EVALUATING THE READABILITY OF MARKETING RESEARCH TEXTBOOKS: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

The readability of textbooks affects student performance and textbooks that are less readable result in lower average marks (grades) in the specific course. The readability of textbooks is one of the aspects in communication that requires attention in the South African context. South Africa is a country with 11 official languages, with many students reading textbooks that are not written in their first language, but rather in their second (or even their third or fourth) language. It has been estimated that approximately 80% of all secondary scholars in South Africa study in a second language. There has been an increase in the number of textbooks published in different parts of the world (as has taken place in South Africa) and there has also been an increase in the number of publications in different languages. In some instances, international editions are adapted for a local market (specifically a country) while in other situations, a textbook is written by local authors for use in their own environment. Various reasons can be identified why textbooks would be adapted from their original US edition or written by local authors, including the provision of local examples and the cost issues associated with the importing of textbooks.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate and compare marketing research textbooks that have been written for a South African context to determine the readability of these textbooks and compare with those written in the US context.

There are numerous methods for determining readability including the Flesch Reading Ease, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Index, Gunning's Fog Index and the SMOG procedure. Research conducted by Chiang, Englebrecht, Phillips and Wang (2008) examined scores based on these methods determined that the readability scores using several methods were highly correlated ($p < .0001$), therefore making it necessary to only use one measure.

Marketing research textbooks that had been written specifically for the South African market were identified. Electronic copies of each chapter of the South Africa adaptations were obtained from the publishers. From each chapter, all tables and figures as well as assessment questions and references were removed. Four marketing research textbooks marketed in the United States were chosen for the study. Because three of the texts have multiple authors, samples were extracted from each of the chapters of the textbook.

The texts adapted from the South African market are written at the same readability level as all US texts except for the Hair, Bush, and Ortineau text. This suggests that students are required to read at the level of their US contemporaries. The importance of adapting texts to the South African market may be more about applying concepts using cultural examples and less about English as a first language. Limitations associated with this research include the limited number of SA marketing research textbooks that can be analyzed in this study as well as the development of readability formulae being dated. Future research can be conducted on locally-authored marketing textbooks as well as examining the comprehension of students of the specific textbooks.

References available upon request