



Teacher Adaptability and New English Textbooks: Challenges and Strategies in Chinese Junior Middle Schools

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Abstract. This study investigates the pedagogical challenges junior high school English teachers face in China following the nationwide implementation of new textbooks in the fall of 2024. The research explores current practices and perceptions related to the new materials, focusing on teacher adaptability. Based on empirical findings, the study proposes targeted adaptation strategies to facilitate effective textbook integration and enhance instructional outcomes. Employing a rigorous, mixed-methods approach, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence and practical recommendations for educators and policymakers addressing the challenges associated with curriculum reform.

Keywords: New English textbooks; Junior high school teachers; Teaching adaptability.

1 Introduction

The ongoing reform of China's basic education curriculum has positioned English language teaching at a crucial stage of development. The 2024 revision of junior high school English textbooks signifies a departure towards more contemporary educational paradigms, necessitating corresponding adaptations in teacher pedagogical approaches. These new materials are designed to foster students' comprehensive language competence and intercultural communicative competence, preparing them for effective engagement in a globalized context [1]. Notable features of the revised textbooks include enhanced scaffolding mechanisms, such as visual aids, tables, and illustrative examples, designed to mitigate learning difficulty, and the integration of cultural background knowledge and authentic real-world scenarios to stimulate student motivation and practical application [2].

This study investigates the challenges and opportunities related to the adaptability of seventh-grade English teachers in Northwest China within the context of these new textbooks. The research analyzes the dynamic interplay between teachers' evolving pedagogical beliefs, instructional methodologies, and resource integration practices.

The objective is to provide empirical insights and strategic recommendations for enhancing the quality of English language education in the region and promoting a more robust alignment between pedagogical practice and overarching educational objectives.

2 Literature Review

Teacher adaptability is crucial for realizing curriculum reform goals in junior high school English education, directly impacting curriculum implementation and student learning outcomes. Research indicates that teachers often rely on traditional methods and materials, potentially due to insufficient understanding of curriculum standards and limited support [3].

Factors such as educational background, pre-service training, and professional development opportunities influence adaptability, with rural teachers often facing greater challenges due to unequal resource distribution [4]. Teachers' views on materials also play a role, with many adopting an "authoritative" rather than "adaptive" or "creative" stance [5].

Adapting materials to student needs requires reading, evaluating, and modifying them, but limited resources and time often pose obstacles. While dynamic adjustments like material selection, sequencing, and content modification can improve student outcomes, they demand strong teacher innovation and flexibility [6].

The new curriculum presents multiple challenges, including textbook comprehension and application, addressing student diversity, innovating teaching methods, fostering positive teacher-student interactions, achieving core literacy goals, mitigating urban-rural disparities, and ensuring effective professional development [7].

Teacher adaptability impacts both personal effectiveness and student learning experiences and achievement. New, novice, and rural teachers face distinct adaptability challenges stemming from factors like personal qualifications, school management, university training, and resource allocation [8].

Strategies for improvement include enhancing pre-service training through methods like micro-teaching and micro-videos, providing in-service support via online and integrated training models, and prioritizing rural teacher development through curriculum enhancement, adaptive guidance, improved working conditions, and increased policy and social support. Programs like Hengyang Normal University's "National Teacher Training Program" demonstrate the effectiveness of well-managed training initiatives [9]. A comprehensive approach employing these strategies can empower teachers to effectively utilize materials and resources, promoting holistic student development.

3 Study Design

3.1 Research Questions

This study comprehensively investigates the adaptability of seventh-grade English teachers in Northwest China to the 2024 English textbook revisions through systematic analysis. The research addresses the following questions:

- 1) How did the textbook revisions impact teachers' pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices?
- 2) What key challenges did teachers encounter when implementing the new textbooks, and how did these challenges affect their teaching?
- 3) What are the primary factors influencing teacher adaptability, and how do these factors operate?
- 4) What effective strategies can enhance teacher adaptability to the new textbooks, and how effective are these strategies in practice?

3.2 Research Methods

This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to ensure the comprehensiveness and depth of the research. The specific methods are as follows:

3.2.1 Questionnaire Survey Method.

A questionnaire containing multi-dimensional and multi-level questions was designed to conduct a large-scale survey of English teachers in many junior high schools in Lanzhou City, Gansu Province, China. The questionnaire content covers teachers' cognition and attitude towards the revision of new textbooks, the use of new textbooks, changes in teaching burden, difficulties encountered and coping strategies. Through data analysis, the overall situation and differences of the teacher group in terms of adaptability to the new textbooks are revealed.

3.2.2 In-depth Interview Method.

Based on the questionnaire survey, some representative teachers are selected for in-depth interviews. The interview adopts a semi-structured method and revolves around the key issues in the questionnaire survey, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' specific feelings, confusions, challenges and coping strategies. Through the interview, richer and more in-depth information is obtained, providing empirical evidence for analyzing the influencing factors of teachers' teaching adaptability and proposing strategic suggestions.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1 Data Collection.

Data were collected through questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and case studies. The authenticity, reliability, and validity of the data were ensured.

3.3.2 Data Analysis.

Statistical software was used to perform descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis on the questionnaire survey data to reveal the overall status and

differences of the teacher groups in terms of adaptability to the new textbooks. Interview records, classroom observation records, and case study materials were summarized, organized, and analyzed to extract key information and conclusions.

4 Data Analysis Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

This survey included 32 junior high school English teachers, with a near 1:1 male-to-female ratio. The majority of participants were between 31 and 40 years old, with an average teaching experience of 11 to 20 years. All participants were confirmed junior high school English teachers, and most of their schools had implemented the new textbooks. Participation in related training was generally low, indicating a need for improved professional development opportunities.

Analysis of the survey data reveals a moderately positive overall teacher perception of the revised textbooks, with a mean score of 3.66. This finding suggests a general acceptance of the revisions among the teacher population. The revised textbooks were evaluated favorably in terms of thematic guidance, real-world relevance, discourse-oriented pedagogy, and language skills development, exhibiting mean scores between 3.94 and 4.19. However, a statistically significant increase in perceived overall difficulty was also reported ($M = 4.28$), indicating that the revisions necessitate enhanced pedagogical content knowledge and instructional expertise on the part of teachers.

Teacher adaptability to the new textbooks, as measured by a mean score of 2.50, suggests a moderate level of overall adaptation. A significant increase in teaching burden was reported by teachers ($M = 3.78$) after the adoption of the new materials. Key challenges identified by teachers included the abstract nature of some textbook content, a perceived lack of adequate resources, and a heavier classroom teaching workload. To mitigate these difficulties, teachers employed a range of coping strategies, including the use of supplementary resources designed for the new textbooks, independent research conducted in libraries and online, and collaborative discussions with fellow teachers. These strategies were widely adopted among the participants.

According to teacher feedback, the new textbooks present a moderate level of difficulty for students ($M = 3.84$), with specific challenges expected in word pronunciation and recitation, sentence structure comprehension, and oral communication skills. Teachers further indicated that the textbooks could benefit from optimization in several key areas, including content difficulty, the provision of teaching resources, and overall textbook structure ($M = 3.28$ - 3.41).

Teacher feedback revealed a desire for greater support and guidance in the areas of educational and teaching theories, curriculum standards, and practical teaching methods, with mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 3.69. This suggests that teachers require further professional development and support to effectively implement the new textbooks and enhance their overall adaptability.

In conclusion, this study reveals that junior high school English teachers have demonstrated a measure of adaptability and a positive orientation towards the revised textbooks, while simultaneously confronting a range of challenges. To maximize the

effectiveness of these revisions and promote sustained teacher growth, targeted interventions are recommended. These include strengthening professional development programs, optimizing the allocation of instructional resources, and establishing mechanisms for incorporating student learning needs and feedback into future curriculum development and implementation.

4.2 Cluster Analysis of Teacher Responses to Textbook Revisions

Cluster analysis of questionnaire responses from teachers revealed two distinct groups: Cluster 1 ($n=6$), comprising higher-level teachers, and Cluster 2 ($n=26$), representing the majority. Both clusters expressed generally positive attitudes towards the textbook revisions, acknowledging their strengths. However, significant differences emerged in their experiences and perceptions.

Higher-level teachers in Cluster 1 perceived the new textbooks as moderately challenging and reported strong adaptation, accompanied by generally positive implementation experiences. They also found the accompanying audio materials effective in stimulating student interest. In contrast, the majority of teachers in Cluster 2 found the textbooks significantly more difficult, reporting greater challenges across various aspects of teaching-related content. This group experienced only moderate adaptation and perceived an increased teaching burden. While both clusters encountered implementation challenges, Cluster 1 teachers reported fewer difficulties and demonstrated greater success in employing coping strategies.

Furthermore, Cluster 2 teachers believed the new textbooks presented significant learning challenges for students across various knowledge domains, whereas Cluster 1 did not report such concerns. Both clusters, however, expressed a desire for further textbook improvement and advocated for increased support and guidance in educational theory and pedagogical practice.

In summary, the cluster analysis highlighted a clear distinction between higher-level teachers and the majority in their experiences with the new textbooks. Higher-level teachers demonstrated greater adaptability, fewer implementation challenges, and a more positive perception of student engagement. Conversely, the majority reported greater difficulties with implementation, a higher perceived difficulty level for both them and their students, and a stronger need for support and guidance. These findings provide valuable insights into the varying experiences and perceptions of teachers regarding textbook revisions and highlight the importance of considering these differences in educational reform efforts.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis unveiled notable interconnections among teachers' attitudes towards textbook revisions, perceived textbook difficulty, changes in teaching load, teacher adaptability, and student learning difficulty. A positive attitude was linked to better teacher adaptation, reduced teaching load, and lower perceived student learning difficulty. Conversely, greater perceived textbook difficulty correlated with increased teaching burden and higher student learning difficulty.

Key findings include:

(1) A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.480$, $p = .005$) between teachers' attitudes and textbook performance aspects, such as thematic coherence.

(2) A negative correlation ($r = -0.520$, $p = .002$) between teacher attitude and teaching load changes, and a positive correlation ($r = 0.479$, $p = .006$) between perceived textbook difficulty and teaching load changes.

(3) Strong positive correlations between teacher adaptability and lower perceived student learning difficulty ($r = 0.650$, $p < .001$), and between perceived textbook difficulty and student learning difficulty ($r = 0.558$, $p = .001$).

A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.796$, $p < .001$) between teaching load changes and perceived student learning difficulty.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of positive teacher attitudes and manageable textbook difficulty in reducing teaching burden and student learning difficulty. Educational departments and schools can use these insights to develop targeted interventions that support teacher adaptation and enhance teaching effectiveness.

4.4 Interview Findings

In-depth interviews were conducted with three seventh-grade English teachers in Northwest China to gain firsthand insights into their experiences adapting to the revised textbooks. While teachers generally expressed support for the revisions, they also articulated several challenges.

4.4.1 Impact on Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices.

The textbook revisions have significantly influenced teachers' pedagogical beliefs. Participants generally agreed that the new textbooks emphasize comprehensive and practical knowledge, focusing on developing integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Teacher A noted the expanded vocabulary and focus on holistic skill development. Teacher B highlighted the rich content requiring interdisciplinary connections. Consequently, teachers reported a greater focus on student needs and a shift towards more diversified and flexible teaching methods. For instance, Teacher B described incorporating various resources, such as online exercises and instructional videos, to enhance teaching effectiveness.

4.4.2 Challenges and Impacts of Textbook Implementation.

Despite their support for the revisions, teachers identified several implementation challenges. The increased vocabulary and overall difficulty placed greater demands on teacher expertise. Both Teacher A and Teacher C mentioned the need for new teachers to acquire more extensive knowledge and for experienced teachers to restructure their existing knowledge base. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary nature of the new textbooks increased lesson preparation time and complexity. These challenges impacted classroom management, pacing, and perceived student outcomes.

4.4.3 Factors Influencing Teacher Adaptability.

Key factors influencing teacher adaptability included prior teaching experience, understanding and mastery of the new textbooks, availability of school resources, and students' prior learning. Teacher B suggested that experienced teachers adapted more readily, while newer teachers required more time and support. The provision of resources and professional development by schools also played a crucial role. Additionally, the heterogeneity of students' prior learning posed a significant challenge.

4.4.4 Strategies for Enhancing Teacher Adaptability.

Teachers employed various strategies to enhance their adaptability. These included:

(1)Professional Development: Teachers prioritized self-directed learning and professional development through training, research on question types, and efforts to improve their teaching skills.

(2)Resource Utilization: Teachers actively used supplementary resources, such as online exercises and instructional videos.

(3)Differentiated Instruction: Teachers implemented differentiated instruction to address the diverse learning needs of their students, focusing on targeted support for weaker students in areas such as recitation and foundational skills.

These strategies yielded positive results, with teachers reporting improved understanding and mastery of the new content and enhanced ability to meet diverse student needs. However, teachers also suggested areas for improvement in the textbooks, such as the inclusion of more relevant exercises and regional reading materials to enhance student engagement.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

The revisions to textbooks present both challenges and opportunities for junior high school English teachers. To empower these educators in effectively implementing the new curriculum, enhancing teaching quality, and fostering holistic student development, educational stakeholders must act on several key recommendations: strengthening professional development and support, refining textbook design and execution, establishing an adaptability assessment framework, and catering to individual teacher needs. This study delved into the adaptability of junior high school English teachers to the revised textbooks, exploring their attitudes, evaluations, and adaptive practices. The subsequent sections summarize the primary findings and propose recommendations for future action.

5.1 Teachers' Perspectives on Textbook Revisions

Overall, teachers responded positively to the 2024 textbook revisions, acknowledging their strengths in thematic integration, real-world applicability, discourse-based instruction, and language skill development. However, concerns emerged regarding content complexity, alignment with classroom demands, and resource availability. Some teachers found the content abstract and challenging to apply practically, complicating

lesson planning. Additionally, the scarcity of supplementary materials, especially practical activities, hindered teachers' creativity and limited their ability to fully exploit the textbooks' potential.

5.2 Variability in Teacher Adaptation and Differentiation

Teacher adaptation to the new materials varied widely. Those with a positive mindset eagerly adopted the new resources, recognizing their value and actively engaging in the learning and adaptation process. These teachers exhibited professional growth by tackling challenges, updating their knowledge, enhancing their skills, and gradually embracing student-centered, interactive, and task-based teaching methods. Conversely, other teachers struggled with adaptation, particularly in designing and implementing content and innovating teaching strategies.

5.3 Factors Impacting Teacher Adaptability

Teacher adaptability was shaped by a multifaceted interplay of factors. Individual attributes, such as teaching experience, professional background, and pedagogical expertise, played pivotal roles. Institutional support, encompassing training and resources provided by schools and educational institutions, was also essential. Although professional development opportunities, especially those offering deep dives into the new textbooks and innovative teaching techniques, had the potential to bolster teacher confidence and motivation, participation levels were not optimal. This underscores the need for improved accessibility and engagement.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Practice

Building on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance teacher adaptability and support the successful implementation of revised textbooks:

5.4.1 Strengthen Teacher Professional Development and Support.

Educational departments and schools should bolster teacher professional development by offering diverse training opportunities tailored to the specific challenges identified in this study. These should include expert-led workshops, peer-learning communities, and access to a broad array of resources. Emphasis should be placed on practical strategies for implementing the new textbooks, addressing content complexity, and integrating interdisciplinary connections.

5.4.2 Refine Textbook Design and Implementation.

Textbook design should prioritize practical application and alignment with classroom needs. Educational departments and schools should establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess textbook implementation, identify challenges, and ensure that the intended benefits of the revisions are achieved. Teacher feedback should be actively sought and incorporated into future revisions.

5.4.3 Implement an Adaptability Assessment Framework.

A long-term adaptability assessment framework should be established to regularly evaluate teachers' adaptation to new materials and provide targeted feedback. This framework should inform personalized support and professional development initiatives, enabling teachers to better navigate the challenges of curriculum changes.

5.4.4 Cater to Individual Teacher Needs.

Differentiated support and professional development should be provided based on teachers' unique needs, considering factors such as teaching experience, professional background, and pedagogical skills. Special attention and resources should be directed towards new and rural teachers, ensuring they receive the necessary support to adapt to the new curriculum effectively.

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