



Original article

Student Engagement and Teacher Practices Using Cutting Edge Elementary at the University of Duhok

Demam Kareem Kareem¹, Shivan S. Toma²

Department of English Language, College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, Duhok, Iraq¹⁻²

*Correspondence author:
deman.kareem@uod.ac
shivan.toma@uod.ac

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the effectiveness of the Cutting Edge Elementary textbook at Duhok University, focusing on its impact on student engagement and teaching methodology across eight Humanities and Science departments. Data were collected through researcher-completed classroom observation sheets over two semesters. Findings indicate that teaching methodology effectiveness remained consistent across departments, while student engagement varied by discipline. Humanities students demonstrated higher motivation and engagement than Science students, whose engagement levels were generally lower and less sustained. The results suggest that Cutting Edge Elementary, as a communicative General-English textbook, aligns more effectively with Humanities learners, whereas Science students may benefit from materials better tailored to their disciplinary needs. Overall, the textbook is pedagogically sound and yields positive outcomes when implemented by competent teachers, particularly when adapted to student context. These findings contribute to textbook implementation practices, teacher awareness of student motivators, and the localized adaptation of materials in higher education in Kurdistan.

Keywords: Textbook Evaluation, Student Engagement, Teaching Methodology, Contextual Adaptation, Higher Education

تفاعل الطلاب وممارسات المدرسين باستخدام كتاب Cutting Edge Elementary

في جامعة دهوك

ديمن كريم كريم¹، شيفان شليمون توما²

كلية اللغات، قسم الترجمة، جامعة دهوك، العراق

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة فعالية كتاب (Cutting Edge Elementary) المستخدم في جامعة دهوك، مع التركيز على تأثيره في تفاعل الطلاب ومنهجية التدريس عبر ثمانية أقسام من مجالات العلوم والإنسانيات. جُمعت البيانات من خلال استمارات ملاحظة صفية حيث قام الباحث بتعبئتها على مدى فصلين دراسيين. تشير النتائج إلى أن فعالية منهجية التدريس ظلت متسقة عبر الأقسام، بينما اختلف مستوى تفاعل الطلاب تبعاً للتخصص. أظهر طلاب أقسام الإنسانيات دافعية أعلى وتفاعلاً أكبر مقارنةً بطلاب الأقسام العلمية الذين أظهروا مستويات تفاعل أقل واستمرارية أضعف. وتشير النتائج إلى أن كتاب (Cutting Edge Elementary)، بوصفه كتاباً تواصلياً للغة الإنجليزية العامة، يتناسب بدرجة أكبر مع متعلمي الإنسانيات، في حين قد يستفيد طلاب العلوم من مواد تعليمية أكثر مواءمة لاحتياجات تخصصاتهم. وبشكل عام، يُعد الكتاب ذا أساس تربوي متين ويحقق نتائج إيجابية عند استخدامه من قبل معلمين أكفاء، خصوصاً عند تكيفه بما يتناسب مع سياق الطلاب. وتسهم هذه النتائج في تحسين ممارسات تطبيق الكتب الدراسية، وزيادة وعي المعلمين بمحفزات الطلاب، ودعم تكيف المواد محلياً لتعزيز التفاعل والفاعلية في التعليم العالي في كردستان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقييم الكتاب الدراسي، مشاركة الطلبة، منهجية التدريس، التكيف السياقي، التعليم العالي

I. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks play an especially integral role in ELT. They facilitate an integrated syllabus and curriculum (Mcgrath, 2002; Sheldon, 1987) and essentially represent a physical embodiment of the implemented approach to any given ELT classroom. Therefore, textbooks are the informational focal point and provider and, the path of least resistance for teacher endeavors (Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi, 2023). (Cunningsworth, 1995) notes that textbooks will cover a structured syllabus for obligatory content with predetermined learning outcomes as an assurance of proficiency, while Tomlinson (2013) notes that textbooks transition a theoretical curriculum into practical lessons learned in the classroom (Dat, 2022). Therefore, textbook evaluation is as welcome an opportunity as quality materials that serve as efficient components of acquired teaching but instead, part of a sustainable endeavor to ensure materials serve their most effective presentation. Through evaluation, teachers can determine whether materials offer the proper resources for their students' linguistic needs, learning styles, and their institutional requirements (Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi, 2023). As Mcgrath (2002) notes, even the most well-designed textbook requires teacher evaluation for its most effective use., while Haidar (2024) emphasizes that the best materials allow for developmentally appropriate flexibility and creativity. Ultimately, a textbook's quality is best reflected in its ability to engage learners and support meaningful communication (Abu Rezeq, 2022). When materials fail to achieve this, both teachers and students may experience frustration and demotivation (Ali, 2025; Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi, 2023)

Out of many available ELT course books, *Cutting Edge Elementary* is one of the most internationally acclaimed resources for its communicative approach and balanced skills distribution. Yet, the effectiveness of such universal course books may differ across localized settings. Previous studies

done on higher levels of the Cutting Edge series, such as Cutting Edge Intermediate, report mostly good findings from instructors (Alshehri, 2016), yet many researchers across disciplines determine that no course book is the best fit for all (Khodadust & Rahbar, 2021). Therefore, regionalized needs assessments determine how well a course book meets learner needs and institutional requirements. Thus, this study focuses on the *Cutting Edge Elementary* course book in a regionalized university setting to ascertain its effectiveness in achieving language learning goals relative to localized requirements (Alshehri, 2016; Mahmud, 2018). To the greatest extent, observation of classroom implementation will reveal the most reliable findings. The more educators can witness classroom dynamics, the better they can understand how the course book is used in a lesson versus how students respond to different lesson activities (Macdonald, 2016). Allwrite (1988) suggests that assessment should follow observation as a means of confirming textbook use intentions and results from teaching and learning integrity. Similarly, David Lasagabaster (2011) notes that observation is valuable for discovering if communicative and learner-centered principles are applied effectively in practice (Malgorzata Ciesielska, Katarzyna W. Boström, 2017).

In this study, observation serves as the primary research tool for documenting classroom patterns, teacher–student interactions, and levels of student engagement with the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook. Thus, this research will focus on the implementation of Cutting Edge Elementary, in particular, which is taught across multiple departments at the university and the possibility of an implementation observation through teaching and student engagement in a regularly observed classroom. This effort seeks to investigate one textbook - Cutting Edge Elementary - being employed among multiple departments at one university to measure teaching and learning levels while in the appropriate environment for assessment - regardless of sustained enrollment in the class without a study promoting this effort.

The primary aim of this research is to evaluate how the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook is implemented across different departments, emphasizing the relationship between instructional approaches and student engagement as revealed through structured classroom observations. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent are students engaged with the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook in classroom settings across different departments?
2. What teaching methodologies are employed by instructors when using the textbook?
3. Are there observable differences in student engagement or teaching methodology between the first and second semesters?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. ELT Textbook Evaluation Frameworks

Textbooks play a central role in English Language Teaching (ELT) as textbooks provide multiple pedagogical and administrative purposes. They function not only as sources for structured instruction and self-directed learning but also as comprehensive syllabi that reflect pre-determined educational goals (Cunningsworth, 1995; Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi, 2023). Therefore, the evaluation of textbooks is necessary for with teaching and administrative purposes across cultures and contexts they serve, from culturally and contextually appropriate or inappropriate means,

materials required for predetermined lesson needs, expectations. Since one textbook will not serve all needs and purposes for all learners, evaluation is essential as a systematic means to determine where material fits, and what improvements can be made (Jusuf, 2018; Sheldon, 1987; Vu Kieu Hanh, Trieu Thanh Nam, 2020).

According to research, textbook evaluation is ultimately assessment and subsequent feedback on the materials for value, relevance, appropriateness (Tomlinson, 2013) and it promotes an educational and administrative decision for educators and administrators to make about what novel materials to purchase, or what materials to adjust (Cunningsworth, 1995). In this way, Sheldon (1987) presents evaluation as a "dynamic process" with educational and administrative components integrated. Moreover, it's not a one-time endeavor, but a cyclical process that connects to a realization that the learning and teaching environment is bound to change and develop (Mcgrath, 2002; Richards, 2001). Researchers have established a typology of evaluation based on when an evaluation occurs in relation to a textbook's use (Littlejohn, 2011; Tomlinson, 2013). *Pre-use evaluation* (or predictive evaluation) is one that occurs before the use of a textbook and assesses its hypothetical fit for a needs-based situation. *During-use evaluation* is one that occurs while a textbook is in use and information is gathered based on usage data and learner feedback. *Post-use evaluation* occurs during textbook implementation, collecting data on actual use and learner response. This stage is particularly valuable because it focuses on observable factors such as resulting in a mismatch between course goals and student needs (Kadhim, 2018). *Retrospective evaluation* occurs after a textbook has been used over time to assess the effects on learner motivation, outcomes and retention (Littlejohn, 2011; Tomlinson, 2013; Tomlinson & Farajnezhad, 2022).

Many examiners rely on checklists which outline the materials from an objectively definable perspective as opposed to a subjectively evaluative one to facilitate a systematic assessment (Jusuf, 2018; Sheldon, 1987). Yet such criteria checklists are often formed from a theoretical assessment, greater emphasis on grammar, comparative studies and even a more pejorative viewpoint (Nazim, 2021). Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi (2023) declare that any criteria utilized to assess materials should relative to three basic factors—the setting of use, the syllabus and the learner requirements. Complementing this, Cunningsworth (1995) recommends a deeper analysis focusing on content organization, teaching methodology, and opportunities for learner autonomy.

2.2. Student Engagement with Textbooks

The other criterion most interconnected to what makes for a successful textbook is whether it facilitates continued motivation to learn. The more motivating a textbook, the more educational value it has, as all learned information fostering student motivation will inevitably enhance language acquisition. Therefore, a textbook must engage students with tasks and activities that are motivationally pertinent (Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi, 2023). When the opposite happens, however, the more likely the outcomes are frustration and demotivation from students and teachers alike (Aghazadeh, 2015). Furthermore, relevance is also an important part of motivation. The more one can read and learn about topics relevant to their life situation, age, developmental levels, and cultural circumstances, the more relevant the material is as the more relevant the subject the more personalized it becomes. Thus, authentic materials and communicative situations when applicable to maintain motivation (Fayadh, 2022; Katırcı, 2022). Yet this factor goes beyond motivation to foster autonomy.

A well-constructed textbook will include reflective assignments to render students more aware of their own processes for independent study learning (Hasan, F. R., Omer, Y. A., & Aziz, 2015). Observational studies measure this via student interest, attitude and effort as behavioral and psychological components which highlight how engaged a student is and for what reason within the materials (Allwrite, 1988).

2.3. Observational Research in Language Classrooms

Observation has long been recognized as one of the most accurate methods of data collection of on teaching and learning practices. By observing a classroom through a structured observation, researchers can document the realities of textbook usage in practice, what these materials are meant to do and what approaches and student responses are engaged. According to Macdonald (2016), observation is one of the three expected sources of information to assess textbooks, for it shows what is applied, what is neglected, and what is brought into the fold to make learning practical and successful. Through observation, it becomes possible to determine whether instructors adhere to prescribed methodologies or employ more flexible, context-sensitive approaches (Kumar, 2021). Such evaluative observation usually includes two realms of focus: teacher actions, including instructional strategies, use of textbooks, and presentation techniques, and student actions, which reflect levels of engagement and interaction. Micro-evaluation, for example, is a term established by Ellis (1997, 1998, cited in Abhar, 2017) who notes that this intentional focus of context assesses an element of the curriculum or instructional program under closer scrutiny. Here, materials used were noted as part of the actual observed classroom reality instead of what the teacher said he used for the lesson. Moreover, Motallebzadeh and Samir (2016) assert that this type of observation is critical to teacher training for the purpose of self-reflection and evaluative development.

2.4. Teaching Methodologies in EFL and ESP Contexts

A critical part of the evaluation process for textbooks is the review of pedagogical assumptions in the materials. The pedagogical approach of a textbook directly impacts what materials are included, how they are arranged, and what subsequent learning is involved (Berta, 2025; Mcgrath, 2002). Furthermore, it's the teacher who mediates their presentation, a professional judgement that requires either inclusion, exclusion, or adaptation, depending on student interest and goals. Thus, if such materials are too basic to provide advanced learning, it's not because one chapter is missing from this book, whereas it is because no textbook can perfectly suit all teaching situations, adaptation is both necessary and pedagogically beneficial (David R.A, 2005; Soe, 2024). Effective teacher training, therefore, would make such materials learnable and facilitated through teachable reflective considerations for quality assessment and application without robbing materials of their learnability through over-simplifying and over-complicating (Darmawanti, 2021; Dos Santos, 2020).

Many contemporary ELT textbooks possess great tendencies toward communicative language teaching (CLT), meaning that they accommodate meaningful interaction, engage with real-life communication and learner input is a primary element in solo, paired, and group works. One way to evaluate the communicative possibility of a textbook is through the overall percentage that helps with authentic communication and collaborative learning (Kırkgöz, 2009; Surtikanti, 2020). In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) these criteria can complicate textbook selection even further. ESP textbooks

differ from General English selections with the use of terminology, specialized skills, and purposeful content that appeals more to academic or vocational, applicable settings (Astika, 2015). To Cunningsworth (1995), materials must reflect the purpose and principles of the teaching program in which they are used. This becomes evident through research obtained from Iraqi universities. For example, many of the ESL textbooks used throughout campus in the ESP curriculum are General English (BICS) focused rather than Academic English (CALP) based, which suggests that the purpose of teaching was not aligned with the students' required path (Kadhim, 2018). Thus, research indicates that the material found in ESP textbooks and the teaching method must work in harmony to benefit students and their academic situation and disciplinary contexts.

3. RELATED STUDIES

Much research has been conducted on Cutting Edge and similar commercial ELT (English Language Teaching) textbooks in the Middle East and Southeast Asia with comparative results that are applicable to teaching efficacy, contextual effectiveness and linguistic relevance of such materials. The relative frequency of Cutting Edge being researched in various settings means that its results are pertinent enough to not only compare Cutting Edge with other communicative approach textbooks but also to its continued application in higher education institutions worldwide. The Cutting Edge Intermediate Level textbook was evaluated by Najran University's Preparatory Year Programme EFL teachers, and general materials appreciation was reported (Alshehri, 2016; Nazim, 2021). Using a questionnaire adapted from Litz's (2005) evaluation checklist, a positive ratings were reported for organization, integration of the four language skills, and diversity of communicative activities, along with the attractive layout and logical progression were frequently cited to appeal successfully to students' interest and motivation (Alshehri, 2016). Thus, Cutting Edge proves to embody communicative language teaching and serves as a successful textbook for a collaborative classroom endeavor.

Limitations, however, arose for the series where educators found the textbook few communicative pathways to conversational fluency and neglect of active versus passive vocabulary (Nazim, 2021). Similarly, Vu Kieu Hanh, Trieu Thanh Nam (2020) claim that *Cutting Edge Elementary* lacks adequate socio-cultural framing which dismisses student use of what they learn in real-world contexts. Therefore, these results indicate that even a widely successful ELT series could benefit from a bit more socio-cultural framing to maximize communicative intention. In fact, similar studies have been done with the English for Iraq series, the established Iraqi EFL syllabus (Akef, 2018; Yasseen, U. I., & Al-Noori, 2021; Fayadh, 2022; Nafashi et al., 2024). These results also coincide with the results found in studies of *Cutting Edge*. While researchers such as Nafashi et al. (2024) confirmed that the *English for Iraq* series satisfies many of Litz's (2005) criteria particularly with respect to objectives, layout, and methodology, other scholars emphasized persisting shortcomings. These included insufficient opportunities for free writing (Akef, 2018). Yasseen, U. I., and Al-Noori (2021) found minimal acknowledgement of learner diversity and a tenuous relationship between textbook content and localized culture. The convergence of such findings with the Cutting Edge findings illustrate a larger problem in ELT material design: the tension between global standardization and local contextualization.

Beyond *Cutting Edge* and *English for Iraq*, other studies have been done on international textbook series, for example, Litz's (2005) study of *English Firsthand 2* revealed that, indicate that the international textbook includes the integration of the four skills as a unifying element, but not intentional practice and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) integration. Similarly, Gholampour, S., & Mehrabi (2023) found that the *Pacesetter* series adhered to the communicative approach but required further contextual adaptation for non-native learners. Collectively, these studies reinforce the importance of continuous evaluation and revision to ensure that ELT textbooks effectively meet the linguistic, academic, and cultural needs of diverse learners (Fayadh, 2022; Nazim, 2021). Ultimately, the existing literature offers a sustained gap between research and reality, and where *Cutting Edge* ELT textbooks have been produced internationally, they are applied to higher education institutions across Iraq. The internationally produced series has been increasingly introduced in Iraqi universities in recent years for potential collaborative benefits, yet there exists little to no research valuing its use in the classroom, engagement by students, or teacher-mediated learning experiences. As such, this research is a gap-filling study that provides an observed assessment of *Cutting Edge Elementary* in Duhok University, across eight departments. It both contributes to established criteria for review and adds to a collection of findings that are contextually based for substantiated facilitation or limitation of student-centered learning and teaching in higher education.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design by integrating quantitative and qualitative data collected through structured classroom observations. The quantitative data consisted of numerical ratings derived from the observation sheet, where student engagement and teaching methodology indicators were scored using a three-point Likert scale (Low = 1, Medium = 2, High = 3). These numerical scores were analyzed to calculate averages, percentages, and changes across departments and semesters. The qualitative data were obtained from the open-ended comment sections and field notes accompanying each observation, which documented classroom atmosphere, teacher–student interaction, and notable teaching or learning behaviors. The integration of the two data types occurred during the analysis and interpretation stages, where quantitative results were supported and explained by qualitative observations. For example, changes in student engagement scores were interpreted alongside classroom observation notes describing students' participation, motivation, and responsiveness, providing a comprehensive understanding of textbook implementation in practice.

4.2. Research Tool: Classroom Observation Sheet

The data came from an observation sheet specifically designed for this study. The observation sheet consisted of two sections of ten indicators each. Each indicator was evaluated by a three point Likert scale (Low, Medium, High) and an area for comments.

1. Section One – Student Engagement:
This part observed how students interacted with the *Cutting Edge Elementary* book and the lesson.. Indicators included students' participation, attention, motivation, curiosity, collaboration, note-taking, and responsiveness during textbook-related tasks.

2. Section Two – Teaching Methodology and Textbook Utilization: This domain addressed lesson implementation as observed by the textbook. Indicators included lesson implementation based on textbook objectives and goals, adaptation of content based on student needs, clarity of instruction, use of visuals to facilitate learning, additional materials used, use of communicative approaches and cultural considerations.

Each observation for each class concluded with a general comment section which summarized the overall thoughts and strengths or weaknesses of the lessons. This was a great way to structure some qualitative/quantitative data and include it for overall assessment. To ensure the validity and reliability of the classroom observation checklist, the instrument was reviewed by four experts in English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics, all of whom have experience in textbook evaluation and classroom observation research. Their feedback focused on the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the indicators for measuring student engagement and teaching methodology. Based on their suggestions, minor revisions were made to refine the wording and organization of the checklist. This expert review process enhanced the content validity of the observation tool and increased confidence in the consistency and trustworthiness of the collected data.

4.3. Participants

The sample consisted of eight teachers from eight university departments. All teachers used the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook for their respective first-year students, and each department was a site of observation. Eight classes were observed, one for each teacher, and the sample was representative of the Humanities and Science streams to ensure diversity across academic disciplines. The sample consisted of eight teachers, each representing one academic department at the University of Duhok. These teachers were selected because they were the only instructors teaching the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook to first-year students across the targeted Humanities and Science departments during the study period. As such, the sample reflects the full population of relevant instructors within this specific institutional context rather than a randomly selected group. This study is therefore exploratory and context-specific, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of textbook implementation and classroom practices at the University of Duhok. Consequently, the findings are not intended to be generalized to other universities or contexts, but rather to offer insights that may inform similar settings and encourage further research with larger samples.

4.4. Procedure

Two observations per class were conducted - one per semester during the 2024-2025 academic year. Both observations were in-person due to the need for the researcher to compile authentic classroom discussions and teaching patterns. The same teacher was observed both times and during both semesters to maintain consistency in the findings for adequate note-taking about what changed or developed over time. Thus, the same teacher was evaluated both times for any advancement in approach or student interaction.

The researcher assessed each criterion on the observation sheet during each observation and then compiled written descriptive notations to represent the vibe of the classroom, questions asked or posed by students and teachers, and student and teacher utilization of textbooks.

4.5. Focus Areas

The observations primarily focused on two domains:

1. **Student Engagement:** To what level did students engage with the textbook, including reading, answering questions, performing activities, group work, collaborating with peers, and motivation or attention.
2. **Teaching Methodology:** To what level did the teacher utilize the textbook in classroom, including how they presented lessons, explained grammar, facilitated discussions, and applied communicative or task-based techniques when using the textbook.

These focus areas directly correspond to the study's research questions on engagement, methodology, and semester-based differences.

4.6. Data Analysis

Data were compiled from these observations onto a spreadsheet for the quantitative aspect. The Likert scale was converted to a numeric value (Low = 1, Medium = 2, High = 3) for average scores per department and per semester to be calculated. These averages were used in the quantitative findings, where they reflect Student Engagement (SE, AVG) and Teaching Methodology (M AVG). For the method and engagement, percentage differences from Semester One to Semester Two were calculated for both increases and decreases to determine if growth was made or there was regression. Qualitative notes from the comments section were assessed for additional findings not necessarily available through these numbers, with themes, notable moments and stories from some of the classrooms. Thus, a two-part process is realized from numeric findings and qualitative notes to create a comprehensive commentary of the *Cutting Edge Elementary* implementation and how these observations shifted across the academic year. Percentage values were calculated based on the average scores obtained from the three-point Likert scale, where the maximum possible score (3) represents 100%, allowing for comparison across departments and semesters.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Student Engagement with the Cutting Edge Elementary Textbook Across Departments (RQ1)

This subsection presents the results related to student engagement with the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook across different departments, as observed during classroom implementation. Eight departments were observed for data collection; four belong to the Humanities (Administration and Management, History, Kurdish, Special Education) and four to the Sciences (Dentistry, Architecture, Physics, Banking & Financial). Data results assessed the level of student engagement for semesters one and two. Overall, the Humanities departments had a greater level of student engagement from Semester One to Semester Two. (See table 1)

Tables and figures present average scores and percentage changes in student engagement and teaching methodology across departments and semesters for clarity and comparability.

Table 1: Average Student Engagement Scores Across Humanities Departments in both Semesters

Stream	Department	Obs. Visits	Semester	SE (AVG)	%	change	%
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Humanities	Administration and	First	First	1.6	53.33	0.80	26.67
		Second	Second	2.4	80		
Humanities	History	First	First	1.2	40	0.9	30.00
		Second	Second	2.1	70		
Humanities	Kurdish	First	First	1.6	53.33	1	33.33
		Second	Second	2.6	86.67		
Humanities	Special Education	First	First	2	66.67	0.9	30.00
		Second	Second	2.9	96.67		

Humanities had great increases in student engagement from Semester One to Semester Two across the board. The Administration and Management department relative to student engagement from semester one to semester two was a significant increase as it went from 1.6 (53.33%) to 2.4 (80%), a difference of 26.67% increase. The same can be said for the History department which was 1.2 (40%) to 2.1 (70%), an increase of 30%. The highest increase came in the Kurdish department from 1.6 (53.33%) to 2.6 (86.67%) which is a 33.33% increase. Likewise, the Special Education department experienced significant progress, increasing from 2.0 (66.67%) to 2.9 (96.67%), marking a 30% increase in engagement. Despite stable or declining engagement scores in some Science departments, observation notes indicated that students were generally passive and relied on teacher prompts to participate, with limited voluntary interaction during textbook-based activities. Collectively, such findings show that Humanities students were increasingly engaged, attentive and motivated to respond as time went on; maybe the teachers were more confident in the textbook, classroom management settled. (See figure 1)

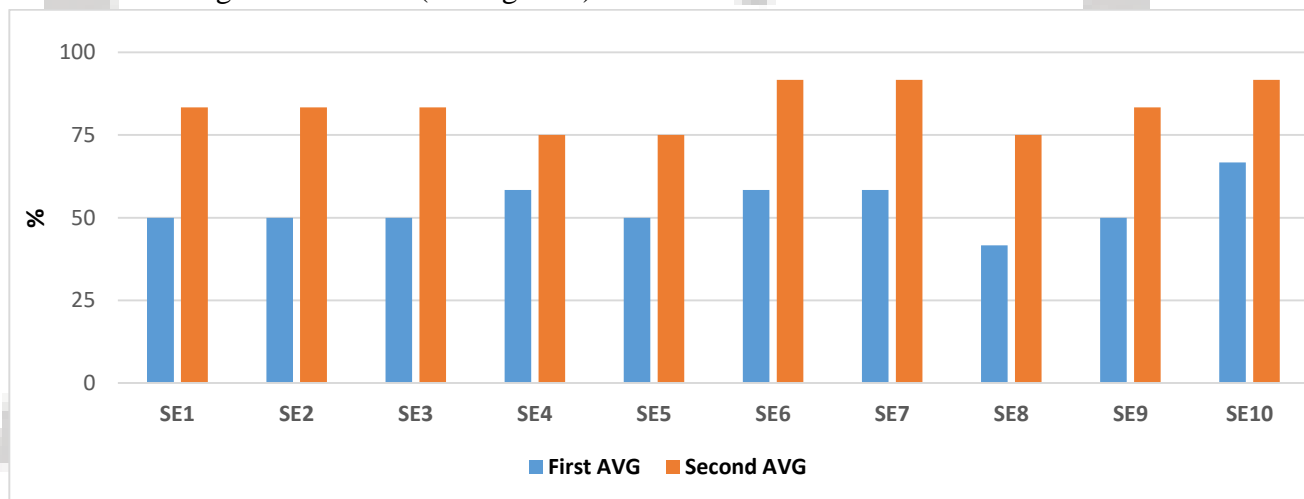


Figure 1: Average Student Engagement Scores Across Humanities Departments in both Semesters

In contrast, the Science departments demonstrated mixed results in student engagement between the first and second semesters. (See table 2)

Table 2: Average Student Engagement Scores Across Science Departments in both Semesters

Stream	Department	Obs. Visits	Semester	AVG	%	change	%
Science	Dentistry	First	First	1.2	40	-0.2	-6.67
		Second	Second	1	33.33		
Science	Architecture	First	First	1	33.33	0	0
		Second	Second	1	33.33		

Science	Physic	First	First	2	66.66		
		Second	Second	1.7	56.66	-0.3	-10
Science	Banking and Finance	First	First	1.5	50		
		Second	Second	1.9	63.33	0.4	13.33

In the Science stream, student engagement levels slightly decreased in some departments and moderately increased in others. For example, the Dentistry department slightly decreased from 1.2 (40%) to 1.0 (33.33%), although this is a 6.67% decrease in levels of engagement. In addition, the Architecture department showed no change from semester one to semester two as both scores registered at 1.0 (33.33%). The Physics department decreased from semester one to semester two by 10%, from 2.0 (66.67%) to 1.7 (56.67%). On the other hand, moderate increases were seen in Banking and Finance, which increased from 1.5 (50%) to 1.9 (63.33%), a 13.33% difference. Thus, relative to Humanities students, Science students engaged at lower levels and in some cases, regressed. Perhaps this is because they have lower English capabilities compared to non-major courses, or they have less interest in English as a non-major course; either way, their attentiveness and engagement during class discussions may have suffered. (See figure 2)

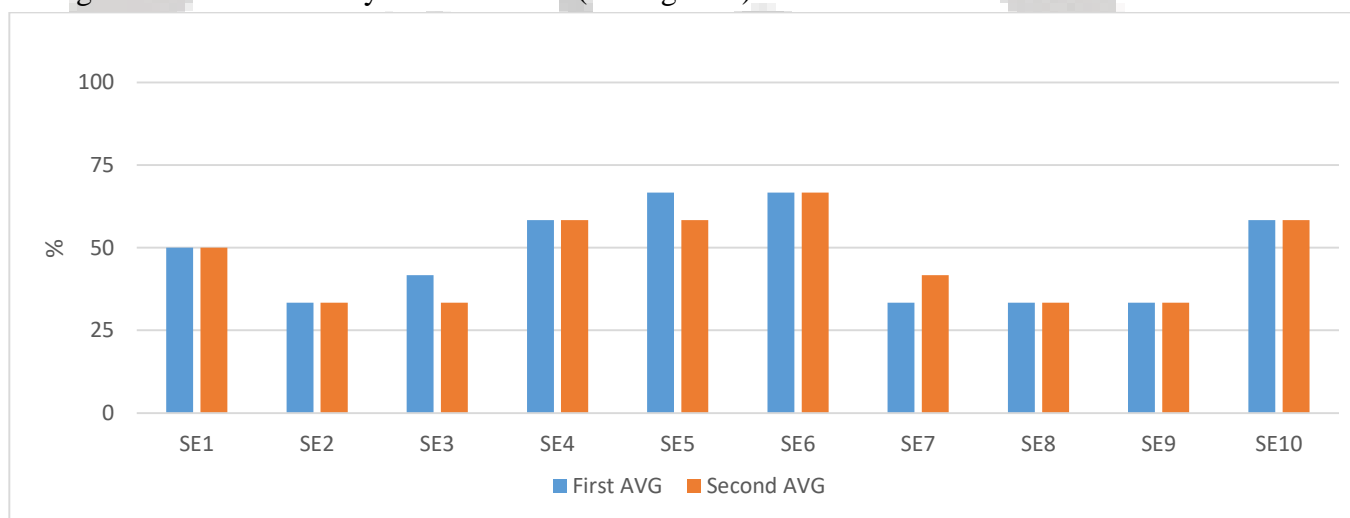


Figure 2: Average Student Engagement Scores Across Science Departments in both Semesters

The average improvement in Humanities departments (approximately 30%) was substantially higher than in Science departments (around -1% overall change). This implies that in Humanities contexts the textbook and teaching method was more effective due to a more motivated student and better engage in communicative English efforts. (See figure 3)

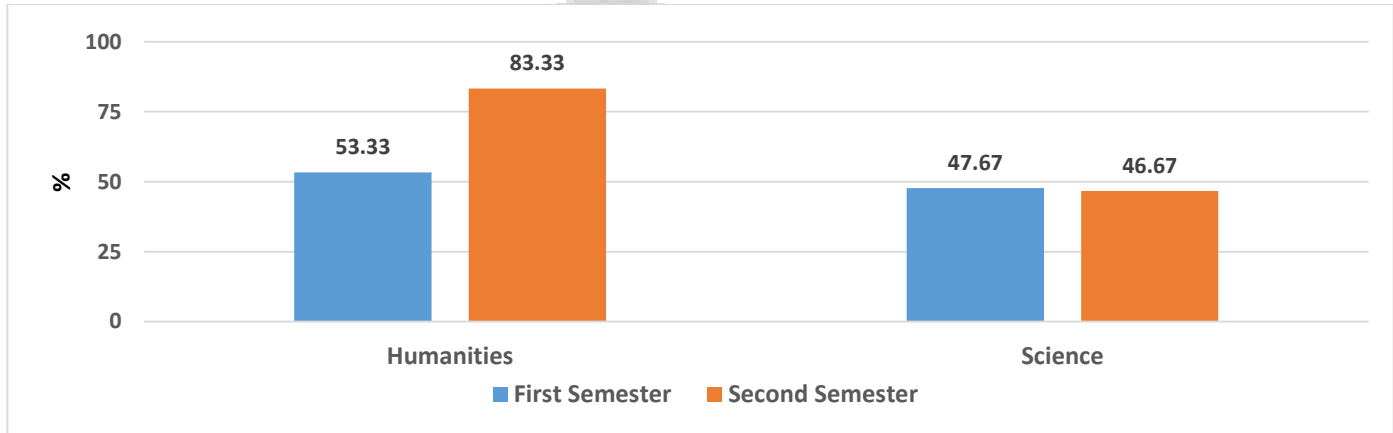


Figure 3: Comparative Improvement in Student Engagement between Humanities and Science Departments

5.2. Teaching Methodologies Employed When Using the Cutting Edge Elementary Textbook (RQ2)

This section of the evaluation assessed teacher dependence upon *Cutting Edge Elementary* to support their lessons, as relevant lesson selection, implemented an adapted lesson in class, supplementary use, and interactive teaching. The Humanities instructors exhibited consistent performance across semesters. (See table 3)

Table 3: Effectiveness of Teaching Methodology in Humanities Departments

Stream	Department	Obs. Visits	Semester	M (AVG)	%	change	%
Humanities	Administration and management	First	First	3	100		
		Second	Second	3	100	0.00	0.00
Humanities	History	First	First	2.3	76.67		
		Second	Second	2.3	76.67	0	0.00
Humanities	Kurdish	First	First	2.5	83.33		
		Second	Second	2.5	83.33	0	0.00
Humanities	Special Education	First	First	2.6	86.67		
		Second	Second	2.5	83.33	-0.1	-3.33

Humanities curricular instruction through textbook stabilized through semesters. Administration and Management, History and Kurdish remained at 3.0, 2.3 and 2.5 respectively (stable); meaning, this was effectively implemented throughout the year. The only change was Special Education which decreased from 2.6 (86.67%) to 2.5 (83.33%) for a 3.33% decrease. Therefore, Humanities teachers were consistent in aligning lesson objectives with textbook use and providing appropriately for student requirements. (See figure 4)

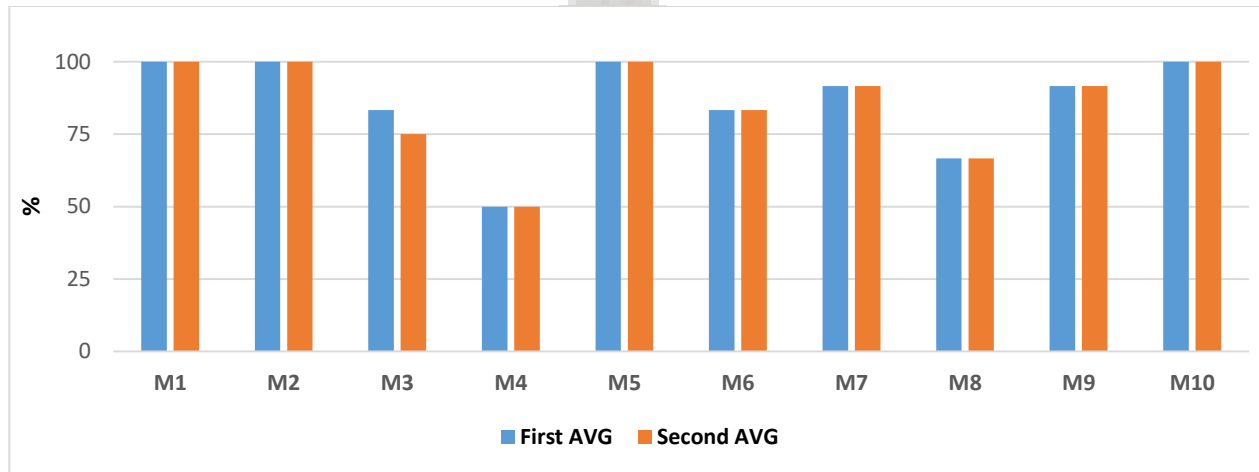


Figure 4: Effectiveness of Teaching Methodology in Humanities Departments

Science departments, for teaching methodology, were relatively consistent with their results though they had a bit more variability than the Humanities departments. (See table 4)

Table 4: Effectiveness of Teaching Methodology in Science Departments

Stream	Department	Obs. Visits	Semester	M (AVG)	%	change	%
Science	Dentistry	First	First	2.6	86.67	0.2	6.67
		Second	Second	2.8	93.33		
Science	Architecture	First	First	2.6	86.67	-0.2	-6.67
		Second	Second	2.4	80.00		
Science	Physic	First	First	2.7	90.00	0	0
		Second	Second	2.7	90.00		
Science	Banking and Finance	First	First	2.8	93.33	0	0
		Second	Second	2.8	93.33		

Dentistry, however, increased marginally from 2.6 (86.67%) to 2.8 (93.33%), a 6.67% increase. Conversely, Architecture decreased marginally from 2.6 (86.67%) to 2.4 (80%), a 6.67% decrease. There was also no change from semester one to semester two for Physics (2.7 (90%)) or Banking and Finance (2.8 (93.33%)). This suggests that the Science teachers were already on the right track in terms of the textbook from the beginning, this left little room for substantial improvement in instructional practices. (See figure 5)

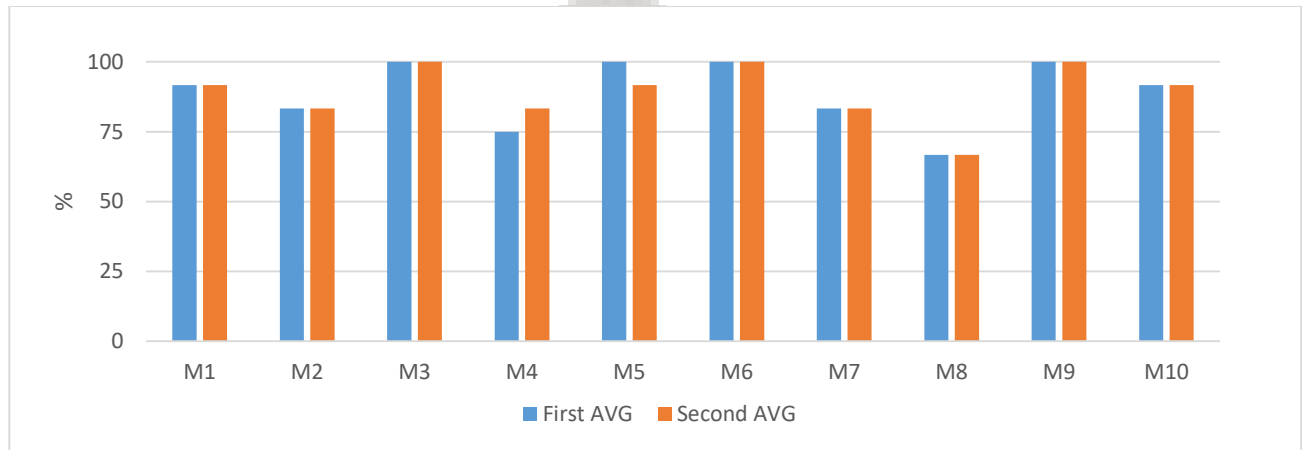


Figure 5: Effectiveness of Teaching Methodology in Science Departments

Unlike student engagement, teaching methodology were strong and steady across both Humanities and Science streams. However, Humanities teachers seemed more open to inclusion and positioning of textbook content while Science teachers were more concerned with structure and precision. The overall difference between the streams was minimal (less than 5%), suggesting comparable levels of methodological competence. (See figure 6)

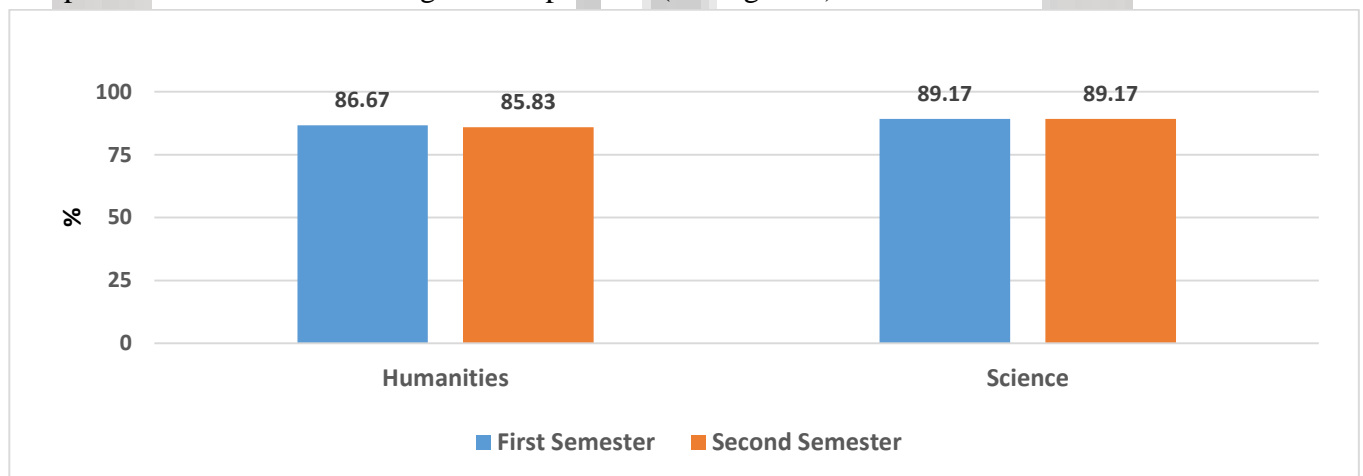


Figure 6: Comparative Analysis of Teaching Methodology Between Humanities and Science Departments

5.3. Comparison of Student Engagement and Teaching Methodology Between the First and Second Semesters (RQ3)

This subsection compares student engagement and teaching methodology across the first and second semesters based on classroom observations. Humanities has an interesting increase as far as engagement and teacher methodology, for it seems a more collaborative and communicative learning experience. (See figure 7)

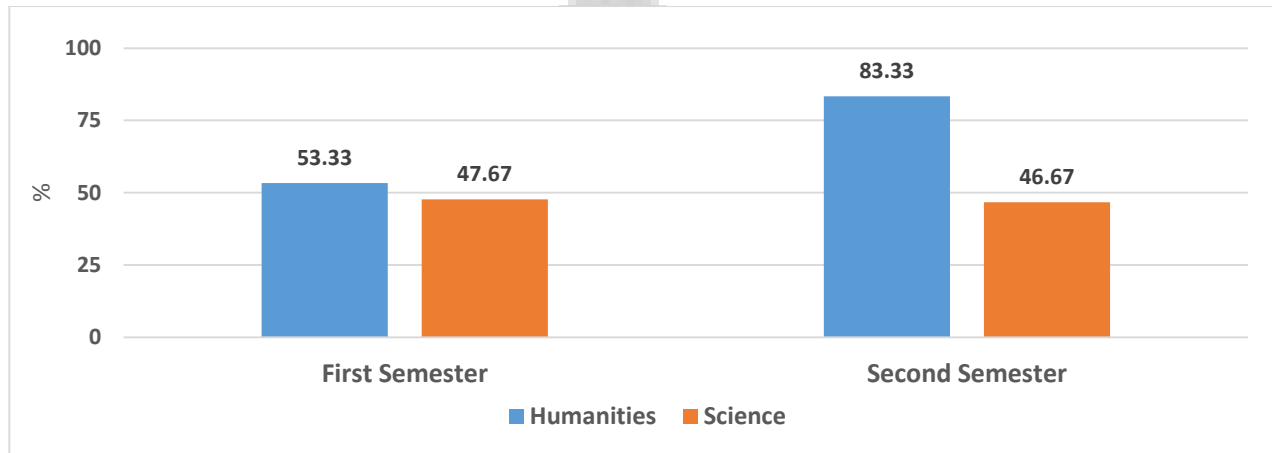


Figure 7: General Observations on Student Engagement and Teaching Methodology in Humanities Departments

In contrast, the Science departments who went along had less involvement despite receiving the same level of education. Maybe this shows that a teacher's interest in a subject and student engagement is critical to determining where Cutting Edge textbooks can be implemented. (See figure 8)

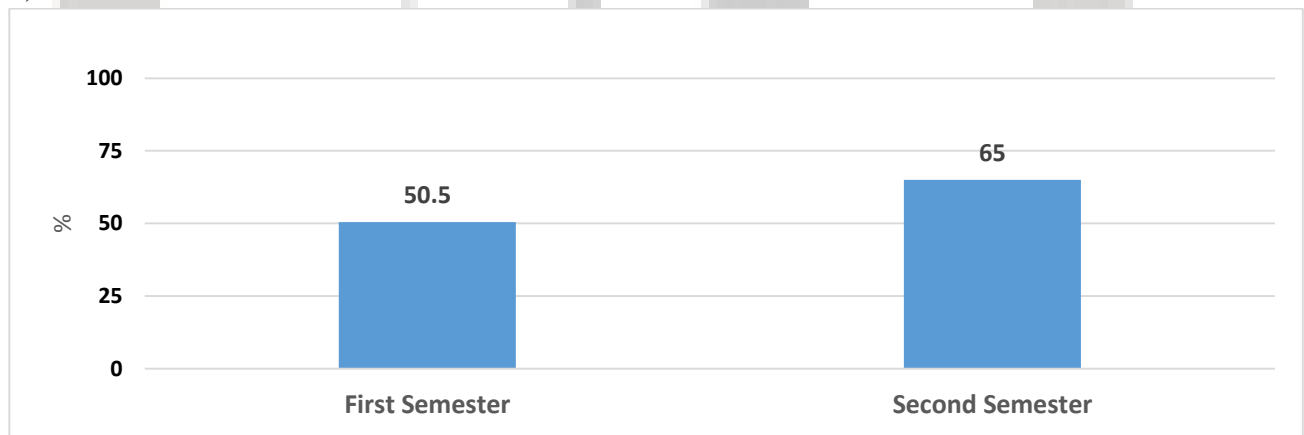


Figure 8: General Observations on Student Engagement and Teaching Methodology in Science Departments

6. DISCUSSION

This chapter is a commentary on how these findings enhance the current knowledge about the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook in accordance with the various teaching applications at Duhok University, across different departments. Thus, this chapter relates the findings to the previously discussed theoretical frameworks and empirical studies.

6.1. Textbook Implementation and Teacher Methodology

Relative to each observation's findings, Humanities and Science were also strongly and consistently implemented textbooks since their average implementation scores only decreased minimally, but still remained high during the two observed semesters. This data supports Cunningsworth (1995) and McGrath (2002, 2016)'s theoretical treatment of textbooks as semi-structured endeavors that position what should be done but ultimately are only as successful as the

implementation truly is, based on a teacher's professional discretion. Therefore, these teachers had professional discretion of their own, but their lessons remained always within the confines suggested by the textbook's target and seamlessly implemented supplementary materials and levels-appropriate communicative approaches. It is clear that such noted methodological consistency is another support of Richards' (2014) claim that classroom observation is an adequate assessment for whether teachers are implementing textbook content as intended. If the teachers can stick to the methods, then they clearly are acquainted with the *Cutting Edge* books and the communicative language teaching (CLT) attributes on which they were based. Nazim (2021) and Alshehri (2016) also discovered *Cutting Edge* as a source through which well-framed lessons, evenly distributed skills, and varied activities could be implemented for best control of the classroom and student responsiveness.

6.2. Student Engagement across Disciplines

Whereas the teaching method findings did not deviate substantially, there was a significant difference between Humanities and Science with regard to student engagement. Humanities students averaged a 30% increase in engagement over semesters while Science students either remained stagnant or slightly decreased. This is to be expected according to the engagement expectations posited by McDonough et al. (2013) and Aghazadeh (2015) that most learners become engaged (or fail to become engaged) based on course content or purpose. The rise with the Humanities departments, however, appears more justified owing to the content-driven approach and motivation internalized. These students were from History, Kurdish, and Special Education and required additional language and communication components. The communicative and task-based features of *Cutting Edge* such as pair work, discussion tasks, and real-world scenarios—appeared to resonate more effectively with these learners. This corresponds to Berardo (2006, cited in Katırcı, 2022) research about learner's interest and memorization in language acquisition that stems from authenticity and contextual relevance. In contrast, Science students' lower engagement supports findings by Kadhim (2018), noted that not all ESP learners in Iraqi universities believe English is as applicable as it should be for their specific fields. Vu et al. (2020) similarly noted that in his research *Cutting Edge* was very communicative and appropriately structured needing only personalization to integrate into the learners professional/academic realm. This gap underscores Tomlinson's (2013) notion that effective evaluation must consider contextual appropriateness, a principle particularly vital in ESP settings. The higher engagement levels observed in Humanities departments can be partially explained by instructional adaptations noted during classroom observations. Teachers frequently extended textbook tasks through discussion, group work, and contextual examples, which appeared to increase student involvement. This aligns with Tomlinson's (2013) emphasis on contextualized material use to enhance learner engagement.

The clear difference in engagement levels between Humanities and Science students can be attributed to several interrelated factors, including the nature of the disciplines, teaching styles, and classroom culture. Humanities students are generally more accustomed to discussion-based learning, interpretation, and verbal interaction, which aligns well with the communicative and task-based activities emphasized in the *Cutting Edge Elementary* textbook. In contrast, Science students often prioritize content-specific knowledge, accuracy, and problem-solving within their major subjects, which may reduce their perceived relevance of General English activities. This mismatch between

textbook content and disciplinary needs may lead to lower motivation and engagement, even when teaching methodology remains effective. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which indicate that General English textbooks tend to better support Humanities learners, while Science students benefit more from English materials tailored to their academic or professional specialization (Cunningsworth, 1995; Kadhim, 2018; Tomlinson, 2013). Therefore, the observed engagement gap reflects not a weakness in teaching practice, but a difference in how students from distinct academic fields relate to language learning objectives.

6.3. Relationship between Methodology and Engagement

One of the greatest revelations from this data is that even with optimal teaching strategies, optimal engagement levels were not achieved still, especially in the Science departments. This runs parallel with Ellis' (1997, cited in Abhar, 2017) theoretical notion of micro-evaluation as he differentiates between teacher and learner outcomes. Teachers may skillfully deliver textbook-based lessons, but without sufficient alignment to students' interests and cognitive needs, engagement remains limited. Materials must be connected to intentions and ethics of specific programs (Cunningsworth, 1995; Al-Abdullah, 2022). The implications are consistent with Fayadh (2022) and Yasseen and Al-Noori (2019), who criticized and analyzed other ELT textbooks (*English for Iraq*, for instance) with the same agenda-related concern.

6.4. Implications for Textbook Evaluation and Local Adaptation

Ultimately, the results support Sheldon (1987) and Richards (2001) cyclical, ever-evolving approach to textbook evaluation. Therefore, *Cutting Edge Elementary*, while a substantial textbook in terms of approach, can only be appropriately implemented in certain situations and requires teacher mediation to be effective. The fact that Humanities departments scored higher indicates that educators adapted their methods of instruction such as culturally relevant examples, additional reading passages, and interactive pair works that supported the communicative purpose of the textbook. Conversely, the results of the Science departments indicate a gap that requires additional vocabulary acquisition through applied communication exercises, as supported by ESP studies (Cunningsworth, 1995; Al-Abdullah, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that *Cutting Edge Elementary* was generally implemented effectively across the observed departments, with teachers demonstrating adequate methodological competence and similar communicative teaching styles. However, a clear difference was found in student engagement levels between Humanities and Science departments, with Humanities students showing higher engagement across semesters. This suggests that although the textbook is pedagogically sound, its general content does not always align with the academic interests and learning needs of students in scientific disciplines, making contextual adaptation a key factor in its effectiveness.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the textbook be adapted to include discipline-related examples, themes, and vocabulary, particularly for Science departments, to enhance relevance and student engagement. Teachers are also encouraged to employ more learner-centered activities,

such as pair work and group-based tasks, to promote active participation. At the institutional level, targeted professional development and ongoing classroom-based textbook evaluation are recommended to support effective and context-sensitive implementation. Overall, *Cutting Edge Elementary* can serve as a successful cross-curricular textbook when its use is guided by intentional adaptation and a student-centered pedagogical approach.

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