

Analysis and Evaluation of PEP Senior High School Textbooks New Senior English from the Perspective of Key Competencies

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Abstract

The status of textbooks is significant in English learning. Textbooks not only provide students with learning resources, but also help teachers design teaching activities. A variety of textbooks are published in the market. For this reason, textbooks evaluation becomes more crucial. This paper is about the analysis and evaluation of senior high school textbooks New Senior English published by People's Education Press from the Perspective of key competencies. The evaluation of New Senior English is conducted according to the requirements of National English Curriculum Standards. After analyzing the New Senior English, it finds that the textbook has both advantages and disadvantages, so teachers should make adjustments based on the actual classroom situation, instead of repeating what the textbook says.

Keywords

Textbooks Analysis and Evaluation; New Senior English; Key Competencies.

1. Introduction

Textbooks, as an significant teaching resources, play an essential role in teaching and learning. Its position in English language learning is evident because textbooks should not only provide students with learning resources, but also provide teachers with references for designing teaching activities. Due to the English curriculum reform, a variety of English textbooks with different teaching objectives, educational philosophies and quality exist in the market, so schools have more choices to select English textbooks. Therefore, it is important to choose a suitable textbook for students.

However, how to choose the best textbooks for students becomes a heated discussion. Most scholars states that analyzing and evaluating textbooks from the viewpoint of users is vital in the process of choosing textbooks. Evaluations of textbooks can not only identify their strengths and weaknesses, but also help teachers and students to make better use of the learning materials. In addition, textbook editors can draw on evaluation results to modify and revise textbooks.

English textbooks are the concrete embodiment of the English curriculum standards, and many of them are also the blueprints of the curriculum standards, as in the case of the English textbook New Senior English published by People's Education Press (PEP) in 2004. As a textbook, it has been widely used by teachers and students in most areas of China. It breaks away from the traditional way of teaching and pays more attention to improving students' communication skills and developing their intercultural awareness and learning strategies.

New Senior English follows the concept of human-centred education, taking full consideration of students' age, cognitive ability and actual learning situation, which is conducive to imparting language knowledge, strengthening students' quality-oriented education, and cultivating students' personality; Besides, it has a wide variety of topics, a rich and vivid language, and moderate difficulty, which may motivate students to English learn English actively, and not only

cultivate students' ability to communicate, but also improve their ability to acquire and process information. At the same time, New Senior English focuses on developing students' learning strategies on the basis of reinforcing language skills, and different topics according to different modules, so that students can learn about Eastern and Western cultures.

Key competencies in subject English mainly include language ability, learning ability, thinking quality and cultural awareness. In the past, senior high school English teachers only focused on English language acquisition and academic achievement, with little attention paid to the development of students' key competencies. English teachers use textbooks to impart knowledge and develop students' key competencies in English. Therefore, key competences in textbooks are vital for teachers to integrate them into English teaching process. This paper presents a specific strategy for analyzing PEP New Senior English textbooks from the perspective of English subject key competencies and aims to help teachers gain a more comprehensive understanding of this textbooks and hopes to provide new inspirations for their teaching.

2. Literature Review

This part provides the previous studies in the area of textbook evaluation. It involves definition of the textbook, key competencies and textbook evaluation, criteria for English textbook evaluation and previous studies in this field.

2.1. Definition of the Textbook

Textbooks are known as teaching materials, and they are regarded as a visual record and psychological support for students. Tomlison (1998:24) believes that "All materials that facilitate the learning of a language can be called textbooks". These include books such as teaching materials, workbooks, newspapers and journals; and multimedia materials, which includes videos, slides, pictures, and audiotapes; and learning materials used in computer networks, such as e-courses and animation materials; in some cases, the teacher's activities are included in the scope of teaching materials in order to fulfil the objectives of the teaching. In the narrower sense of the term, textbooks are materials that used by students in teaching activities. Brown (2001) mainly defines the textbook from a broad perspective. He believes that only the teaching materials that can meet the classroom teaching and are used in the classroom teaching all belong to the teaching materials. This makes the textbooks have a wide range, such as games, textbooks, teaching plans, etc. Cheng Xiaotang (2002) defines textbooks mainly in the broad and narrow sense. He pointed out that textbooks in the broad sense cover a wide range of contents, and anything that can meet the needs of teaching can be called textbooks, including after-school exercises, classroom materials, tutorial materials and so on. It follows that any material that meets the learning needs of students and improves their knowledge falls into the category of textbooks. A textbook in the narrow sense is a textbook.

Textbooks in this study refer to textbooks in the narrow sense of the term, especially those used by teachers and those used by teachers and students in the teaching and learning process.

2.2. Definition of Key Competencies

The National English Curriculum Standard (2022) mentioned that key competencies is the concentrated expression of the value of the curriculum in nurturing people, and through the curriculum, students gradually develop the appropriate values, character and basic skills to meet their lifelong development and the needs of society. The key competencies to be cultivated in the English curriculum contains language ability, cultural awareness, learning ability and thinking quality. Besides, it also introduces the status of the four elements. Language ability is the basic element of key competencies, thinking quality is the reflection of cognitive features of key competencies, cultural awareness is the reflection of value orientation of key competencies,

and learning ability is the key element of key competencies development. The four aspects of key competencies are interpenetrating, integrated and interactive, and develop synergistically.

2.3. Textbooks Evaluation

2.3.1. Definition of Textbook Evaluation

Tyler, r.w (1949: 245) points out that the evaluation of textbooks is a process for finding out how much we have achieved through learning experiences compiled and organized ahead of time; it is also a procedure for figuring out how wide the gap is between the objectives of teaching and the needs of the actual teaching situation. According to Tomlinson (1998), textbook evaluation is the process of measuring the value of some textbooks by determining the influence of the textbook on those who use it. Cunningsworth (1984) states that textbook evaluation is a complex topic due to the large number of variables involved. Nevertheless, textbook evaluation is crucial for teachers.

2.3.2. The Criteria for English Textbook Evaluation

1) Breen and Candlin's Criteria

Breen and Candlin (1987) suggest that the evaluation of textbooks should be divided into two stages. The first is to identify the textbook criteria to be used for evaluation. The second stage is to develop criteria for the activity, including whether it meets the aspirations and interests of the learner, whether it fits with the learner's approach to learning and whether it is coherent with the learning process.

2) Cheng Xiaotang's Criteria

Cheng Xiaotang (2011) points out that the evaluation of an English textbook should have two aspects. One is the internal aspect and the other is the external aspect. The internal evaluation consists of evaluating seven aspects, including (1) evaluation of learning objectives and principles; (2) evaluation of material selection and organization; (3) evaluation of the structural system; (4) evaluation of language proficiency; (5) evaluation of language skills; (6) evaluation of teaching approaches; (7) evaluation of language proficiency evaluation of textbook components. As for the external evaluation, on the other hand, it is the assessment of whether a textbook meets the teaching and learning needs of the teacher and the student, including the teacher's and the student's impressions of the book, language competences, etc.

2.3.3. Previous Studies on Textbook Evaluation

At the beginning of the 20th century, research on the evaluation of textbooks focused mainly on the definition, scope of content, functions, evaluation purposes, processes, methods and its principles. According to Seaton (1982), the evaluation of textbooks should be based on the syllabus or a systematic teaching evaluation form and be conducted on an item-by-item basis. Evaluation can be made on the design and layout of the textbook, the selection and arrangement of topics, the training of language skills, the arrangement of vocabulary, the design of phonics learning, illustrations, audio recordings, and the learning methodology adopted by the learner, and so on. Grant (1987) developed a three-stage assessment process: initial assessment, detailed assessment and ongoing assessment. For the initial assessment, he developed the 'Catalyst Text' as an assessment criterion. For the detailed assessment, he developed three questionnaires. A questionnaire for students, a questionnaire for teachers and a questionnaire for teachers who choose textbooks for their students. Each questionnaire contained 10 items with a scoring scheme. Breen & Candling (1987) argued that the evaluation of materials should include learning methods, learning skills and the process of learning in the classroom, and they also suggested that students should be involved in the evaluation in terms of whether the material meets the needs of the students, whether the material stimulates them to be enthusiastic in their learning and whether the material improves their motivation to learn. Shelton (1988) puts forward two textbook evaluation methods, that is, overall impression

evaluation method and qualitative evaluation method. The overall impression method analyses the overall situation of the textbook from the surface structure, including the textbook's title, publisher, pricing, author and so on; qualitative analysis is based on the deeper structure, and a set of related questions is designed in a qualitative manner to analyse the textbook in 17 aspects, that is, theoretical, practicability, relevance, layout design, accessibility, coherence, selection and sequencing, graphic features, appropriateness, authenticity, adequacy, culture, education, interactivity, flexibility, instructionality and overall price evaluation, and so on.

In 1990s, the evaluation of English textbooks attracted the attention of some Chinese scholars. Qian Yuan (1995) suggests the following four aspects about the evaluation of English textbooks: 1) checking each part of the textbook according to the syllabus or assessment testing form to check each part of the textbook item by item; 2) obtaining students' and teachers' opinions; 3) comparing the characteristics of various textbooks; 4) conducting research after use to obtain effectiveness; Cai Huiping (1999) states that the evaluation of English textbooks should include the scope of the syllabus, the number of language knowledge points in the textbook, the content design and the number of activities appearing in each unit.

Liu Daoyi (2004) believes that the evaluation criteria of textbooks will change with the development of the times, but there are some basic evaluation criteria for the evaluation of textbooks at a certain period of time. In her view, textbooks must comply with national policies, laws and regulations, be guided by curriculum standards, conform to the laws of students' physical and psychological development, meet students' developmental needs, and take into account the current requirements of education reform in the regions where the textbooks are used. In her view, the evaluation of English language teaching materials should be based on the above four foundations and the relevant requirements of the curriculum standards. In addition, she summarized 10 aspects for evaluating the quality of teaching materials: developmental, ideological, systematic, scientific, interesting, advanced, practical, evaluative, creative and expansive.

In conclusion, the evaluation of textbooks can be divided into stages of the use of textbooks, as well as into different aspects and levels of the contents of the textbooks. These studies have made the evaluation of textbooks more and more rigorous scientific, so that there are systematic and more complete reference standards, whether in the study of analyzing the text alone or in the multi-faceted study of the text and the users.

3. Evaluation of New Senior English

The study does research in evaluation of New Senior English(NSE) published by People's Education Press. NSE contains compulsory courses and optionally compulsory courses. Compulsory courses include Book 1 to Book 3. There are five units in each compulsory textbook, and each unit has a specific theme with reading, listening, speaking and writing skill practice. And optionally compulsory courses contain Book 1 to Book 4. This study mainly focuses on the compulsory courses.

3.1. Key Competencies in Textbook

3.1.1. Language Ability

Language ability refers to the ability to understand and express language as demonstrated by the use of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge and a variety of strategies when participating in language activities related to the subject in a given context(NECS,2022).

The New Senior English textbook takes into account phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, discourse and pragmatics. As for phonetics, in addition to the reading section, where students listen to texts, perceive and imitate different speech rhythms, there are also listening activities and exercises to train students to listen to information. As for vocabulary, in the reading section,

students consolidate their vocabulary by filling in the gaps in the discourse. In addition, there are vocabulary extensions, such as learning about adjective suffixes, synonyms or antonyms. With regard to grammar, the textbook integrates grammar into texts so that students can observe, analyse and summarize grammatical patterns and learn to apply them in new contexts in an inquiry learning approach. Regarding discourse and pragmatics, the textbook sets up various types of discourse, including speeches, news reports, documentaries, etc., to help students understand the structure and linguistic features of various genres of texts, and to set up a variety of activities such as discussions, so that they can use their knowledge of English to express their views decently and appropriately in different contexts and achieve the purpose of communication.

3.1.2. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness refers to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the recognition of excellent cultures, including students' cross-cultural cognition, attitude and behavior orientation in the context of globalization(NECS,2022).

New Senior English first presents students with a wide range of cultural phenomena so that they can understand them, and then allows students to form their own cultural attitudes and cultural identities through deeper understanding. Taking Unit 2 of Book 1 as an example, it shows students the differences between British and American English in simple dialogues so that they can understand the differences between languages in different countries. The pre-reading part also provides students with basic knowledge about the English language, such as countries in which English is an official language and which countries have the largest number of English learners.

3.1.3. Thinking Quality

The thinking quality refers to the personality traits of human thinking, reflecting students' level and degree of understanding, analyzing, comparing, inferring, critiquing, evaluating, creating and so on. The enhancement of thinking quality helps students to learn to identify, analyze and solve problems and to make correct value judgments on different things(NECS,2022).

The Reading for Writing in New Senior English Unit 1 of Compulsory book 1 combines critical thinking with creative thinking activities. In the passage, Ms Luo gives advice to a teenager on how to talk to his friends to get them away from the addiction to the Internet. In Activity 1, Question 2 is "Do you think Ms Luo's advice is useful?", students need to express their views on whether Ms Luo's advice is useful and feasible, which reflects the development of students' critical thinking, that is, the courage to comment on the ideas in the passage. Question 3 is "What other kinds of advice would you give?", at which point students can express their opinions creatively in relation to the question of how to help their friends give up their Internet addiction. In addition, Activity 3 asks students to give advice to one of the teenagers about their problems, which requires students to think actively about the measures and reasons for solving the problem, and to use the vocabulary and grammar they have learnt to express new ideas that conform to the rules of English, which will help them to train their creative thinking while developing language ability.

3.1.4. Learning Ability

Learning ability refers to the awareness and ability to actively use and adapt English learning strategies, expand English learning paths, and endeavour to improve the efficiency of English learning. The development of learning ability helps students master scientific learning methods and develop good lifelong learning habits(NECS,2022).

Learning tip and reading for fun will appear at the end of each unit, which can give students guidance on learning methods, so that students will not study blindly, nor feel confused and overwhelmed. In the learning process, especially in English learning, it provides students with more perspectives on problems, so as to expand students' Cognition. At the same time, students

have a preliminary understanding of the cultural knowledge between China and Britain, and have formed a certain cultural literacy and accumulation. This design is helpful for students to carry out self-monitoring and reflection in time under the guidance of learning strategies, improve meta-cognitive awareness and promote the development of autonomous learning ability.

3.2. Advantages in New Senior English textbook

3.2.1. Fully Meet the Need of Teachers and Students

The New Senior English textbook follows the National English Curriculum Standard in a creative way to strike a balance between the needs of students and examinations. That is, the textbook is designed in a spiral way, providing opportunities for students to review and apply knowledge step by step, which allows knowledge to be internalized in the classroom rather than outside the classroom; Besides, teachers can benefit from the cultural information provided by the textbook. It is necessary to enrich the knowledge related to culture, and the structure and system of knowledge presented by the textbooks are also crucial in teaching, so that teachers can better optimize their knowledge structure in teaching.

3.2.2. Different Topics of Each Units

The variety of topics, vivid language, and appropriate level of difficulty are conducive to stimulating students' interest in learning English, which not only cultivates students' communicative skills, but also enhances their ability to acquire and process information. In the reading modules, the contents of the five units cover five aspects: life, culture, travel, nature and great men, which broaden students' horizons. On the basis of strengthening language skills, it focuses on cultivating students' learning strategies, and according to the different themes of various modules, students learn about the knowledge of Eastern and Western cultures in their learning.

3.3. Disadvantages in New Senior English Textbook

3.3.1. Mechanical Nature of Exercise Design

The National English Curriculum Standard puts forward that teachers are supposed to place emphasis on fostering creativity of students. However, the exercise design in New Senior English is more mechanical, and each unit is generally similar in structure. In the exercise design of this textbook, the first stage is to guess the corresponding words through English-English interpretation; The second stage is to choose words and fill in the blanks; The third stage is to summarize the key phrases, sentences and grammar; The fourth stage is to translate sentences. Although some exercises involve a small amount of cultivation of creativity, but the effect is still limited, which can not promote students' innovative ability in teaching process.

3.3.2. Lacking Explanations for Words and Grammar

There are a large amount of textual materials in the textbook, such as character dialogues and passages. These materials contain words and grammars that students have never encountered before, and these words and grammars are not provided with appropriate explanations alongside the passages or in the appendices, which may cause them to have difficulties in the reading process. Although it is mentioned in the National English Curriculum Standard that students should have the ability to guess the meaning of words in context, it is inevitable that they are somewhat confused when faced with grammatical structures that they have never been exposed to before. Besides, the explanation of the necessary grammar knowledge is helpful for students to grasp the knowledge quickly, and together with the necessary practice, it can make students grasp the use of the grammar well.

3.4. Suggestions

3.4.1. Suggestions for Editors

When compiling textbooks, editors should pay more attention to the psychological and physiological development of high school students and their cognitive patterns, and adopt a step-by-step approach to arrange language items in a systematic and comprehensive manner. For example, there are some new words and grammars in some texts that are not mentioned in the book, which may bring trouble to students in the process of learning. So editors should mark key words, increase the recurrence rate of words and key knowledge points, and give detailed explanations of grammar to supplement students' grammatical defects at the end of the lesson, so that students can learn more easily and be more motivated to learn.

In terms of reading genre selection, more basic articles such as expository texts, argumentative texts and narrative texts should be selected, so that students can master reading skills and lay the foundation for difficult texts that may be encountered in the future. At the same time, in order to enhance students' cultural awareness, some intangible cultural heritage can be put into the reading, such as Spring Festival couplets and paper cutting. Besides, Some of the themes in the book are out of date, which are far from students' life. Therefore, editors should keep abreast of the times when compiling the textbooks, and bring the hotspots of the era into the textbooks, so that students can have an understanding of the current society and trigger empathy to promote the unfolding of teaching.

3.4.2. Suggestions for Users

In the process of teaching, as the contents of the textbooks are numerous and some of the contents may not meet the actual teaching needs, teachers are required to make appropriate deletions, additions, adjustments and substitutions to the contents, structure and sequence of the textbooks in the light of the actual situation of teaching without affecting the systematicity and completeness of the textbooks. If teachers do not make appropriate changes to the textbooks, it is impossible for them to complete the teaching task within the prescribed time. The initial design of the textbook is also based on the intention that teachers should have the ability to make choices when preparing the lesson in order to achieve the best teaching results. Teachers should also learn more about other versions of textbooks to support their teaching, so that the contents of the textbooks will be more complete and more consistent with students' real life. When using the textbook, teachers should pay attention to flexible application and avoid rote application. When teaching language knowledge, several teaching methods should be used to increase students' interest in learning and take the initiative to learn. At the same time, teachers should pay attention to phonetic training, learn phonetic knowledge well, and improve their oral expression ability and listening ability.

4. Conclusion

English textbooks are an essential part of the English curriculum resources. At the compulsory education stage, English textbooks are an indispensable part of students' English language knowledge transfer, and it is the main source of students' English knowledge input. The New Senior English textbook has many advantages compared with other versions of the textbook. Through analyzing the books from the four perspectives of the key competencies of the English subject, it finds that the New Senior English textbook conforms to the requirements of the key competencies of the English subject, and the contents of the sections are aimed at the cultivation of students' language ability, learning ability, thinking quality, and cultural awareness.

There is no perfect textbook. Therefore, every textbook has its strengths and weaknesses. So teachers and students should make use of the good part of the textbooks and abandon what is not good, and make adjustments based on the actual classroom situation. The main purpose of

English textbook analysis and evaluation is to make better use of the New Senior English textbook. Teachers and students are the direct users of the textbook but not the slaves. They should be creative rather than passive to the textbook.

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