The Use of Textbook Adaptation Strategies in English classrooms at a Vietnamese College

Cao Hoang Yen

Can Tho Vocational College, Can Tho, Vietnam

Abstract: **Adapting the textbook has been implemented differently in a variety of teaching and learning contexts. The present study was designed to gain college students' perceptions on the extent to which their teachers employed the six adaptation strategies in their English classroom and the contribution of the adaptation to students' learning. The findings led to a conclusion that the teachers in the local school implemented all the six strategies. Two of them, simplifying and extending, were used the most frequently by those teachers. Research findings also showed that from the students' perceptions, the adaptation produced by their teachers supported their learning by different ways. The findings helped to build stronger support for the use of textbook adaptation in English classrooms.**

Keywords: **textbook adaptation strategies, implementation, contribution, English learning.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The textbook has been regarded as one of the important factors that contribute greatly to the success of the language teaching and learning process. The textbook is one of the main teaching and learning materials in addition to the accompanying materials such as visuals, listening recordings, additional handouts, references, and the like (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Snow, 2014). In many schools in Vietnam, teaching materials are selected by the educational management agency to which the school belongs. For example, the English textbook at the Can Tho Vocational College is put into implementation at the discretion of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs. Similarly, English textbooks used in high schools are under the management of the Ministry of Education and Training. The selection of the textbook is said to bring unity to the whole education system and ensure the quality of materials to some extent because the choice of the textbook is the result of a whole process of rigorous analysis and evaluation of leading professors in the field as well as experienced teachers. However, this does not mean that all textbook selected or recommended by these professionals are perfectly appropriate to the teaching context of each educational institution. It can be noticed that many textbooks lack the necessary diversity and appeal (Harmer, 1998). This is because each educational institution has its own characteristics in terms of resources, teachers and learners, factors that are closely related to the application of teaching materials (Cunningsworth, 1995). Differences in learners, teachers, and the others lead to the need to adjust the textbook to ensure its relevance to the specific context. The adjustment of the textbook is usually actively made by the teacher based on the teacher's assessment of how well the textbook matches the course objectives, the learner's factors and the teachers'. In some cases, teachers may think that it is necessary to adjust a certain aspect of the teaching material because they believe that such adjustment will benefit their students. In other cases, teachers may make adjustments to suit their teaching style. Indeed, adaptation based on teachers' impressive evaluation may become more effective when it involves the participation of the students instead of the individual evaluation of the teacher alone because the learner is at the center of the teaching process, being influenced by the adjustment. Once the adjustment is made in a reasonable way, it will promote the student's learning. On the contrary, it will become a hindrance factor that reduces the effectiveness of the learning process. On the learner-centric basis, this study closely examines the students' perceptions of the textbook adaptation strategies employed by their teachers and how helpful the adaptation is. The results of the study can help teachers assess how effective the adjustments are and make decisions about the changes needed to improve the quality of textbook adaptation.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Textbook adaptation can be defined as the process of making changes to various aspects of the textbook. Almost all textbooks can be improved in some way to suit the circumstances of use (Cunningsworth, 1995) because no textbook is perfect for a particular teaching context, with a specific group of learners as argued by Richards (2001), Islam and Mares (2014) as well as Celce-Murcia, Brihton, Snow (2014). The adaptation of the textbook according to Cunningsworth (1995) is necessary to solve a lot of problems related to methods, language content, subject matter, balance of skills, progression and grading, cultural content and image. Effective adaptation requires teachers to have an understanding of the nature of the material as well as the learning and teaching situation in which the textbook is being used. According to Harmer (1998), the adaptation of the textbook is carried out when the document has something problematic with content, language and sequencing. In general, the fundamental factor driving the adjustment of the textbook is to achieve the best suitability for the teaching circumstances and those who are involved in the learning process with that textbook.

Many adaptation strategies have been introduced and discussed by scholars and researchers. As Harmer (1998) claims when there is a problem with the textbook, the teacher can select one of the methods such as omitting, replacing, adding and adapting something in the textbook. According to Harmer's summary (1998), omitting means that the teacher deletes a certain lesson altogether if it doesn't fit. Replacing means that teachers may use a lesson designed by themselves to replace the inappropriate lesson in the material. Replacing is said to be more exciting for teachers and more suitable for learners. Lessons in the textbook can be used as a supplement, which learners can use for revision. Regarding adding, additional teaching materials provide more activities or exercises to help learners have more interest and opportunities to explore and use the language. Adding is argued to be a better solution than omitting and replacing. While the first two strategies can lead to a question about why the material was introduced into teaching in the first place, the third one takes advantages of the learner's factors and also the teachers' creativity. Adapting is defined as using the material in the textbook in a creative, flexible way in the teacher's own way. Adapting focuses heavily on the way how the activities in the textbook are organized and developed.

According to Richards (2001), many forms of textbook adaptation can be used to make a commercial textbook become appropriate to a specific teaching and learning context. These forms of adaptation include modifying content, adding or deleting content, reorganizing content, addressing omissions, modifying tasks, and extending tasks. As for modifying content and modifying tasks, teachers only change the content of the material and the organization of activities. In terms of adding or deleting content, a certain part of the textbook is omitted because of its redundancy or mismatch. It seems that the name given for this adaptation strategies is rather confusing as it leads to questions about what is covered by adding. Addressing omissions is a method of adaptation by which teachers add content or activities that they consider to be necessary. Extending tasks is explained to involve the provision of additional language practice activities. This concept seems to overlap what modifying tasks covers to some extent.

Celce- Murcia, Brinton, Snow (2014) state that the factor that determines the effectiveness of textbook adaptation is the teacher's knowledge of adaptation options. These knowledge and skills are gradually accumulated during the process of conducting textbook adaptation. In other words, teachers learn to adapt the textbook effectively from their failures and success. As summarized by Celce- Murcia, Brinton, Snow (2014), textbook adaptation can be made in four ways called sequencing, being selective, changing the instructions, changing groupings. Sequencing is changing the order of the units or activities in the textbook. Being selective involves removing a certain part of the textbook. Changing the instructions is to provide a clear explanation that is easy to understand and suits the learner's level. Changing groups relates to the main way the learner works, making it different from what is available in the textbook. Another concept equivalent to adapting a textbook is supplementing a textbook. Accordingly, teachers provide learners with additional content that the teacher considers necessary for the program and learners such as practical examples related to the learner's life, additional activities related to the content in the textbook and some extended assignments. It can be seen that the classification of strategies proposed by Celce- Murcia, Brinton, Snow (2014) consists of more strategies than the one introduced by Harmer (1998).

Islam and Mares (2014) believe that the adaptation of the textbook whether more or less, pre-planned or spontaneous comes from limitations on the relevance and usefulness of the textbook itself when being used for a particular group of students. Islam and Mares (2014) propose five ways to adapt textbooks based on learners' factors such as adding, deleting, simplifying, reordering, replacing material. Adding is simply explained as providing more material to learners both quantitatively and qualitatively. In other words, teachers can increase language input or exercises or practice related

Page | 362

to a certain content in the textbook by expanding and extending. Deleting is also done by either of two ways, subtracting or abridging. While subtracting is associated with reducing the number of language inputs or related assignments, abridging is the complete abandonment of a skill or a large part in the textbook. By simplifying, teachers change instructions, texts or activities so that they are easy to understand and managed for students. Reordering is related to how the process of giving instructions or conducting an activity takes place. Replacing involves using an alternative to replace the inappropriate part in the textbook.

Based on the overview of theoretical background related to textbook adaptation, the researcher comes up with a classification of textbook adaptation strategies with 6 strategies as follows:

- Deleting: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook

- Subtracting: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content

- Adding: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook

- Extending: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input

- Reorganizing: teachers change the order of section or tasks

- Simplifying: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage

In terms of the practical use of textbook adaptation strategies in language classes, it can be said that they have been used quite widely in classrooms around the world. Studies examining the use of textbook adaptation strategies as well as their effectiveness have been conducted by many researchers. In a study recently carried out by Ahamat and Kabilan (2022), Malaysian rural primary school teachers shared their views towards the use of imported textbooks and the strategies they used. The researchers of the study employed McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara's classification of adaptation strategies, which comprises adding, omitting, modifying, simplifying, and reordering. The results of the study show that adding is the strategy used by the most teachers. Five in seven teachers added photos and videos to make learners more interested in the lesson. While modifying, simplifying was only used by one teacher, a teacher reported to only follow the textbook without adaptation due to the worry about being criticized by school inspectors.

The research study conducted by Mede and Yalçın (2019) in Turkey brings more understandings to the strategies used by novice and experienced EFL instructors. Data collected from the three research instruments such as reflective essays, lesson plans and semi-structured interviews showed that teachers had a positive attitude about adjusting the textbook. They believed that adjustments were necessary to meet the course objectives as well as differences in the student's styles and interests. At the same time, both groups shared an agreement on the effectiveness of adaptation strategies in enhancing learning. In terms of the practical use textbook adjustment strategies presented McDonough & Shaw (1993), adding, deleting, modifying, simplifying, re-ordering, replacing and branching, the study results showed that both groups used a variety of strategies. By comparison, the implementation of modifying was the highest, equal in the two groups, while simplifying and branching were not used by either group of teachers. In contrast, there were differences in the frequency of use of adding, deleting, simplifying, re-ordering. While the experienced teachers used deleting more frequently than novice teachers, the use of adding was much lower. The frequency of re-ordering, replacing was quite low especially in novice teachers' classrooms. Another qualitative research conducted by Pratiwi, Jufrizal, and Hamzah in the same year with the participation of 5 teachers at SMKN 6 in Padang, Indonesia using comparisons of the textbook and students' notes as research instruments also showed the presence of textbook adaptation strategies in the classroom. Data analysis showed that teachers at the school used three strategies as expansion, re-writing, and abridging techniques most often. In contrast, the level of use of strategies such as the extension, subtraction, and reordering was quite limited.

In a survey with teachers and students at three selected preparatory schools in East Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region in 2020, Tibebu and Gashaye examined the teachers' feelings about textbook adaptation and the use of strategies. Data collected from questionnaires and interviews showed interesting findings. On the one hand, the teachers perceived textbook adaptation as a facilitating factor in their classroom. On the other hand, their implementation of adaptation was limited. The teachers carried out adaptation in three areas including the content, teaching methodology, assessment techniques respectively but they didn't do that with the book objectives. In terms of the extent to which each adaptation strategy was employed, research results revealed that the two strategies giving additional notes for grammar based activities, deleting skill based activities were used extremely frequently while the two strategies changing activities in the textbook and

substituting activities in the textbook was almost never used. The other strategies including expanding activities in the textbook, modifying some activities, rearranging activities in the textbook, deleting grammar based, reducing some activities. activities, giving additional notes for skill based activities were rarely employed by the teachers. The weak correlation between teacher's positive perceptions on the effectiveness of textbook adaptation and their infrequent use of adaptation in practice was explained to come from the teachers' lack of profession skills and experience, the shortage of available supplementary materials and concern about students' assessment method.

Literature review on research studies recently conducted on textbook adaptation shows that adaptation has been used widely at different extent in language classroom. The focus is mostly on teachers' perceptions and their use of adaptation.

The present study also examines the use of adaptation strategies and their perceived contributions to learning, but from students' perspectives rather than teachers' ones. This type of investigation has not been conducted yet in the local context, inspiring the researcher to carry out the study.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted to address two research questions:

- To what extent are the six textbook adaptation strategies employed in English classrooms?

- What is students' attitude toward the contribution of the adaptation strategies to their learning?

The participants of the study were 111 college students of Can Tho Vocational College. Convenience sampling method was used to select the participants for the study. The researcher sent the invitation to participate in the study to all students at the college who have just finished their general English course. The ones who accepted the invitation and were finally regarded as research participants. Those participants are mostly elementary English learners aged from 19 to 25.

To collect data for the study, a questionnaire was designed based on categories of adaptation strategies and their help presented in literature review. The questionnaire includes a total of 42 items divided into two sections. Section 1 with 36 five-point items is to get students' responses on the first research question, the extent to which the strategies were employed by the teachers in their listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar classes. Those the five-point scale items allowed the participants to specify their perceived frequency of adaption strategies among five scales (never used, rarely used, sometimes used, frequently used, very frequently used). Section 2 with 6 items is to examine the students' perceptions on the helpfulness of their teachers' textbook adaptation. For those items, the participants ranked the helpfulness on a 4- point scale of not helpful, a little helpful, quite helpful, very helpful. The questionnaire was sent to the participants as a Google form as it is time- saving and economical. Descriptive statistics showed a high coefficient alpha (α=.91) of the questionnaire which ensures its reliability a research instrument.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of Descriptive Statistics tests were analysed to get the answer for the two research questions.

Regarding the degree to which the adaptation strategies were used in local classrooms, there existed the implementation of all textbook adaptation strategies as shown in Table I and Table II below.

TABLE I: THE OVERALL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SIX ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Adaptation strategies	Mean	Min	Max
1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	2.8	2.5	3.3
2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	2.7	2.6	3.3
3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	3.6	3.1	4.2
4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	4.0	3.6	4.3
5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	2.9	2.9	3.0
6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	4.0	3.7	4.3

TABLE II: THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SIX ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN EACH LESSON TYPE

Lesson types	Adaptation strategies used	Mean	Min	Max
LISTENING	1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	3.3	2	5
	2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	3.3	2	5
	3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	3.3	2	5
	4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	3.6	2	5
	5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	3.0	2	5
	6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	3.7	2	5
SPEAKING	1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	3.2	2	5
	2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	2.6	2	5
	3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	3.5	2	5
	4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	3.8	2	5
	5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	2.9	2	5
	6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	4.2	2	5
READING	1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	2.6	2	5
	2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	2.6	2	5
	3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	3.3	2	5
	4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	4.2	2	5
	5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	3.0	2	5
	6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	3.9	2	5
WRITING	1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	2.5	2	5
	2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	2.6	2	5
	3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	4.2	2	5
	4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	4.3	2	5
	5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	3.0	2	5
	6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	4.2	2	5
V OCABULARY	1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	2.5	2	5
	2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	2.6	2	5

	3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	3.1	2	5
	4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	4.2	2	5
	5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	2.9	2	5
	6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	3.8	2	5
GRAMMAR	1. **Deleting**: teachers completely omit a task or a section in the textbook	2.6	2	5
	2. **Subtracting**: teachers reduce the number of questions of a task or knowledge related to language content	2.6	2	5
	3. **Adding**: teachers provide supplementary language input, exercises or activities using materials outside the textbook	4.2	2	5
	4. **Extending**: teachers develop more activities for practice based on available content or input	4.0	2	5
	5. **Reorganizing**: teachers change the order of section or tasks	3.0	2	5
	6. **Simplifying**: teachers modify a content or task in the textbook in a way that it is easier for students to understand and manage	4.3	2	5

As can be seen from Table I, the average mean scores for the six adaptation strategies are from 2.7 to 4.0, indicating the extent to which they were used rather high. The two strategies with share the highest mean score 4.0 are extending and simplifying, which were reported to be employed frequently by the teachers. In other words, teachers in the local school often designed more activities for their students' practice based on the available input in the textbook and provided the students with easier tasks and language explanations for better understanding and achievement. Adding was also used rather frequently by the teachers (M=3.6), just a little bit less than extending and simplifying. The other three strategies, deleting, subtracting and reorganizing, saw similar implementation due to no significant differences in their mean scores (M= 2.8, M=2.7, M=2.9 respectively). It can be concluded that the teachers sometimes employed those strategies in their classroom.

A closer look at the use of the six strategies in different lesson types such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar in Table II brought interesting findings.

In listening lessons, the strategies used the most frequently are extending and simplifying (M= 3.6, M=3.7) while reordering was used the least frequently (M=3.0). The use of deleting, subtracting and adding was the same (M=3.3). The results implied that the teachers mostly made use the listening materials in the textbook without making many changes by addition, omission, subtraction and reorganization. They just paid attention to making the lesson easier to their students and supported practice with supplementary activities using available material.

In speaking lessons, it can be seen that the use of most strategies increased in comparison with their use in listening lessons. An obvious increase involves simplifying (M=4.2), by which the teacher made the task easy to understand and carry out. The simplification may come from the lack of detailed instruction of the available speaking activities in the textbook. The use of extending in speaking lesson was rather lower than that of simplifying due to lower its lower mean score (M=3.8). The degree to which subtracting was employed in speaking lessons was considerably lower than that in listening lessons, indicating that the teachers reduced more requirements in speaking activities.

In reading lessons, it can be said that the teachers did not often delete or subtract a task or content in the reading section. Their mean scores for deleting and subtracting (M=2.6) were rather lower than the middle point in the five-point scale. Extending appeared to be the most frequent used strategies with the highest mean score (M= 4.2), slightly higher than simplification (M = 3.9).

Writing lessons experienced different implementation of the strategies. The use of adding considerably increased, becoming one of the most three frequent used strategies. The highest mean score of adding (M=4.3) shows that it is employed frequently in writing lesson, much more often than in other skill lessons. Extending and simplifying were still equally employed regularly in writing classroom (M= 4.2). The use of the strategies could involve a lack of comprehensive and step-by-step instruction of available writing activities.

The use of the strategies in vocabulary lessons was similar to that in reading lessons with extending employed the most, followed by simplifying, adding, reorganizing, subtracting and deleting respectively. In contrast, grammar lessons shared similar trend in the use of the six adaptation strategies with writing lessons. The use of adding, simplifying and extending was very much higher than the other three, implying the teachers' focus on grammar in the local context.

The extent to which the students perceived the helpfulness of the strategies is presented in Table III.

TABLE III: THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE HELPFULNESS OF THEIR TEACHERS' TEXTBOOK ADAPTATION

The contributions of the adaptation	Mean	Min	Max
The adaptation helps better my study.	3.3	2	4
The adaptation helps me master knowledge about vocabulary and grammar covered in the textbook.	3.3	2	4
The adaptation brings me more opportunities to practice the four language skills.	2.6	2	4
The adaptation makes learning more interesting.	2.6	2	4
The adaptation brings a variety of activities and content, better suiting learners' differences.	3.2	2	4
The adaptation makes the lessons more suitable to my level.	3.4	2	4

As seen in Table III, the textbook adaptation was perceived to be beneficial to students learning to certain degree. The mean scores of all items are around 3.0 implying that their level of helpfulness was from a little to quite high. The results show that the greatest contribution of the teachers' adjustment of the activities and content of the textbook was suiting students' level (M= 3.4). In addition, implementing textbook adaptation helped students better their learning in general and master knowledge about vocabulary and grammar aspects in specific. It is also reported that implementing textbook adaptation resulted in a variety of activities and language input, which can meet the differences in students' learning styles. The contribution of the adaptation in these three aspects was perceived to be rather considerable by the students. This may be related to the frequent use of simplifying, a strategy aiming at making the lesson easier to understand and follow as well as extending, a strategy aiming at giving more practice activities. The perceived contribution of adaptation to student's learning by bringing them more interests and opportunities to practise all four language skills was lower than in other aspects, however still meaningful with the average mean score of 2.6.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings, it was evident that the college students perceived their teachers' textbook adaptation as a contribution to their learning to some extent. The most significant contribution of the adaptation lied in suiting the student's level. In terms of the implementation of the six adaptation strategies in the classroom, it can be concluded that all of the strategies were employed by the teachers, but differently by frequency. The most frequent used strategies were simplifying and extending while the least frequent used ones were deleting and subtracting. This implied that the teachers often followed the organization and content covered in the textbook. Rather than omitting or subtracting a part, the teachers just adjusted it by adding simplifying or extending it to suit their teaching situation.

For further research, the researcher's recommendations would involve in what other aspects to examine and what other research instruments to employ. In fact, the present study only focused students' perceptions on the textbook adaptation strategies used by their teacher without exploring related aspects such as the teacher's reflection of the practice and the factors lying behind the practice. These are what further research could take into consideration. Besides that, more research instruments such as classroom observation and interview could be employed to get insights into the issue.

REFERENCES

[1] Ahamat, M. I. & Kabilan, M. K. (2022). Material adaptation among rural primary school English language teachers. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature®. The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 28(1).

[2] Cele-Murcia, M., Brinton, D.M. & Snow M. A. (2014). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Boston, MA Heinle ELT.

[3] Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann

[4] Harmer, J. (1998). *How to teach English: An introduction to the practice of English language teaching*. Harlow, Longman.

[5] Islam, C. & Mares, C. (2014). *Developing materials for language teaching*. Bloomsbury Publishing. 86-195

[6] Mede, E. & Yalçın, S. (2019). Utilizing textbook adaptation strategies: experiences and challenges of novice and experienced EFL instructors. *TESOL International Journal*, 14 (1).

[7] Pratiwi, N. U., Jufrizal & Hamzah (2019). English language teachers' practices of textbook adaptation techniques. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 463.

[8] Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[9] Tibebu, Y. & Gashaye, S. (2020). EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices of textbook adaptation in three selected preparatory schools of East Gojjam Zone. *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, 8(6).