封面頁

**海學文化事業股份有限公司
與文藻外語大學**

**產學合作計畫成果報告**

初探英文閱讀教科書範文之可讀性研究:
以*Active Skills for Reading\_Intro*為例

合約編號：英產學字第107020032號
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計畫主持人：英國語文系 林秀珍 老師

共同主持人：英語教學中心 謝君青 老師

本成果報告包括以下附件：

🗹結案報告一份：11頁(請依照範例格式，內文字體為12級字，至少6頁以上)
🞎計畫執行相關圖片與說明(請儘量貼圖說明，置於結案報告內，可資為佐證，非必要條件)

執行單位：文藻外語大學英國語文系及英語教學中心

中 華 民 國107年7月24日

**文藻學校財團法人文藻外語大學產官學合作計畫**

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| □期中檢核表Verification Check-list for Midterm IGA Project | █結案檢核表Verification Check-list for Final IGA Project |
| 計畫名稱 | 初探英文閱讀教科書範文之可讀性研究:以*Active Skills for Reading\_Intro*為例 |
| 合約編號 | 英產學字第107020032號 |
| 計畫主持人 | 林秀珍 | 系、所（中心） | 英國語文系 | 職稱 | 專任副教授 |
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| 執行期間 |  107年 3 月 1 日起，至 107年 7 月 31 日止 |
| 完成臨時人力退保 | □是，已辦理退保時間： 年 月 日 ▇無聘用人力□否，若未依期限退保所衍生之保費，由計畫主持人支應。  |
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| 進度說明 | ■如期結案 □已申請延長核銷結案(請檢附簽核完成之延長核銷申請表)  |
| 現況簡述或檢附期中(結案)報告(必填) | 本產學研究案蒐集英文閱讀教科書之內容進行可讀性之研究，結果顯示約三分之一的課程未能做由簡到難的規劃，僅就主題來區分內容。研究建議出版社可做最經濟的改變：以可讀性做閱讀內容順序之調度，若前後章節差異數值過大，建議可做適度的可讀性調整。若能接受如上建議，達成閱讀者感受閱讀內容漸進式的難度挑戰之功能，亦能提升本教科書內容設計之評價，並進而增加市場接受度。 |
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| 會計室 |  |
| 研究發展處 |  |

**說明：**除教育部或科技部專案研究外，產學合作案應依規定填報下列資料送交研究發展處存檔備查：(一)期中檢核表：合約期程長於六個月，計畫主持人須於該案起始日起每六個月填報。(二)結案檢核表：計畫主持人須於結案日後三個月內填報。(三)結案報告及其他相關資料如成果發表會論文等：計畫主持人須於結案日後三個月內，以電子檔及書面方式送交。**流程：**計畫主持人系主任院長會計室研究發展處

**初探英文閱讀教科書範文之可讀性研究:
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**Abstract**

This paper reports on the study in relation to the readability of reading texts retrieved from an assigned course book used in a high-beginning level language course in a language university located in southern Taiwan. The purposes of this study were to investigate the reading ease as well as the grade level of the reading texts. Findings show that generally the texts were properly arranged in terms of reading ease and grade level; nevertheless, some advice and amendment could be considered to meet the student readers’ needs. Results of this study may raise the essence of readability measurement before teachers make the final decision in selecting textbooks.

***Keywords:*** *readability, questionnaire-based, reading ease, grade level*

**Introduction**

 In a second language classroom, textbooks have been strictly selected to correspond to students’ proficiency level of the target language before the course begins. In fact, they are the main written input for instructors to interact with students to learn, practice, elaborate, and finally acquire the target language.

English has been the main foreign language for students in Taiwan to learn from formal instruction settings, from elementary school to university. Consequently the huge market of English textbooks has stimulated publishers to provide a variety of textbooks to meet different need of learners, learning purposes, and proficiency levels. These books are generally written and edited by foreign publishers in a series, and instructors can find an appropriate level for their students with ease. Nevertheless, textbooks play a decisive role to lead the class to either success or failure, whereas teachers who act as facilitators of learning in the classroom.

Therefore, the readability needs to be taken into consideration in addition to choosing a proper level while teachers are seeking appropriate reading texts for class. Readability consists of the complexity of reading materials in sentences, vocabulary and grammar (Richard & Schmidt, 2002, p. 442). If it is far beyond students’ proficiency, the learning will become overwhelming or even make them lose the interest of learning English. On the other hand, if the textbooks are properly chosen, the learning efficacy would be accomplished and students can be thus motivated to extend their learning to a wider context. Apparently, readability is therefore an important factor for publishers to take into account when they are under the production of creating new textbooks.

To investigate the readability of a textbook for reading skills, the present study aims to answer the following questions and provide the findings not only for teachers to improve their selection of ideal textbook but also for publishers to present a better quality in their products.

1. Are the reading texts in the textbook properly arranged on the basis of reading ease?

2. Are the reading texts in the textbook properly arranged on the basis of grade level?

3. How to improve the readability of the textbook?

**Literature Review**

Second language learners are usually exposed to a variety of input from which they hear or receive to achieve fluency and accuracy of a target language. In the meantime, they may encounter two means of developing L2 knowledge. One is the subconscious process of language acquisition; that is, to pick up the part of language which has been attended to or noticed as intake (Krashen, 1982, p.10; Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 262). The other is conscious learning, which yields language’s formal knowledge such as grammar and rules (Krashen, 1982, p.10). Such conceptualization of acquisition and learning was seen fuzzy and loose to describe the journey of acquiring L2 knowledge (Brown, 2000, p. 279), and alternative modes were thus assumed to represent this, such as implicit and explicit learning in cognition (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 206). Either learners are conscious or unconscious in the procedure of explicit or implicit learning, there is no denying the fact that input plays a key role to guide them to interact with the target language. For this reason, the research on learners’ English reading text was conducted.

***Input***

 Second language acquisition takes place merely when learners have access to input (Ellis, 2003, p. 26). Little agreement, however, has been made about the role of input. Behaviorists such as Watson and Skinner (as cited in Ellis, 1999, p. 20) claim input is essential in the process of acquisition because it is likely to trigger learners’ intention to reinforce the practice. This is challenged by mentalists such as Chomsky (as cited in Ellis, 1999, p. 20) who claim that it is the mental process of learners that converts the input they receive into a form they could store and handle in production.

More influential studies have been proposed in the dispute. Take Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis as an example. On his theory of language acquisition, Krashen contends that a learner can acquire a second language by receiving comprehensible input, which contains structures slightly ahead of a learner’s current competence (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). In other words, the language that a learner already knows may not serve any purpose of acquisition. To make this more specific, Krashen conceptualizes a learner’s current state of knowledge as *i* and the next stage as *i+1* formula. Therefore, when learners receive right quantities of comprehensible input, they acquire the language automatically. For instance, speech emerges as the result of building competence through accumulating comprehensible input.

Krashen’s innatist model of second language acquisition has been questioned on its application in classroom. For example, sufficient quantity of comprehensible input has not been defined for a learner to receive prior to the acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 205)? Also, it is argued that speech may automatically emerge only for those highly-motivated students, and Krashen has not left any clear instructions for teachers to deal with those students who do not witness the emergence of speech but suffer from silence in language production (Brown, 2000, p. 281).

***Readability***

 In addition to selecting *i*+1 input for potential acquisition in the future, both learners and instructors look forward to measuring the difficulty level of input to ensure learners would reach effective learning efficacy. That is, readability.

Readability has been defined as how easily that written materials can be read and understood. It is specifically related to the length of sentences, new vocabulary and grammatical complexity (Richard & Schmidt, 2002, p. 442). If learners can be exposed to level-appropriate reading texts, the intention of the writer can be addressed to intended readers and thus the learning atmosphere is not filled with affective filters which block the learning from the input. Furthermore, learning and acquisition can be expected to take place in the end.

Studies indicate readability of textbook may have been ignored by teachers during selecting textbooks; therefore, students have experienced frustration in the learning process. Freahat (2014) reported those poor instances in different academic settings ranging from fourth grade to university, which applied readability formulas to assess textbooks and cloze tests to evaluate students’ comprehension of their reading materials. Among most of the cases, the readability level of textbooks was far beyond students’ current competence. Students were, consequently, not able to enjoy learning from those reading materials that teachers and professors expected them to achieve in the classroom.

Research also supports the notion that appropriate and increased readability in textbooks leads to better comprehension, retention, reading speed, and efficiency since not only does it facilitate learning but also results in greater knowledge (Rebottini & Smith, n.d. , p. 151). Therefore, teachers should take readability of textbook into consideration. Moreover, this needs to be done from chapter to chapter to ensure that the difficulty level of each single reading text is appropriate for learners (Kasule, 2010, p. 63).

**Method**

In this study, three sets of instruments were used. Two reading ability formulas were employed, one being Microsoft Word readability and the other being the free online readability test tool.

(http://www.readabilityformulas.com/freetests/six-readability-formulas.php).

***Data analysis***

 In order to calculate the numbers of reading ease and grade level, Microsoft Word and online readability test tool were applied. The figures were then computerized to get the average scores for the six units and two review units covered in one semester, including two reading passages in each unit and three extra passages in each review test.

**Result and Discussion**

Readability scores and grade levels of the reading texts were calculated by Microsoft Word and the free online readability test tool ((<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/freetests/six-readability-formulas.php>). The results might differ slightly. Table 1 illustrates the results of the readability analysis with the in-built tools in the Microsoft WORD and the online text readability testing tool. Using the same tools, Table 2 shows the results of the grade level. The higher number of readability a text gets, the easier the reading text is. The higher number of grade level a text gets, the higher level of reader it fits.

As can be seen, the reading ease did not show the gradual level, that is, from easy to difficult but the topic-based arrangement. While some units such as Units 1A (81%) and 1B (78%) and Units 3A (82.2%) and 3B (79.7%) could follow the principle, others such as Units 2A (75.8%) and 2B (87.4%) and Units 4A (74.9%) and 4B (77.8%) could not.

**Table 1:** Flesch Reading Ease score: Texts in Units and Review Units

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unit | Title/Word Count | WORD | Text Readability Test Tool | Total Score | Aver-age | Rank (Easy (1) ~ Diffi-cult (6)) |
| Unit 1A | Face 2 Face (172) | 77.2 | 84.8 | 162 | 81.0 | 5 |
| Unit 1B | Active Gaming (379) | 78.5 | 79.2 | 157.7 | 78.9 | 8 |
| Unit 2A | The International Student Resource Center (241) | 79.2 | 72.3 | 151.5 | 75.8 | 11 |
| Unit 2B | The Learning Center, Toronto (208) | 83.7 | 91.1 | 174.8 | 87.4 | 1 |
| Unit 3A | One Man, 52 Jobs (197) | 81.1 | 83.2 | 164.3 | 82.2 | 4 |
| Unit 3B | *Working* Holiday (229) | 79.9 | 79.5 | 159.4 | 79.7 | 7 |
| RU 1A | Can the Internet be bad for you? (260) | 78.0 | 78 | 156 | 78.0 | 9 |
| RU 1B | Lifelong Learning (169) | 64.3 | 69.7 | 134 | 67.0 | 17 |
| RU 1C | Earning Power (240) | 59.0 | 77.4 | 136.4 | 68.2 | 14 |
| Unit 4A | Sports Today World Sports (236) | 75.4 | 74.3 | 149.7 | 74.9 | 12 |
| Unit 4B | Are sports important? (224) | 76.1 | 79.4 | 155.5 | 77.8 | 10 |
| Unit 5A | Scenic Hong Kong (210) | 86.6 | 86.0 | 172.6 | 86.3 | 2 |
| Unit 5B | Singapore (232) | 65.6 | 69.5 | 135.1 | 67.6 | 16 |
| Unit 6A | *Table* Manners (293) | 85.0 | 82.5 | 167.5 | 83.8 | 3 |
| Unit 6B | My Homestay Diary (237) | 79.9 | 80.0 | 159.9 | 80.0 | 6 |
| RU 2A | Special Guests (225) | 69.7 | 72.9 | 142.6 | 71.3 | 13 |
| RU 2B | World Cup Blog (237) | 65.8 | 70.4 | 136.2 | 68.1 | 15 |
| RU 2C | Tony Wheeler of Lonely Planet (213) | 61.0 | 64.2 | 125.2 | 62.6 | 18 |

 Similar trend could also be observed in the grade level (See Table 2). Some units, could indicated the grade level from the lower level to the higher level, for instance, Units 1A (Level 3.7) and 1B (Level 4.4) and Review Units 2A (Level 6.2), 2B (Level 7.1), and 2C (Level 7.6), whereas some did not, for instance, Unit 2A (Level 5.0) and 2B (Level 2.7). Even the principle could be followed, there appeared to be a big gap. Take Unit 5A and 5B. The grade level in 5A was 3.4, but it was 7.9 in 5B.

**Table 2:** Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: Texts in Units and Review Units

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Unit | Title/Word Count | WORD | Text Readabi-lity Test Tool | Total Score | Aver-age | Rank (Easy (1)~Difficult (6)) |
| Unit 1A | Face 2 Face (172) | 4.1 | 3.2 | 7.3 | 3.7 | 3 |
| Unit 1B | Active Gaming (379) | 4.2 | 4.5 | 8.7 | 4.4 | 5 |
| Unit 2A | The International Student Resource Center (241) | 4.3 | 5.6 | 9.9 | 5.0 | 10 |
| Unit 2B | The Learning Center, Toronto (208) | 3.2 | 2.2 | 5.4 | 2.7 | 1 |
| Unit 3A | One Man, 52 Jobs (197) | 4.6 | 4.4 | 9 | 4.5 | 6 |
| Unit 3B | *Working* Holiday (229) | 4.3 | 4.7 | 9 | 4.5 | 7 |
| RU 1A | Can the Internet be bad for you? (260) | 5.2 | 5.3 | 10.5 | 5.3 | 11 |
| RU 1B | Lifelong Learning (169) | 7.0 | 5.7 | 12.7 | 6.4 | 14 |
| RU 1C | Earning Power (240) | 7.8 | 5.7 | 13.5 | 6.8 | 15 |
| Unit 4A | Sports Today World Sports (236) | 5.5 | 5.8 | 11.3 | 5.7 | 12 |
| Unit 4B | Are sports important? (224) | 5.0 | 4.4 | 9.4 | 4.7 | 9 |
| Unit 5A | Scenic Hong Kong (210) | 3.3 | 3.4 | 6.7 | 3.4 | 2 |
| Unit 5B | Singapore (232) | 7.9 | 7.8 | 15.7 | 7.9 | 18 |
| Unit 6A | *Table* Manners (293) | 4.5 | 4.8 | 9.3 | 4.7 | 8 |
| Unit 6B | My Homestay Diary (237) | 4.1 | 4.2 | 8.3 | 4.2 | 4 |
| RU 2A | Special Guests (225) | 6.4 | 6.0 | 12.4 | 6.2 | 13 |
| RU 2B | World Cup Blog (237) | 7.3 | 6.8 | 14.1 | 7.1 | 16 |
| RU 2C | Tony Wheeler of Lonely Planet (213) | 7.7 | 7.4 | 15.1 | 7.6 | 17 |

Research question 1: Are the reading texts in the textbook properly arranged on the basis of reading ease?

Each reading text gained an average score of reading ease and grade level respectively (see Table 3) and formed the basis of the research and data. Reading ease literally indicates the degree that readers can access the reading passage; therefore, a higher score demonstrates the text is easier to comprehend. On the other hand, a high grade level may interrupt readers from understanding the reading text and thus convey obstacles in reading ease.

**Table 3:** Average Scores of Reading Ease and Grade Level of Target Reading Texts

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Unit** | **Review Unit** | **Unit** | **Review Unit** |
|  | 1A | 1B | 2A | 2B | 3A | 3B | 1A | 1B | 1C | 4A  | 4B | 6A | 5B  | 6A | 6V | 2A | 2B | 2C |
| Reading Ease | 81 | 78.9 | 75.8 | 87.4 | 82.2 | 79.7  | 78 |  67 | 68.2 | 74.9 | 77.8 | 86.3 | 67.6 | 83.8 | 80  | 71.3 | 68.1 | 62.6 |
| Grade Level | 3.7 | 4.4 | 5 | 2.7  | 4.5 | 4.5 | 5.3 | 6.4 | 6.8  | 5.7 | 4.7 | 3.4 | 7.9 | 4.7 | 4.2 | 6.2 | 7.1 | 7.6 |

\*Reading ease: The higher the value, the easier the text.

\*Grade level: The higher the level, the more difficult the text.

The six units represent six topics on different themes, and each unit consists of two reading passages. To expose readers to increasing challenges and benefit from the reading texts, the publisher should arrange them by lowering the reading ease from the first unit to the last one. In other words, the grade level should gradually increase to the highest at the end of reading this textbook.

**Table 4:** Discrepancy of Reading Ease and Grade Level Between Lessons

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Unit | Reading Ease | Grade Level |
| Discrepancy Value | Percentage\*  | Discrepancy Value  | Percentage\*  |
| 1A-1B | 2.1 | 2.6% | 0.7 | 18.9% |
| 2A-2B | 11.6 | 15.3% | 2.3 | 46.0% |
| 3A-3B | 2.5 | 3.0% | 0.0 | 0.0% |
| Review 1A-1B | 11.0 | 16.4% | 1.1 | 17.2% |
| Review 1B-1C | 1.2 | 1.8% | 0.4 | 6.3% |
| 4A-4B | 2.9 | 3.9% | 1.0 | 17.5% |
| 5A-5B | 18.7 | 21.7% | 4.5 | 132.4% |
| 6A-6B | 3.8 | 4.5% | 0.5 | 10.6% |
| Review 2A-2B  | 3.2 | 4.5% | 0.9 | 14.5% |
| Review2B-2C | 5.51 | 8.1% | 0.5 | 7.0% |

\*3 groups demonstrated obvious discrepancy on Reading Ease: Unit 2A-2B, RU 1A-1B, Unit 5A-5B

\*2 Groups demonstrated obvious discrepancy on Grade Level: Unit 2A-2B, Unit 5A-5B

Results of reading ease show that six lessons were not properly arranged among eighteen target texts due to higher indexes compared to their previous lesson (Figure 1). The arrows above the six dots of Flesch Reading Ease in the same figure conveyed this shortage of readability to a proportion of one third of the target reading texts. For example, the average reading ease of unit 2B should be lower than unit 2A and the line of reading ease in the figure should go down as unit 1B does. However, the score is 16.4% (Table 4) higher than its previous lesson, that is, it is definitely simpler to access the text after lesson 2A and readers may not have the opportunity to take the increasing challenges of reading. Similar results appeared on Review Unit 1C, Unit 4A, 4B, 5A, and 6A.



**Figure 1:** Reading Ease and Grade Level of Target Reading Texts

Research question 2: Are the reading texts in the textbook properly arranged on the basis of grade level?

 Regarding the grade level, the score (Table 3) as well as the figure (Figure 1) did not demonstrate a result as significant as the reading ease did, yet the findings of those texts not properly arranged in this aspect echoed the majority of lessons in terms of reading ease. Five lessons’ grade level dropped in Flesch Kincaid Grade Level, and their performance on Flesch Reading Ease went upwards. Review unit 1C was the exception because both of its reading ease and grade level revealed a higher value than unit 1B. In fact, the scores they reflected and the distinction between this pair of two lessons were close and trivial that these reading texts may still be considered similar (Table 3; Table 4).

Research question 3: How to improve the readability of the textbook?

 To meet the readability of these reading texts, the findings indicate adjustment of the six units not properly arranged on reading ease and grade level should be made, particularly the order in the reading textbook. Such a modification would be more likely to promote learners’ reading competence by means of reading a carefully published book under the consideration of its readability. This is estimated the most economical and efficient solution to increase the readability of all reading texts in the textbook without sacrificing original concepts of creating a variety of themes.

Two review units are not involved in the suggested diagram (Figure 2) due to their contents were written to review previous units. For example, Review Unit 1 extended reading practices from unit 1, 2, and 3 to another three lessons prior to proceeding to another new theme. When the new version of first three units consists of unit 2, 5, and 6, it is odd and hard to build up the connection between original Review Unit 1 with the three units because it contains the review section only for unit 2, not for unit 5 and 6. Therefore, the two review units do not appear in this suggested figure.

Nevertheless, the original two review units were mostly well arranged on their readability except review unit 1C, particularly its reading ease. In contrast, the grade level of the same reading text was higher than review unit 1B and thus might give readers a bit challenges while proceeding to this lesson. The discrepancy between these two lessons was calculated and appeared to be the lowest, 1.8%, in the study (Table 4); therefore, it is not necessarily important to modify the sequence of these two lessons if review unit 1 is under the consideration to be part of the new version.



**Figure 2:** SuggestedReading Ease and Grade Level of Target Reading Texts

An idealcollection of reading texts should place the order from high to low on reading ease, whereas the grade level is arranged from low to high. For the same reading texts, the order of these main twelve reading passages is thus reshuffled and suggested. As two lessons of each unit were presented following the identical theme, changes are made merely on the order of units. Also, two lessons would be reversed if their reading ease and grade level did not appear from simple to difficult. This only occurred on unit 2 and unit 4.

The new diagram seems to reveal a well-developed version on reading ease and grade level; however, a collapse of reading ease between two lessons of unit 2 and unit 5 may appear dramatic difference and imply necessary changes should be made to achieve a better readability. The discrepancy percentage between lesson A and B of these two units occurs to be the highest among all the units: 16.4% and 21.7% for unit 2 and 5 (Table 4) respectively. Meanwhile, the same phenomenon takes place on the grade level and shows the highest discrepancy among all the units: 46% and 132%.

Overall data (Table 3) (Figure 1) lead to verify that unit 2B and 5A are both significantly simpler than their counterparts unit 2A and 5B. It is thus plausible for the publisher to consider reducing the gap on revised version and reverse the order of two lessons of unit 2. Unit 2B was presented with the highest reading ease and lowest grade level of all reading texts; it is therefore suggested to be the first reading lesson (Figure 2). Similar suggestion can also be also given to unit 4, so unit 4B should be presented to learners earlier than unit 4A.

**Conclusion**

 This study aimed to use the most commonly and user-friendly readability formulas to measure the reading texts involved in the course book for high beginners in a language university located in southern Taiwan. Readability and grade level of the reading texts appeared in the units, including review units which are covered in a semester, were compared. Findings showed that the rank order might have to be reshuffled in terms of reading ease and text grade level so as to present the easy-difficult order for specific level of readers. The following suggestions could be considered when the publisher intends to continue revising the course book:

1. To arrange the units based on the analysis done in this study rather than on the topic.

2. To integrate the emphasized training in the textbook, i.e. Nelson’s reading speed, so as to see if the difficulty level goes with the reading speed.

3. To amend the length of the reading texts based on the consequent level of easiness and grade level even though no significance was found.

**Limitation & further study**

 This study shows some limitation, for example, lack of qualitative method during the study. If comprehension questions could be done to analyze whether the reshuffled texts can be understood, the effectiveness of classified texts could be evaluated. Further study may include investigation of students’ productive outcome, such as writing to evaluate readability and grade level of their written work. It can also be done with the focus group so that further in-depth opinions could be collected.

 Another possible task for further study could be considered. In the case of the publishers, it is suggested that reading textbooks can be analyzed so that proper texts can be managed to fit the reading ease and grade level of the students. In the case of teachers, whenever additional texts are to be used, readability test can be done in advance so as to meet the students’ needs.

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