

A Study on the Adaptability Evaluation of English Teaching Materials in Middle Schools

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Abstract: The relevance of teaching materials refers to the extent to which they match the actual needs of a particular geographical area or school, teachers, and students. Improving teachers' appropriateness of teaching materials can assist them in using the materials more effectively and thus achieve the best teaching results. The purpose of this paper is to study the appropriateness of middle school English teachers' English textbooks in the western region, focusing on three aspects: teachers' knowledge of the textbooks, teachers' use of the textbooks, and teachers' feedback on the textbooks. Based on the findings of 192 middle school English teachers, it is found that there are deficiencies in teachers' knowledge and use of teaching materials. In the future, we should strengthen the training of middle school English teachers in the western region in the use of teaching materials, develop the literacy of secondary school English teachers in teaching materials, and the teachers themselves should continuously improve and perfect their teaching methods to enhance the effectiveness of English teaching.

Key words: Middle school English; Teaching materials; Suitability; evaluate

1. Introduction

"Pertinence" refers to conformity and exact matching, while appropriateness represents the strength of the association between the two, i.e., the degree of fit of one for the other. In terms of the interaction between teachers and the curriculum, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' use of teaching materials in actual teaching situations in order to further explore the impact of curriculum reform on teachers' teaching and students' learning (Meng Xianyun, 2023). In the field of education, the appropriateness of teachers' use of teaching materials is directly related to students' learning experience and knowledge absorption. Education is not just about delivering material content to students; it also requires teachers to skillfully blend individual differences, subject matter characteristics, and teaching environments to create a learning environment that is both challenging and accessible to students. In this process, the teacher plays the role of guide and inspiration, while the textbook becomes the blueprint for knowledge. This paper will delve into how teachers can understand, utilize, and adapt materials to achieve optimal teaching and learning. By examining appropriateness, we will better understand how to integrate culture, individual differences, and pedagogical innovations in education to produce students with critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.

2. Literature review

Since the middle of the 19th century, research activities on the assessment of educational materials have begun in Western countries. By the beginning of the 20th century, theoretical discussions and practical operations in various fields of content assessment were already underway. Franzen and Knight first created a unique system of curriculum assessment criteria in 1922. In addition, David Williams provided an in-depth analysis of the topic in his 1983 book, *The Seven Elements of English Language Teaching Materials*. Young and Reigeluth, in "Setting up Specialized Dimensions of Instructional Materials Evaluation Based on Different Evaluation Objectives and Participants," proposed two main categories: general and Griffiths, in his 1995 article, not only focuses on the consistency of teaching materials with learning objectives but also emphasizes the importance of "the extent to which teaching materials are culturally appropriate." Summarizing the above literature, we can see that the research on teaching materials in foreign countries has started for a long time and has shown a good development trend on the whole. There are several aspects of the discussion on the appropriateness of teaching materials in the international arena: firstly, the concept of assessment has always kept pace with the development trend of the times. Especially in the assessment focusing on the appropriateness of teaching materials, they advocate that teaching materials should be led by serving teachers and students; secondly, the rich pedagogical theories and psychological perspectives provide a diversified assessment framework; and lastly, this kind of assessment has been proven to be very effective and reasonable (Wang Xiaoli, 2019).

The main contributions to the research on the appropriateness of teaching materials in China cover four areas: first, research on the assessment of teaching materials; second, the establishment of an analytical framework for the appropriateness of teaching materials and its specific parameter setting; third, the exploration of the appropriateness of teaching materials in specific subject areas; and fourth, the in-depth exploration of the geographical appropriateness of teaching materials. Gao Lingbiao (2002) proposed that textbook evaluation is a cognitive behavior between the value dominator and the value audience (i.e., between students and textbooks), and its purpose is to determine the overall value of textbooks. Zhang Aiping (2005) elaborated on her views on the adaptability of textbooks in her *Study on the Adaptability Assessment of Textbooks in Basic Education Curriculum* and emphasized that ratings based on a teacher's adaptability after using a textbook can only be used as a measure of whether the textbook is suitable for the teacher's teaching concepts and skills. Teachers and students are the main subjects of textbook use, and their needs are both the focus of textbook design and the starting point of textbook evaluation (Zhang Zengtian and Peng Shouqing, 2015).

To summarize, most of the evaluation studies on the appropriateness of textbooks at home and abroad focus on the evaluation of the textbooks themselves, and few scholars have evaluated the subject of textbook use. This study, on the other hand, focuses on the appropriateness of English teachers' use of textbooks in the western region and explores the degree of appropriateness of teachers' use of textbooks.

3. Research design

3.1 Research questions

- (1) Are middle school English teachers and English language materials appropriate in the western region? What are the problems?
- (2) What factors affect the relevance of middle school English teachers and English teaching materials in the western region?

3.2 Participants

Teachers and students are the subjects who use the textbooks and the targets of the study on the appropriateness of textbook writing. This study focused on a group of middle school English teachers in the western region, so the subjects were some teachers working in middle school English courses in the region.

3.3 Research tools

In this paper, we designed a questionnaire on the appropriateness of middle high school English teaching materials for middle school English teachers, which consists of teachers' basic information and a 6-point Likert scale, and the data were validated using the data analysis tool of SPSS 24.0, which showed that this questionnaire has a total reliability level as high as 0.963 and a KMO index as high as 0.937, which meets our research needs and proves its validity and reliability.

3.4 Data processing

This study utilized descriptive statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, and percentage to assess the adaptability of middle school English language materials and stepwise regression analysis to examine the predictors affecting teachers' adaptability with the materials.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Middle School English Teachers' Cognitive Levels of Textbooks

A total of 192 teachers participated in this research, and the findings showed that the overall level of middle school English teachers' knowledge of teaching materials was good, and teachers' overall knowledge of the concept of curriculum standards ($M = 3.516$) was relatively good, but the level of knowledge about the concept of writing English textbooks ($M = 3.203$), the characteristics of writing ($M = 3.292$), and the system of writing ($M = 3.297$) was relatively lower. Meanwhile, the data show that most of the teachers who have participated in the training on teaching materials have only participated in two trainings on the use of teaching materials.

4.2 The Use of Textbooks by Middle School English Teachers

The findings show that teachers tend to use textbooks in a deletion ($M = 3.635$) and adjustment ($M = 3.573$) manner and for rewriting ($M = 3.036$) and addition ($M = 3.380$) less often.

Qualitative studies have been conducted to prove that the elements that influence teachers' choice of textbooks are personal and socio-cultural elements such as personal academic backgrounds and interests, beliefs about teaching and learning English, and exam factors (Jinfen Xu and Yumei Fan, 2017; Lianjiang Jiang, 2020). In this paper, we investigate five aspects of test factors: teaching effectiveness factors, teacher factors, environmental factors, and student factors. Through the correlation test between the behavior of using textbooks and their influencing factors, we found that the test factors (correlation coefficient: 0.540**), the teaching effectiveness factors (correlation coefficient: 0.651**), the teacher factors (correlation coefficient: 0.760**), the environmental factors (correlation coefficient: 0.795**), and the student factors (correlation coefficient: 0.844**) were all positively correlated with teachers' use behavior. The author's stepwise regression analysis of these four factors found that teaching effectiveness, teacher factors, and student factors totaled three items in the model, with an R-square value of 0.838, which means that teaching effectiveness, teacher factors, and student factors can explain 83.8% of the variation in textbook use. Teachers are mainly influenced by these three factors in the process of textbook use.

4.3 Reflections on the use of textbooks by middle school English teachers

Feedback from teachers after using the materials is critical to improving the quality of teaching and learning. 65% of teachers were able to make improvements to their future use of the materials based on student responses and needs in order to improve the effectiveness of their teaching and learning; 62% reflected on their successes and challenges in using the materials; and 54% of the teachers felt that they were able to effectively stimulate student interest and engagement after using the materials.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

According to the results of the survey, we found that teachers' adaptability to the textbooks is high, but there are still weaknesses in teachers' knowledge of the textbooks, use of the textbooks, and feedback on the textbooks. The study found that teachers' knowledge of the textbooks is relatively low in terms of the concepts, characteristics, and system of the textbooks, and their ability to adapt and rewrite the textbooks in the process of using the textbooks is not strong. In the feedback on the use of the textbooks after the class, it was found that most teachers are still unable to stimulate students' interest and participation in learning. In addition, the use of teaching materials is mainly influenced by teaching effectiveness, teacher factors, and student factors.

The appropriateness of teaching materials is important for improving the quality of English teaching in local secondary schools, and the level of appropriateness depends on two factors: the materials themselves and the actual situation of teachers, students, and schools. The improvement of the appropriateness of teaching materials should be considered from these two aspects (Yang Xiaojun, 2021), and the present study focuses on investigating the appropriateness of the English teaching materials used by teachers and English language teachers. In this regard, some suggestions for improvement are made. First, to cast a firm sense of the Chinese national community as the main line, to improve the teaching materials literacy of middle school English teachers. Textbook literacy has a key role in education. It covers educators' profound knowledge of teaching materials and their ability to utilize them flexibly. Having good textbook literacy helps teachers design and implement teaching more effectively and ensure that students understand knowledge systematically. Teaching materials literacy enables teachers to select, adapt, and use teaching materials according to the actual situation of students. To enhance teachers' materials literacy, teachers can develop their educational competence in a holistic manner and improve their understanding and application of teaching materials in a variety of ways, such as in-depth study of teaching materials, participation in training and seminars, collaboration with subject experts, hands-on teaching activities, examining teaching materials from multiple perspectives, utilizing technological tools, regular assessment and reflection, collaborating with colleagues, paying attention to educational research, and establishing feedback mechanisms. Secondly, teachers, as "agents" (van den Branden, 2016) and "mediators" (McGrath, 2002) between teaching materials and students, use teaching materials creatively. is an integral part of teaching (Bosompem, 2014). English teachers should increase or decrease the teaching content according to the actual needs, integrate all kinds of curriculum resources to promote students' learning, and utilize technological tools and online resources for the secondary development of teaching materials. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the development of teachers' information literacy so that they can skillfully use various educational technology tools to support secondary development. Teachers should also be encouraged to show creative thinking in secondary education and develop their ability to think independently and design teaching content. This can be promoted by organizing creative teaching competitions and seminars. Thirdly, enhancing students' interest in learning is one of the very important goals for teachers when using teaching materials. Teachers can relate the content of the teaching materials to students' real lives and experiences so that students can understand and accept what they have learned more easily. Examples, stories, and life applications are utilized to demonstrate the practicality and relevance of the teaching materials. This can also be done by developing colorful teaching plans, including interactive teaching activities, practical exercises, and case studies, in order to attract students' interest. This creates a lively and interesting teaching and learning environment.

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