

Fidelity vs. flexibility: Can structured teacher adaptations lead to better student outcomes?

MORE (Model of Reading Engagement) is THE elementary science and social studies program that builds schemas and improves academic achievement – including literacy and math.

Scaling up, or introducing evidence-based innovations to new schools, presents a challenge: whether to emphasize **fidelity** (to stick closely to the principles of the program exactly as it was designed) or to **adapt** it to better fit the local context. Historically, **fidelity** and **adaptation** have been viewed as incompatible.

But what if there was a middle-ground option? MORE has found that building in supports that help teachers use their expertise to make **structured adaptations** – or changes to the program within a set of guidelines designed to preserve the program’s core principles – can give positive results. We tested this “**Adaptive MORE**” approach during COVID-19.



? How does Adaptive MORE differ from Core MORE?

Our study randomly assigned 95 third-grade classrooms to either receive **Core MORE** (emphasizing **fidelity**) or **Adaptive MORE**. Adaptive MORE teachers participated in team-based learning to help them customize aspects of MORE (such as engagement strategies and the timing of lessons) to meet their students’ needs, while also learning the ‘why’ behind the core elements of MORE to encourage fidelity where it matters most.

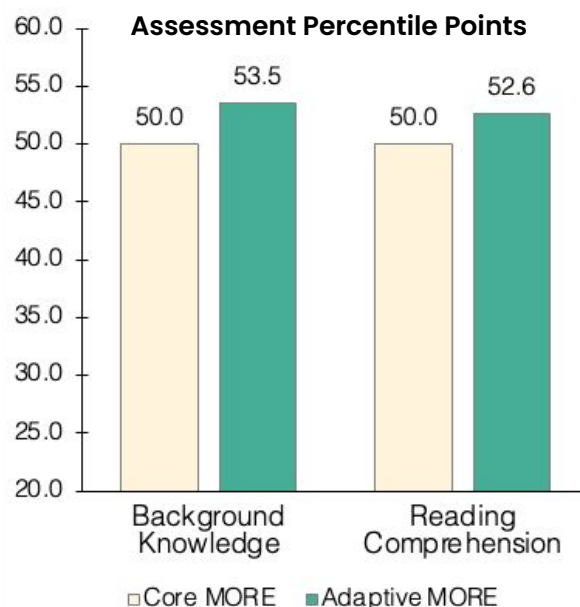
Components	Core	Adaptive
15 online MORE lessons plus print and digital student activities	✓	✓
Researcher-led teacher professional development training	✓	✓
Team-Based Learning sessions for teachers, promoting collaboration with research team and peers	✗	✓
Access to student participation data on print and digital activities	✗	✓
35-minute extension lesson on the concept of <i>systems</i>	✗	✓

Structured teacher adaptations improved student engagement and learning outcomes.

Students in **Adaptive MORE** classrooms showed **better science background knowledge and science content reading comprehension** than Core MORE students.

The graph to the right shows students' average assessment scores as percentile points¹. For example, if a CORE MORE student scored at the 50th percentile, an **Adaptive MORE** student's scores improved to the 52.6 percentile on reading comprehension.

Adaptive MORE also resulted in **higher motivation and engagement levels** with the digital activities.



Empowering teachers to make structured adaptations improves student academic outcomes and engagement compared with strict fidelity.

Every school, classroom, and student is unique. Building in opportunities for teachers to use their knowledge to make adaptations within a clear framework, while also emphasizing the core principles of the program, can be an effective approach to scaling programs and bridging the fidelity-adaptation divide. When teachers have support to work together and combine research-based strategies with classroom knowledge, they can effectively engage students and improve learning outcomes, while maintaining fidelity where it matters.

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1. If a score is in the 50th percentile, this means that 50% of the students scored lower than that score, while 50% scored higher.