Adapting Language Learning Materials: Challenges and Considerations from a Systematic Review of 2010 - 2025 Studies

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Abstract

Adapting language learning materials plays a vital role in ensuring effective instruction across diverse educational contexts. This study conducted a systematic literature review of 14 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025, which were retrieved from Google Scholar, ERIC, Sage, ScienceDirect, and JSTOR, to identify the main obstacles and guiding principles in material adaptation. The articles were chosen based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, with a focus on the types of research, results, language used, database, and time frame. By grouping the data according to themes, the researcher identified five recurring challenges: varying levels of proficiency and learning styles, professional demands, sociocultural incompatibility, technological deficiencies, and accessibility of materials. In contrast, five considerations were discovered: alignment to objectives, authenticity of tasks and materials, consideration of the learners' backgrounds, scaffolding of content, and aesthetics of materials. These findings show that material adaptation is a complex but necessary process that requires a balance of contextual, pedagogical, and technological factors. The study suggests that differentiated instruction, culturally responsive design, and institutional support are vital for developing effective and engaging language learning resources.

Introduction

Language learning materials are an integral part of language acquisition and instruction. They capture learners' attention and facilitate the development of linguistic competence in second or foreign languages (Zhuomin, 2010). However, standardized textbooks and resources, while widely used, often fail to address the diverse needs of learners in specific contexts. For this reason, adaptation becomes a necessary process to ensure instructional content remains accurate, meaningful, and responsive to learners' backgrounds. Adaptation refers to the modification of materials to suit learners' requirements better and align with specific objectives (Cunningworth, 1984; Hanifa *et al*., 2024).

The process of adapting materials, however, presents numerous challenges. For instance, using authentic materials poses difficulties for material developers because such materials contain the originality of the language and are not intended for second or foreign language learners, which discourages teachers from using them (Duarte, 2008). Many educators also rely heavily on textbooks without modification, resulting in lessons that lack contextualization (Stec, 2015). In addition, aligning adapted content with pedagogical goals while meeting institutional expectations creates further difficulties. The process requires numerous considerations to maintain the integrity of the learning objectives while keeping the learners engaged.

One consideration is the classroom's characteristics, which should align with the content and format of materials (Li & Xu, 2020). Even the selection of

text for adaptation is a problem and a significant concern (Nawi & Nor, 2023). These issues highlight the need for careful consideration when adapting instructional materials. In an increasingly globalized educational landscape, the adaptation of language learning materials has become essential to meet diverse learner needs. While standardized resources may offer broad applicability, they often overlook cultural and contextual differences. Effective adaptation ensures that materials remain engaging, culturally appropriate, and pedagogically sound. In the Philippine setting, Quintos (2021), as referenced by Aguilar and Rebolla (2023), noted that insufficient Nihongo vocabulary and the absence of cultural context in instructional materials hinder students' retention and comprehension of the lesson in a foreign language. Similarly, inappropriate context and a lack of understanding of the culture presented in instructional tools make learning challenging, emphasizing the need to adapt materials.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill a gap by reviewing literature on the challenges and considerations in adapting language learning materials. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Identify the challenges encountered by material developers in adapting language learning materials, particularly in terms of the learners, teachers, and material developers.
2. Examine key considerations applied by material developers when adapting materials, including factors related to students and instructional materials.

By focusing on these objectives, the study contributes to existing knowledge by providing contextually grounded insights for material developers, educators, and policy makers, particularly in multilingual and culturally diverse settings such as the Philippines. The findings can inform the strategies to enhance the effectiveness, cultural relevance, and inclusivity of language learning resources, which ultimately improve learning outcomes for students.

Materials and Methods

This study utilized a systematic literature review method on scholarly articles relevant to the adaptation of language learning materials focusing on the challenges and considerations involved in the process. These scholarly articles refer to peer-reviewed or published studies or journal articles in which the systematic literature review was applied. A systematic literature review (SLR) identifies, selects, and critically appraises research to answer a clearly formulated question (Dewey & Drahota, 2016). This method was used to identify peer-reviewed articles and select relevant studies featuring challenges and considerations in

adapting materials. The researchers collected studies from several databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, and ScienceDirect) with the belief that these databases and platforms are appropriate for gathering relevant articles due to their specialization, coverage, accessibility (free), and ease of searching. In these databases, keywords such as "challenges and considerations in language learning materials adaptation" were used to search.

Articles were screened using predefined criteria. Studies were included if they: (a) were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2010 and 2025, (b) were written in English, (c) explicitly tackled challenges and/or considerations in adapting language learning materials and development, (d) followed a standard research structure, and (e) were indexed by acknowledged databases and platforms in the inclusion criteria.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Selection of Journal Articles

Parameters	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Type of Research	Published research in peer-reviewed and scientific journals (Open-access)	Unpublished research or articles, and book reviews
Results of the Study	Research articles or scientific studies that feature challenges and/or considerations in adapting materials	Research articles or scientific studies that do not feature the challenges and/or considerations in adapting materials
Language	Research articles or scientific studies that use English as the medium of writing	Research articles or scientific studies that did not use English as a medium of writing
Database	Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, and ScienceDirect	Other databases
Time Frame	Research articles or scientific studies on challenges and/or considerations in adapting materials published from 2010 to 2025	Research articles or scientific studies on challenges and/or considerations in adapting materials from 2010 to 2025
Structure	Research articles or scientific studies that have at least an introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion	Research articles or scientific studies that lack an introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion

Following the above-mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria, an initial pool of studies was identified. The researchers entered the keywords first in the search bars of the databases. Then, the total number of hits was recorded. After applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria,

the remaining studies were filtered as shown in the table below.

Table 2. Search Results and Screening Process of Studies Across Databases (2010-2025)

Database	Initial Results	After Applying the Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria
Google Scholar	1, 060, 000	7
ERIC	12, 604	4
ScienceDirect	22, 673	2
Sage	93,489	1
JSTOR	8,469	0
Total		14

The results in Table 2 show that while the initial keyword searches yielded a large number of articles, only a small subset passed the screening process. This demonstrates both the abundance of research across fields and the narrow scope of studies that directly addressed challenges and considerations in material adaptation. Overall, this shows that specific studies on material adaptation remain limited, which justifies the final inclusion of 14 selected studies for thematic analysis.

A matrix was created to extract essential information from each study, including authors, year, research context, and major findings related to challenges and considerations. The data were then analyzed using thematic coding, in which recurring concepts were grouped into broader themes. This allowed identification of patterns across studies while preserving the insights of each study. Since this study did not involve human participants, ethical clearance and consent were not required. Nevertheless, the researchers observed ethical practices by accurately citing all sources, ensuring transparency in data selection, and avoiding plagiarism. To improve grammatical structure and word choice, they utilized Grammarly accordingly.

Results and Discussion

From the literature gathered across various databases, the researcher analyzed and noted the challenges and considerations in adapting language learning materials. At the end of the systematic literature review, the researcher grouped the challenges and considerations gathered according to their themes. The following themes were the result of this review:

1. **Challenges in Adapting Language Learning Materials**

   a. **Varying Levels of Proficiency and Learning Styles**

One of the recurring challenges faced by material developers in adapting language learning materials is the varying levels of learners' proficiency. Kırmızı-Ayyıldız and Akkuş-Çakır (2022) noted that low readiness levels and even illiteracy in some regions make students unsuitable for engaging with language lessons in their current form. For example, some learners struggled to recognize basic letters and sounds, making it difficult to adapt higher-level texts for classroom use. Differences in proficiency and learning style further complicate adaptation.

Mustofa and Damayanti (2024) observed that if a lesson is simplified too much, high-achieving students may lose interest and find it boring. There were instances in which advanced students disengaged when reading tasks were shortened or simplified excessively, since the material was no longer challenging for them. Hanifa (2018) likewise warned that excessive simplification can compromise learning, as students are constantly given easy tasks and remain in their comfort zones.

Wondimtegegn (2020) also highlighted the mismatch between learners' levels and text difficulty, noting that adapted materials are often still perceived as too difficult for low-proficiency students. Some learners struggle to complete comprehension questions because the vocabulary in the adapted text is still beyond their level. In terms of literary texts, Hossain (2024) emphasized that materials must remain linguistically accessible, as overly challenging texts cause frustration and disengagement. Because of frustration, learners may avoid reading adapted stories that contain too many unfamiliar words.

Taye (2025) added that it is difficult to align adapted texts not only with proficiency levels but also with learners' interests, while Natasya and Kembaren (2025) observed that differences in attitudes, study habits, and language backgrounds often limit the effectiveness of adapted materials. This implies that learners with weaker study habits were unable to keep up even when texts were simplified, while more motivated students require more complex texts. Taken together, these studies highlight that balancing accessibility and challenge remains one of the most persistent difficulties in material adaptation, as learners differ not only in proficiency but also in interests, habits, and cultural exposure.

   b. **Professional Demands**

Teachers' workload is another challenge in adapting materials. Kırmızı-Ayyıldız and Akkuş-Çakır (2022) noted that teachers often cannot adapt language materials due to their busy schedules, since much of their time is consumed by administrative duties and other activities aside from

classroom teaching. In line with this, Hanifa and Yusra (2023) explained that adaptation is rarely practiced and challenging because of time limitations. Teachers spend most of their time preparing lessons, grading papers, and fulfilling institutional requirements, leaving little time for material preparation. Similarly, Natasya and Kembaren (2025) emphasized that teachers' schedules are already full because they must prioritize meeting curriculum targets over revising or creating new learning resources. These studies collectively show that heavy professional demands limit teachers' ability to engage in a meaningful adaptation process.

c. Sociocultural Incompatibility

Presenting unfamiliar cultures to learners with limited exposure often results in incompatibility. Kırmızı-Ayyıldız and Akkuş-Çakır (2022) explained that some students cannot relate to coursebook content due to regional conditions, such as activities like bowling and billiards that are uncommon in their environment. Wondimtegegn (2020) likewise noted that some materials are overly culturally biased, making them difficult for learners to connect with. Hossain (2024) also noted the challenge posed by culture in adaptation. The relevance of the material to the learners' culture is crucial for creating engagement and motivation in the language learning process. When content does not reflect learners' culture, engagement and motivation decrease. These studies collectively show that sociocultural incompatibility reduces learners' ability to relate to and benefit from adapted materials.

d. Technological Deficiencies

The environment plays a crucial role in the implementation of adapted materials, since it affects how well learners receive them. Digital literacy is one concern for material developers. To cater to young learners who are considered digital natives, teachers need to be more creative because students are already highly digitally literate (Mustofa & Damayanti, 2024). Another issue is technological deficiencies, such as a lack of projectors, computers, or smartboards (Kırmızı-Ayyıldız & Akkuş-Çakır, 2022). Even when lessons are converted into digital formats, some teachers still struggle to present them due to the absence of equipment. Hanifa and Yusra (2023) also reported that teachers had to deal with poor facilities and technical constraints, such as power failures. Similar problems were noted by Natasya and Kembaren (2025), who found that limited resources and institutional support make it difficult to sustain technology use, especially when teachers lack training in using digital tools effectively. Overall, these studies emphasize that technological

deficiencies hinder teachers from maximizing the potential of adapted materials.

e. Accessibility of Materials

If learners or teachers have difficulty accessing materials, it becomes a barrier to adaptation. Hanifa and Yusra (2023) noted that teachers often struggle with online resources because many useful materials are locked behind paywalls or subscription requirements that discourage them from adapting the content. There are cases where teachers abandon their plans to use online journals or teaching resources when they discover that access requires payment. Another challenge is selecting and filtering from the abundance of resources available online. Hanifa and Yusra (2023) explained that teachers sometimes spend hours searching through websites only to find that most materials are either too complex, too lengthy, or irrelevant for their learners. Teachers have difficulty locating simplified reading texts appropriate for younger students, which forces them to edit lengthy passages or create their own. This study explains that limited access and the difficulty of filtering quality resources hinder teachers from effectively adapting materials.

2. Considerations in Adapting Language Learning Materials

a. Alignment to Objectives

The choice of the adapted material is determined by the nature of the learning objective. Wondimtegegn (2020) emphasized that before beginning the adaptation process, it is necessary to clearly identify the learning goals. For instance, when the lesson aims to build vocabulary, the teacher may adapt a reading passage by simplifying difficult words while keeping key vocabulary terms. Minh (2011) also noted that the objectives of the adapted material or activity should be aligned with the objectives of the lesson to maintain instructional coherence. Wang *et al.* (2024) added that curriculum objectives have a positive and significant influence because they guide how materials should be modified. These studies highlight that aligning adapted materials with instructional and curriculum objectives ensures their validity and effectiveness in meeting learning goals.

b. Authenticity of Tasks and Materials

Several studies emphasize the importance of using authentic tasks and materials in language learning. Green (2023) explained that authenticity involves current and stimulating content, meaningful use of language, and scaffolding of real-world tasks with appropriate teacher

sources. Hanifa *et al.* (2024) likewise argued that authentic materials help learners become familiar with how language is used in real contexts rather than only in textbooks. Hanifa and Yusra (2023) provided an example in which learners engaged with texts on contemporary social issues in Indonesia and Aceh, which are topics the students were already aware of.

By connecting classroom tasks with real-world concerns, learners became more involved in communication and saw the relevance of English in their daily lives. These studies underscore that authentic tasks and materials make language learning more engaging, practical, and contextually meaningful.

c. Consideration of the Learners' Background

A learner's background is broad and encompasses various aspects that influence how materials should be adapted. Hanifa *et al.* (2024) emphasized that materials need to account for learners' prior knowledge, learning experience, and cultural familiarity to ensure efficiency in adaptation. Hanifa and Yusra (2023) further explained that considering learners' situations, preferences, and interests helps teachers design tasks that are more relatable. For instance, when texts reflect familiar contexts or topics that learners enjoy, they are more likely to connect to new lessons with their existing knowledge. Adapting materials to include familiar references and breaking down complex ideas through scaffolding can also give learners a sense of achievement and confidence. These insights suggest that material adaptation is most effective when it is responsive to learners' experiences, interests, and cultural backgrounds.

d. Scaffolding

Scaffolding plays a central role in material adaptation as it helps make language input more manageable by breaking learning into smaller chunks (Green, 2023). Material developers should design lessons that progress from simple to more complex tasks to ensure learners build skills step by step. Without proper scaffolding, learners may become overloaded with information, which hinders comprehension. Hossain (2024) emphasized that scaffolding also involves providing simple, clear, and direct instructions. For example, a reading task may first ask learners to identify key words before moving on to comprehension questions and later to discussion tasks.

These studies indicate that scaffolding adapted materials encourages gradual learning, reduces cognitive load, and builds learners' confidence.

e. Aesthetics

An appealing material balances text with other design elements on the page. Green (2023) noted that a common mistake among novice designers is producing cluttered pages with dense text, which increases cognitive load and may overwhelm learners. Considering aesthetics helps maintain engagement because clear layouts, appropriate use of visuals, and balanced spacing make materials easier to navigate. For instance, breaking long passages into shorter sections with headings or adding relevant images can improve readability and learner interest. These considerations show that thoughtful design enhances both the usability and attractiveness of adapted materials.

Conclusion

Based on the systematic literature review of 14 relevant studies, several insights can be drawn:

First, the challenges in adapting language learning materials involve multiple factors. These include the varying levels of proficiency and learning styles, making it difficult for material developers to cater to all learners without oversimplifying or overcomplicating content. Professional demands, such as time constraints, limited training, and overloaded schedules, also hinder teachers' ability to adapt materials effectively. Sociocultural incompatibility complicates the process further because learners may disengage from materials that present unfamiliar cultural contexts. Technological deficiencies, including a lack of equipment, digital literacy issues, and inadequate institutional support, also pose barriers to adaptation. Accessibility of materials is also a challenge to material adaptation, in particular, the difficulty of utilizing subscription-based online materials and filtering and selecting appropriate learning materials online. Second, this study identified key considerations that can guide material adaptation. Alignment with learning objectives ensures that adapted materials remain instructional and valid. The use of authentic tasks and materials exposes learners to real-world language use and promotes meaningful engagement. Considering learners' backgrounds (prior knowledge, interests, and experiences) fosters relevance, while scaffolding enables learners to process input gradually. Finally, attention to aesthetics, such as clear layout and balanced design, supports learner focus and motivation.

Overall, adapting language learning materials is a complex process that requires balancing pedagogical, cultural, and technological factors while ensuring instructional goals are met. This review highlights that effective material adaptation is not only about modifying

content but also about designing responsive, engaging, and inclusive resources.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that teachers can benefit from differentiated instruction strategies to address varied learner needs, supported by professional development opportunities focused on material adaptation. Meanwhile, material developers should prioritize cultural relevance and contextual fit through needs analyses of learners' backgrounds. Schools, on the other hand, need to provide adequate resources, time, and training to reduce teachers' burden and maximize the potential of adapted materials.

Future Research Directions

Future researchers should investigate innovative approaches and frameworks for adapting materials that address persistent challenges such as diverse proficiency levels, technological limitations, and sociocultural incompatibility. Further studies can also examine adaptation practices in varied educational contexts and cultural settings to develop solutions that are widely applicable across learning environments.

Ethical Statement

Since this study did not involve human participants, ethical clearance and consent are not required.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the conduct and publication of this research. All procedures followed were in accordance with institutional and ethical standards, and there were no financial or personal relationships that could have influenced the outcomes of this study.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

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Data Availability

All data supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper.

Author Contributions

DAEJR: Conceptualization, Writing (Original Draft, Review and Editing), Project Administration; **JCR**: Supervision

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