Chi's comment, our team researched the effectiveness of *Reach E*'s adaptation. Our study expanded on Chi's claim that clear English instructions could benefit students' acquisition and provided an empirical approach to test her theory. The collected results show that students who experienced the adapted textbook performed better in tests compared to those who studied the original textbook. The test scores can be affected by factors outside of the team's control, such as natural intellectual development which students may have undergone, their interest in the subject, as well as their behaviors during the tests. Despite its modesty, the data set was reliably analyzed using statistics and statistical tests to provide an objective result. The result confirms that textbook adaptation contributed partially to students' improved performance.

2.5.2. Teacher's perspectives

We interviewed teacher D. who taught both **Group 2223** and **Group 2324** to get his opinions on the main differences between the original and adapted content. Teacher D. noted that "*the old (lessons) were not arranged in order (...) compared to the new ones. I think the new one (...) really helps the weak students to follow the lessons*". He also noted the improvement in student

participation: “*The participation in the new lessons (...) is still better than the (old) ones.*” Hence, there are observable changes in students' reception: the content's reorganization helped students follow the lesson, thus boosting their engagement.

2.5.3. Limitations

The main limitation of this study concerns the small data pool of 43 students from the same private institution. Thus, the statistical result cannot serve to prove the effect of adapting authentic materials in a socio-economically different education setting. Another limitation this study faces is the lack of focus on individual tested areas: as students are tested on four areas – vocabulary, grammar, reading skill, and writing skill—it is helpful to analyze and compare the grades of each area between **Group 2223** and **Group 2324** to better study the effectiveness of textbook adaptation. The inclusion of students' perceptions can also further highlight how the new materials impact learners, giving insights into new/better ways of adaptation.

2.5.4. Implications for further research

Considering the current landscape of research on authentic textbook adaptation across Vietnamese schools, this study brings to the table a proposal to include quality assessment grades into the equation. Alongside international standardizations such as IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, or Cambridge English Qualifications, some suggest that a nationally recognized English test (Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency - VSTEP) can benefit quality assessment (Nguyen, 2021). This study wants to emphasize the importance of the difference in proficiency levels between native speakers and language learners. Shavkatovna (2024) stresses that to ensure efficiency, the teaching materials should be adapted following students' needs and proficiency levels.

3. Conclusions

As demands for the incorporation of authentic English material into language education rise amongst Vietnamese learners, the task of adapting textbooks is becoming common for educators. This study aims to launch a conversation on comprehensive simplification and reorganization of authentic content, as seen from a more statistical perspective. To support this objective, the research team presented the steps and reasons to which it modified and simplified *Reach E*. To highlight the impact of textbook adaptation, the team analyzed the difference in test scores between two groups of students, one of which had experienced the adapted material, and the other had not. The results demonstrate that there is a statistically significant improvement in test scores amongst students who followed the adapted content. While the results appear optimistic, the small data pool implies that this study does not represent the general influence of textbook adaptation on Vietnamese ESL learners. However, the empirical approach which prioritizes students' test scores brings a new perspective to the generally theoretical approach surrounding this discourse.

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