

An Evaluation of Senior High English under the Textbook System of Cheng Xiaotang

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Abstract: With the reform of the new curriculum standard - National English Curriculum Standard (2017 version revised in 2020), scholars have made a breakthrough in the view of the teaching material evaluation. Textbooks are main tools for teachers to carry out and organize instructional activities, and one of essential basic abilities for English teachers is to correctly analyze and evaluate textbooks. It worths exploring the way to enhance teachers' ability to research and use textbooks. In view of this, this thesis systematically analyse and evaluate Senior High English (SHE) in Cheng Xiaotang's textbook evaluation method in order to find out whether SHE is consistent with National English Curriculum Standard and assist high school English teachers to achieve secondary development of the textbook.

Keywords: Senior English textbooks; The New Curriculum Standards; Textbook evaluation

Introduction

Textbooks as primary learning resources play a pivotal role in teaching a foreign language (Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2017). In recent years, with the increasing prosperity of the textbook market, it is crucial to choose suitable textbooks and play their roles fully and effectively. As a result, people pay more attention to textbook evaluation.

Senior High English (SHE), which is composed by Beijing Normal University and published by Beijing Normal University Press. According to Wang Qiang and Wang Qi (2019), based on National English Curriculum Standard (NECS), with the goal of developing students' core competencies in English subject and relying on the six components (thematic contexts, text types, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills and learning strategies), SHE integrates and optimizes course content and teaching methods, focuses on the value orientation behind them to lay a solid cultural foundation of humanistic heritage and scientific spirit for students, promote the sense of social responsibility and the ability to innovate and learn independently.

1. Literature Review

Seaton (1982) proposed more than ten items for textbook evaluation, but their evaluation content was too detailed and appeared to be cumbersome. Among numerous textbook evaluation tables, the evaluation criteria of Breen and Candlin (1987) assist teachers in selecting the most suitable textbooks for learners of various levels in various teaching environments, but there are many problems: low credibility, difficulties in practical operations for intricate reference table of evaluation guidelines, learners' different needs and learning methods, etc. McDonough and Shaw (1993: 59) hold the idea of that textbook evaluation can be viewed from aspects of internal evaluation and external evaluation; Cunningsworth (1995) provides a detailed introduction to two methods for evaluating English textbooks - impressionistic overview and in-depth evaluation. However, due to the lack of objectivity and scientificity, it is not advisable to be solely relied on; Besides, according to Cunningsworth (2002: 14), there are three categories in textbook evaluation: pre-use evaluation, whilst-use evaluation and post-use evaluation.

The theoretical research of textbook evaluation in China started later than that in foreign countries. Many of these works have concerned the principles and processes of material design, investigating both the content and effectiveness of English language textbooks for Chinese learners (Pan, M.X. & Zhu, Y., 2022). Cheng and Sun (2011) pointed that textbook evaluation can be divided into two major categories: ad hoc impressionistic evaluation and systematic evaluation in English Materials Analysis and Design. Systematic evaluation, can also be divided into internal evaluation and external evaluation, which are closely related.

2. Internal Evaluation of SHE

2.1 Guiding Ideology of SHE

In NECS, students are advocated to develop comprehensive language skills through experience, practice, discussion, cooperation, and exploration, which has been implemented by SHE editors in textbook design. For example, in grammar learning, SHE adopts guided discovery method. The learning of each grammar point goes through the process of language experience, typical example sentences analysis, induction of grammar rules, and finally consulting texts. Compared with deductive and inductive method, this instructional method focuses on students' own perception and comprehension of language, which not only reflects the new curriculum ideology of priority to students' independent learning, but also cultivates their abilities to analyze and solve problems, thus develop their thinking capacities.

2.2 Teaching Methods of SHE

In order to satisfy the demands of NECS, SHE has adopted Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which seeks to develop students' inter-language skills through providing tasks and then using language to solve it. For instance, "Act out a dialogue between a Chinese student and a foreign student after watching a local opera." (page 13, Compulsory 3). Based on well-designed tasks like this, students are expected to build their ability to use language comprehensively.

2.3 Contents Selection and Arrangements of SHE

2.3.1 Contents Selection of SHE

(1) Language Knowledge

Corresponding phonetic knowledge is systematically arranged in "Pronunciation" in Lesson 2 of each unit. It can be seen that SHE attaches great importance to students' pronunciation, e.g. stress and intonation (page 57 in Compulsory 1), and also arranges pragmatic phonetic knowledge, e.g. formal/informal use of language (page 13 in Compulsory 2), which aims to cultivate students' phonetic ability in real communication, and indeed meets the phonetic requirements of NECS for Senior High School English level 8.

Key words are made full use in vocabulary learning with schema theory. For instance, in "Topic Talk" of Unit 5, when introducing the unit theme, the 1st activity is "What comes to your mind when you see the word 'nature'? Add more words to the diagram." In this way, students can review learned words to activate their original schema related to nature.

(2) Language Skills

Listening activities in SHE are diverse, close to students' lives and cultivate students' listening skills to some extent. In SHE, each unit has four to seven listening texts. In respect of listening topics, all topics required by NECS are included. For listening genres, they can be roughly divided into two categories, dialogues (e.g. interviews) and monologues (e.g. radio programs and documents), which reduces the difficulty of students' listening.

There are full of speaking activities in each unit design, which take place in different forms, such as dialogue work, role play, and group discussion. In addition, "Talk Builder" provides a great deal of guidance on the oral practice to express students' opinions step by step and achieve communication goals finally.

The reading materials in SHE have some prominent features. First, there is a wide variety of different text types. Second, reading skills are well linked to other skills, especially listening and writing ones. Recorded on cassettes, students can listen to reading texts. Besides, models for writing are presented in SHE after analyzing the structure of reading materials. Third, extra reading text is provided in "Reading Club" and "Literature Spot" to further expand students' reading input.

Writing content is centered on a variety of stylistic writing modes. Additionally, each unit has one major writing task in "Writing Workshop" and is divided into four parts: "get ready for writing", "read for writing", "focus on structural and language" and "compose your writing". In this way, the teacher can guide students in a phased manner with the help of "Sentence Builder" and "Writing Help". Furthermore, there is "Peer Editing Sheet" arranged for students to assess their works.

In NECS, "viewing" is added to language skills: "understand the meaning conveyed by non-verbal resources such as pictures, images, sounds, symbols, colors, etc. in multi-modal texts", thus video learning content is added to the textbook. "Viewing Workshop" provides corresponding video clips and related instructional activities. Students obtain information through watching videos, construct language, form knowledge structure related to the theme, and then realize the transformation from knowledge to ability through certain activities.

2.3.2 Contents Arrangements of SHE

After the contents being determined, these materials should be reasonably arranged. The key and difficult points are distributed in different units and arranged from simple to complicated. For example, in Lesson 3, Unit 8, SHE starts from questions "Are there

any shared bikes in your neighbourhood or around your school? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of them?”, then provides with a text about Amsterdam, a good city for cycling. With “Skill Builder” (Understanding development of events), students are supposed to gradually understand the “white bikes” in Amsterdam and introduce it with the help of a given flow chart. After questions “What does the title ‘White Bikes’ on the Road’ mean?” and “What does the writer mean by saying ‘Where will bike-sharing go in China?’” to think critically, and “Complete the summary with the information you have learnt” to make an abstract, they are able to find the similarities and differences between “white bikes” in Amsterdam and shared bikes in their cities/towns in “Express Yourself” part. This not only helps task achievement and builds confidence, but also develop students’ awareness of communication itself. What’s more, language points is thoroughly recycled in the course. For example, the grammar item “passive voice” appears in Lesson 1, Unit 3, and reviewed in Lesson 1, Unit 10.

At the beginning of the textbook, “Learning to Learn” provides an overall guidance for students’ learning methods and strategies. Then the main purpose of three units is to help students to learn how to comprehensively use language to solve practical problems. Each unit is mainly divided into three parts: unit preparation (“Topic Talk”), main learning content (Lesson 1, Lesson 2, Lesson 3, Writing Workshop and Viewing Workshop) and autonomous learning content (“Reading Club”, “Check Your Progress” and “Unit Diary”). At the end of the textbook, it showcases many resources for autonomous learning, including “Literature Spot”, “Project”, “Grammar Summary”, etc.

2.4 Authenticity of language materials

To ensure the nativeness and authenticity of language, most texts are either selected from original materials or rewritten by foreign authors. Besides, discourses materials about Chinese culture mainly provided by Chinese editing teams are also refined and optimized by foreign experts (Wang Qiang & Wang Qi, 2019). There are plenty of selections from literary masterpieces or daily lives in SHE, such as Reading Club 2: The Un-Birthday Gift in Unit 3, adapted from Alice’s Adventures in wonderland, the video clip in “Viewing Workshop” in Unit 6, extracted from the famous speech “I Have a Dream”, and the play excerpt in “Literature Spot” in Compulsory 3, adapted from King Lear. Liu Yue and Wang Shan (2021) hold that the authenticity of the contents refers to whether the expression content is consistent with the real world. For instance, “Imagine you were asked to tell one of the fairy tales to a group of ten-year-old children. Tell it with proper intonation, facial expressions and body language.” in “Viewing Workshop”, Unit 8. Ten-year-old children is old enough to expose to English at the same time young enough to enjoy fairy tales, so that we can say the language used in this condition is comparatively authentic.

2.5 Components of SHE

As an integrated textbook package, SHE consists of Student’s Book, Teacher’s Book, Workbook, Cassettes, CDs, and other authentic materials. Student’s Book is considered to be the core of whole package, and it functions as a bridge between teachers and students. Therefore, the internal evaluation mainly focuses on it. Workbook is closely connected to the Student’s Book. It is bond behind each Student’s Book, which intends to give students extra practice in the items that are already introduced in class. Besides, Teacher’s Books are also very important. The function of the Teacher’s Book is to provide teachers with the detailed information that they can make the best use of the whole course. Cassettes play a necessary role during the teaching process as they are used for listening and pronunciation work. In a word, all the components of SHE work well with each other.

2.6 Materials design of SHE

SHE is designed with a single column, in the size of 210 mm * 297 mm, and the font size is suitable for students to read. Moreover, SHE are colorful and attractive. In each unit, one relevant picture is set as the background to make students know the theme of this unit at a glance. Regarding the binding design, the printing is flexible with contents, the paper is sturdy and durable and basically without any corner foldings.

Conclusion:

Based on the evaluation described above, we can conclude that SHE generally meet the requirements put forward by NECS.

It should also be noted that NECS advocates teachers to use teaching materials creatively and individually, so teachers can not mechanically “teach teaching materials”, but learn to “use teaching materials”, try to use textbook in resource-like way and bear in mind to be innovative in adjusting the contents of SHE to better satisfy the demands of NECS.

References:

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