

The Study of the Connection Between English Textbooks and Picture Books in Elementary Schools in China

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Abstract: English picture books, as popular extracurricular reading materials, have gradually become an important option for teachers to strengthen students' English ability. How to effectively connect English picture books with elementary school English textbooks to improve students' English level is one of the focuses of this paper. With a certain quantity of literature review and a conducting of a survey, the elementary school English textbooks (Yilin Version) may suffer the problems of being out-of-date, the lack of corpus as well as authentic English language for communication. Thus, this study provides the principles and solution for selecting proper English picture books for elementary school teachers as extended teaching materials to associate with their teaching.

Keywords: English Picture Books; Elementary School English Textbooks; Connection

1. Introduction

With the extending demands of extra reading from the English text books, there are a large number of popular English picture books emerging in the market, covering a wide range of contents to meet the needs of teachers who desire to improve the English skills of their elementary school students. However, in the process of using English picture books, there remain some problems, especially the connection between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks. The main focus of this study is to find the joint connections between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks, in order to show reference for the elementary school English teachers to enrich their teaching activity to help students' English learning.

According to the catalogue of National Curriculum Teaching Books for Compulsory Education in 2022 issued by the Ministry of Education in China, there are 13 versions of English textbooks available for Chinese elementary school. The research object of this study is Yilin English textbooks, published by Yilin Press Widely and officially used in Jiangsu province in China. English picture books mean books consisting chiefly of pictures (Wordnet, 2012). A Picture book is a kind of children's book that transmits information or tells stories through the combination of a large number of coherent pictures and relatively few words (Nodelman, 1988). Matsujichi (2017), known as the Father of Picture Books in Japan, explained the graphic relationship of picture books with mathematical formulas:

text + picture = a book with illustration

text × picture = a picture book

To sum up, this paper defines "English Picture Book" as a type of Children's books that use English as the language in the book with attractive pictures which are able to help children's comprehension of the English as the second language. By studying picture books in the context of this paper, it refers to "text × picture."

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Principle of Connecting English picture books and Elementary School English textbooks

The characteristics of English picture books are listed as intuitive, narrative, repetitive, empathic, close to daily life, and with rhythmicity (BAI Wei, 2012:62). Finding a proper English picture book to associate with English class teaching is very important. Using English picture books and teaching materials should seek the opportunity of the integration of the two from the three aspects of language cognition, theme meaning and reading literacy (ZHANG Yuhua, 2021:93). Based on the improvement of students' English skills selecting an English picture book as a teaching material for class teaching in Chinese elementary school should focus on: 1). the consistency of single topic, 2). the interest of story plot and 3). the richness of humanity in pragmatic environment (KAN Rongping, 2021:24). Selecting English picture books to consist with the main teaching materials, we need to make sure the books fit the topic, match the language and are good for students' cognitive emotional correspondence (LI Hong, 2021:5). To conclude the opinions above, when teachers choosing a picture book for students, the following principles shall be followed: 1). In line with the topic of students' textbook; 2). Adapt to students' language and cognitive ability; 3). Focus on the reproducibility of language; 4). Choose a picture book with pragmatic environment.

2.2 The Necessity and Significance of Connecting English Picture Books to Elementary School English Textbooks

English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2011) indicates that 1). Students should be able to understand and read simple stories with the help of pictures. 2). Teachers should appropriately expand the teaching content or extend the original teaching activities. WANG (2015) suggests that for students in lower grades of elementary school in China, teachers should use multiple and colorful teaching resources to enrich the teaching content, form an intuitive teaching process in front of the students, so as to adapt to children's cognitive characteristics. Although teaching materials are the core of English curriculum resources, teachers can also create, develop and make use of various English learning resources to serve English classroom teaching according to the characteristics of mutual influence and promotion between teaching and learning.

Connecting English picture books with English textbooks for class teaching can enhance students' interest in English, develop their higher order thinking, and broaden students' international vision (KANG Shaoling, 2021:125). Integrating picture books with different themes into teaching can stimulate students' interest in reading and effectively cultivate their reading ability (HOU Yunjie, 2018:5). Selecting a suitable picture book for students can expand students' vocabulary capacity and enlarge their sentence patterns, (KAN Rongping, 2021:23), help students improve their English pragmatic ability and cultivate their reading literacy (CHEN Huarong, 2021:44). Thus, applying English picture books as a learning material is beneficial and advantageous for Chinese young learners to build up their English skills.

2.3 Abroad Standards for Connecting in Class and out of Class Reading

Native English spoken countries have earlier noticed the need to establish a graded reading system based on children's cognitive level and language learning regulations (HU Minmin, 2020:11). A variety of graded reading picture books have been published under the graded reading standards, such as *Lisheng English Reading series*, *Oxford Reading Tree Series*, etc. At present, there are many grading systems for children's reading in Britain and the United States, such as, Guided Reading Level; Developmental Reading Assessment; Accelerated Reader (AR); and Lexile. These four classification methods evaluate readers' reading ability to obtain the corresponding data, and carry out the reading material selection and graded reading guidance for children to achieve the goal of independent reading. Therefore, when Chinese English teacher need to

find an English picture book in their class reading activity, the above four evaluation systems can be taken as references.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

In an effort to understand the problems existing in the connection between picture books and elementary school textbooks and how to effectively connect the contents of picture books and textbooks, we put forward the following research questions:

- (1) What are the problems in the connection between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks?
- (2) How to deal with the disconnection between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks?

3.2 Research methods and Participants

Qualitative and quantitative research method are the two major research method of this study. Qualitative research is based on amounts of literature review to sort out essential attributes such as, problems existing in the connection between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks, and principles to select the English picture books. In order to examine whether the suggestion from the literature review is applicable, fifty-five questionnaires were distributed teachers who has or had the experiences of elementary school English teaching and fifty feedbacks were received. Quantitative method is adopted to analyze the data that were collected from the survey.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Problems in the connection between English picture books and Elementary School English textbooks

According to the literature review of the study, it can be found that the elementary school English textbook might be out of date as there is no enough data to show that the textbook is closely related to the times for the present (JI Yindi, 2018:25). So far, the Yilin English textbook has been used for more than 10 years and it is less unlikely in line with the requirements of the times, and there is a certain backwardness (JI Yindi, 2018:25). Additionally, the lack of authentic English language and the insufficient corpus in the context of the textbook could be a barrier to meet the needs of communication (GU Yien, 2020:48-49;JI Yindi,2018:22-23, 29-30). Considering the limitations of the syllabus of compulsory education on Teachers' class hours and the acceptance ability of Chinese elementary school students, the length of elementary school English textbooks are limited, the corpus is also insufficient. Thus problems in the textbooks also remain in the connection to the English picture books, in which the language are authentic, the corpus are designed to meet the needs for communication, and the content are updating with times.

In response to the above three major problems of the English text book (Yilin version), this study conducted a questionnaire to support the authors concern. Thirty out of the fifty participants believe that there exist problems in the connection between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks. Chart 1 indicates among the thirty participants who believe there are connecting problems, 37% of them also believed that the textbooks as the core English teaching materials are out of date, 90% of them think that the language of textbook cannot meet the needs of communication, and 73% of them thought the corpus of textbook for English learning was insufficient.

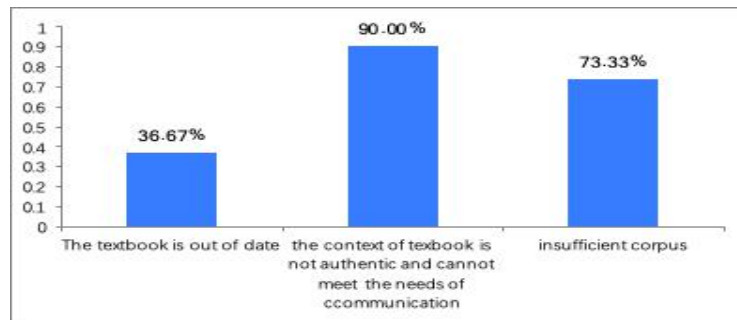


Chart 1. problems existing in the textbooks

4.2 Solution of Selecting English Picture Books to Connect with English

Textbooks

4.2.1 Applying Lexile Graded Reading System

The Lexile Framework for Reading, initiated by American National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in the 1990s, is a set of English graded reading standards developed to evaluate students' reading ability and text readability. It measures students' reading ability in the unit of "Lexile", which can be abbreviated as "L", and helps teachers locate the starting point of reading teaching as well as achieve differentiated reading teaching (LUO Dehong&YU Jing, 2013). In today's United States, Lexile framework is the most widely used reading measurement standard in schools. It is applied to all kinds of schools in 50 states in the US. More than half of the students in the United States report the Lexile scores of 30 million reading tests every year (LUO Dehong & YU Jing, 2013:90). A Lexile unit equals to a difficulty unit. In other words, a Lexile is defined as one thousandth of the gap between reading a primary level reading and high level reading, such as an encyclopedia. The highest score of Lexile value is 2000L and the lowest value is zero (ZHANG Jinxiu, 2017:16). The smaller the number, the lower the difficulty of reading or the lower the reading ability of the readers. Therefore, the framework of Lexile is widely recommended by Chinese scholars and English institute on selecting the adaptable picture books for elementary school English learners. The picture books are usually labeled with the Lexile graders. The matching English level between the grade of American schools to the grade of Chinese schools are listed in the following table. If teachers are willing to choose an English picture book for Chinese elementary school students, they need to pick the one label with American Pre-k with the Lexile of 100-200L.

American Education Grade	Lexile	Chinese Education Grade
American Preschool	0 to 100L	Chinese Preschool
American Preschool	100L to 200L	elementary school grade 1 to 3
American Preschool	150L to 300L	elementary school grade 4 to 6
Elementary school grade 1	200L to 400L	Junior high school Grade 1
Elementary school grade 2	300L to 500L	Junior high school Grade 2
Elementary school grade 3	500L to 700L	Junior high school Grade 3

Table 1. Lexile Graded Reading System

4.2.2 Recommendations of Selecting English Picture Books from Literature

Research Method

To solve the problems in the connection between English picture books and elementary school English textbooks. Table 2 suggests the characteristics of English picture books, the principles of selecting English picture books, the advantages of following the principles, the recommendations of the English picture books, and the sources of the recommenders to help elementary school teachers to find a proper book to associate their English class teaching.

Principles	Characteristics	Advantages	Recommendations	Source
In line with the topic of students' textbook and close to students' life	Intuitive; Narrative; Empathic; Close to daily life	English picture books are mainly presented in the form of pictures and simple text (sometimes without text), whose expression is more intuitive. It is easy to arouse students' desire to explore the world in the pictures. It can also improve students' interest in reading, help students understand the reading content, and cultivate their ability of independent thinking. This principle plays a substantive role in the cultivation of students' comprehensive English learning quality.	Oxford Reading Tree Series; Reading A-Z Series; Heinemann series; Lisheng English Reading series; An Arthur Adventure; If You Give Mouse A Cookie; David, NO; The Food We Eat; The Runaway Bunny;	LI Jianhong, 2021:13; BAI Wei, 2012:64; DAI Shuzhen, 2022:168; LI Xiaoling, 2018: 28; KANG Shaoling 2021:125; WU Yanman , 2018:90-91.
Adapt to students' language and cognitive ability	Rhythmicity	The catchy tune and the sense of rhythm are providing young English learners joyful reading experience. Cadenced reading offers primary schools students a good feeling of musicality and facilitate students' memory to master language knowledge.	Sheep In The Jeep; Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See? The Green Family Goes; Wait! Wait! Wait!	LI Jianhong, 2021:13; DAI Shuzhen, 2022:168
Focus on reproducibility of English language	Repetitive	Choosing picture books with high language reproducibility can reduce the difficulty of students' learning. The repeated sentence structure is convenient for students to understand, replace and operate repeatedly, which is helpful for students to associate memory to acquire the new language.	The Very Hungry Caterpillar Does A Kangaroo Have A Mommy?	LI Jianhong, 2021:13; DAI Shuzhen, 2022:168

Choose a picture book with pragmatic environment	Narrative; Empathic; Close to daily life	As contextual language materials, English picture books can train students' ability to express their feelings and interests. Students learn to exchange ideas which cultivates their higher order and critical thinking as well as improves their communication ability.	Snail's Adventure	BAI Wei, 2012:64; LI Xiaolin, 2018:28; KANG Shaolin , 2021:125
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Table 2. Picture Books of Recommendation to Connect with English Text books in Elementary school

To prove the feasibility and reliability of the Table 2, a questionnaire was conducted to find if the teachers ever heard or find those picture books helpful for their class teaching. By analyzing the data from the questionnaire, this study found that 82% of the participants believed that Oxford Reading Tree Series was helpful to connect primary school English textbooks. However, only 2% of the participants believed that David, No was useful (more data can be seen in Chart 3).

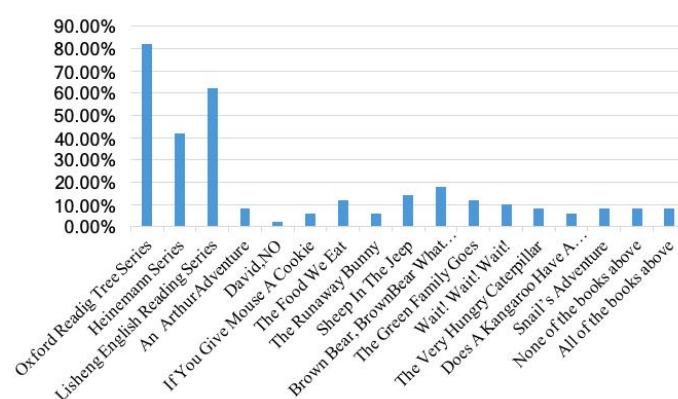


Chart 2. Elementary school English Teachers' Perspective of English picture books that are good to connect with the English textbooks in class teaching

5. Discussion and Result

Based on a wide range of the researches from the Journals of scholars as well as the survey conducted by the author of this study, it is generally believed that there are problems on the connection between English textbook and English picture books when teachers want to use picture books as an extensive learning material. To better connect the English picture books with Elementary school English text books, adapting Lexile graded reading system is suggested. For example, the sixth graders in Chinese primary school, teachers should pick the picture books labeled as Pre-k with the Lexile between 500L-700L. Students with different English skills are highly recommend to test their Lexile on the official website of Lexile testing in order to find the best level to do their extensive reading from picture books. From the survey, the paper recommends Oxford Reading Tree Series, Lisheng English reading series, and Heinemann series to teachers for extending material for English teaching.

6. Limitations and Implications for Further Research

In this paper, if the sample of the questionnaire can be larger, the result of the study might be affected to some extent. on the aspect of the disconnection between English textbooks and picture books, there might be other problems except for the three major ones discussed by this study. Further research will adopt qualitative research method by interviewing elementary school English teachers about their opinion on the disconnection between English textbooks and picture books to find more problems and solutions.

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