

The Treatment of High School English Textbooks in China: A Discussion Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Liming Yang*

School of Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

Krashen's Input Hypothesis provides valuable insights into second language learning. Nowadays, many researchers in China have utilized this theory in various aspects of English classes. However, it is not common to use this theory to analyze the current status of high school English textbooks. This passage will focus on analyzing the current status of high school English textbooks and provide some suggestions based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis. It will first introduce the role of high school English textbooks, then analyze their current status based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis. After that, the reasons are explored. The crucial part follows - giving suggestions inspired by Krashen's Input Hypothesis. This passage is written based on the author's understanding of Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the actual use of high school English textbooks. It is hoped that this paper can offer some suggestions for high school English teachers and serve as a supplementary study in English teaching research based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis.

Keywords

High School English Textbooks; Krashen's Input Hypothesis; Current Situations; Reasons; Suggestions.

1. Introduction

The Chinese society always attaches great importance to the nurture of senior high school students' English competence. The New English Curriculum Standards (NECS) for Senior High Schools, which were revised in 2020, promote that the English curriculum of high school is supposed to develop students' key competence, which refers to the language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability of students [1]. High school English textbooks are the instructional materials designed to meet the goal of cultivating high school students' key competence as outlined in the New English Curriculum Standards. As one kind of instructional material used in English classes, high school English textbooks are always seen as the connections between teachers and students. High school English textbooks are the primary instructional materials used in high school English teaching. Krashen's Input Hypothesis is usually used to give explanations of second language learning, especially the issues of input materials. As input materials, high school English textbooks can also be explained by Krashen's Input Hypothesis. This paper will analyze the current situation of the textbooks from the perspective of Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Then, based on the analysis of the current treatment of high school English textbooks, this paper will give some suggestions for high school English teachers to handle the high school English textbooks based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, so that students can be better nurtured in the high school English courses.

2. Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen is one of the most famous linguists in the world, who is renowned for his five hypotheses: the Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis [2]. Among these hypotheses, the Input Hypothesis is arguably the most widely used theory. Many scholars in China have written papers about Krashen or have used Krashen's hypotheses to offer teaching advice for English language teaching. For example, Li once wrote a review paper about Krashen's Input Hypothesis [3].

Among Krashen's five hypotheses, the Input Hypothesis plays a unique role. It is widely studied by many linguists and teachers in language teaching. In the Input Hypothesis, Krashen proposes that language is acquired under the condition of sufficient comprehensive input. What's more, Krashen's Input Hypothesis suggests that the input should also meet the principle of 'I+1', which means that the level of the input materials should be slightly beyond the learners' present level but not too far above it. Additionally, the color and order of the input are also important factors to consider.

3. The Role of High School English Textbooks

The high school English textbooks are the main input materials for high school students. This is due to the following two reasons. First, students at the high school stage are busy preparing for the College Entrance Examination and therefore don't have much time to learn various English materials after class, nor are they willing to spend time searching for other materials. Second, high school English teachers tend to focus solely on the textbooks. For these reasons, the high school English textbooks often become the primary, if not the only, input material for high school students.

Given Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the crucial role of input materials in language learning, it is clear that high school English textbooks, as these input materials, are of great importance in high school students' language learning process.

4. The Current Situation of the Treatment of High School English Textbooks in High School English Teaching of China

In this chapter, we will analyze the current situations of high school English textbooks from the perspective of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that input materials should be ensured to be rich, interesting, and comprehensible.

4.1. The Notion of "Regarding Textbooks as the Center" is Prevalent

In the Input Hypothesis, Krashen supports that enough input is of great importance in language acquisition. From the perspective of ensuring the abundance of input, we can see that the high school English classes in China cannot provide students with abundant input materials, because high school English teachers are always textbooks-oriented. And this kind of textbooks-oriented phenomenon is embodied in the following aspects.

First, high school English teachers typically overlook the design of elective courses, which leads to a lack of material input breadth. The general high school English curriculum standard outlines requirements for the content of three course types: compulsory courses, selective compulsory courses, and elective courses, from various aspects including text types and language knowledge [1]. However, in practice, high school English classes seldom offer elective courses, as teachers primarily teach based on the prescribed textbooks—namely, the compulsory and selective compulsory textbooks.

Secondly, the textbooks-oriented approach of high school English teachers results in a neglect of and a lack of breadth in high school English classes. The College Entrance Examination has a long history in China, and the entire society attaches great importance to it. Consequently, there inevitably exists a phenomenon of test-centeredness. Many high school English teachers have gradually developed a test-oriented mindset, causing them to excessively focus on textbooks. Many teachers seldom incorporate additional materials into their English classes; some even neglect the teaching of selective high school English books. They selectively teach only what they deem necessary. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, excessive attention is paid to high school English textbooks due to the CEE, leading many English teachers to seldom consider other materials besides textbooks. This, in turn, creates a situation where there is insufficient richness in the input.

4.2. Rigid and Inflexible High School English Textbooks Fail to Comply with the 'I+1' Principle for All Students' Language Learning

Firstly, high school English textbooks are generally designed for almost all students. They can hardly consider all students' real language competence. Some knowledge is too difficult and some is too easy, so that the "i+1" principle cannot be well met. Secondly, there are several versions of high school English textbooks. Different regions choose different versions of the textbooks according to the overall level of high school students in their respective regions. But this may ignore some students' real need for input materials. Finally, high schools are implementing the class teaching system. Therefore, the presentation of the high school textbooks cannot cater to all students' needs. For some high school students, when a high school English teacher is presenting the textbooks, the content may be at the level of "I+1"; while for other students, it may be at the level of "I-1". However, under the conditions of the real teaching environment, it is difficult for high school English teachers to design the presentation of the textbooks differently. And treating the high school textbooks flexibly is also a big challenge for high school teachers.

In conclusion, implementing the "I+1" principle promoted in Krashen's Input Hypothesis when dealing with high school English textbooks remains a challenge. And this means making the textbooks comprehensible for all high school students is almost impossible.

4.3. The Presentation of High School Textbooks Lacks a Sense of Fun

Due to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, making the input materials interesting is of great importance in helping language learners acquire language. And from this perspective, we can see that there is a lack of fun in dealing with the instruction of high school textbooks. This phenomenon is mainly expressed in the following aspects.

Firstly, high school English teachers always teach from textbooks. They usually teach the textbooks strictly according to their design and seldom change the order or add more materials to enliven the English classes, so that the teaching of high school English books lacks fun. Secondly, the language used by high school English teachers to teach textbooks is not vivid enough. They usually teach the textbooks using a flat tone, and their descriptions of the textbooks lack vividness, which may lead to the phenomenon of "echoing what the books say". However, according to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the high school textbooks, as the main materials, are supposed to be comprehensible, interesting, colorful, and at an appropriate level of difficulty for all students. From this perspective, high school English teachers are still having problems in dealing with the textbooks.

5. Analysis of the Reasons

Based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, we have analyzed the current practices surrounding the use of high school English textbooks in the preceding section. The reasons for these issues stem primarily from the following aspects.

First, high school English teachers tend to focus excessively on the College Entrance Examination, teaching primarily to meet its requirements. This approach can result in a negative washback effect from the examination.

Second, high school English teachers still lack the ability to teach the textbooks flexibly. This deficiency in capability encompasses not only their inability to creatively design lessons based on the textbooks but also their lack of proficiency in using vivid language to describe and engage students with the material.

6. The Enlightenment Provided by Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Addressing Chinese High School English Textbooks

Given the current situation regarding the treatment of high school English textbooks as mentioned above, there are several issues that English teachers encounter when dealing with textbook instruction. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, these issues contribute to a lack of richness, comprehensibility, and fun in the input materials. In the following, we will provide some suggestions to address these current issues with high school English textbooks.

6.1. Enhancing the High School English Teachers' Theoretical Knowledge Training in Second Language Learning

Helping high school English students to master some theoretical knowledge in second language acquisition is significant for high school English teachers to change their attitudes towards the materials. And this paper is written based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, so we will use Krashen's Input Hypothesis as an example. For instance, we can observe that, nowadays, few high school English teachers are aware of Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes input, but the types of input are not specific. If they are trained to learn about this kind of theory, they may change their perceptions about high school English textbooks, which means they may regard the textbooks as one of the input materials rather than seeing them as the bible to pass an examination. The perception of high school English teachers plays an important role in their English instruction, and changing the traditional concept of high school English textbooks is the first step towards making the high school English textbooks more dynamic and engaging.

6.2. Enhancing the Professional Training of High School English Teachers to Align with the New High School English Curriculum Standards

Jia believes that the implementation suggestions of the New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools are related to Krashen's Input Hypothesis[4]. For example, in the teaching recommendations, the New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (the version issued in 2017 and revised in 2020) propose that high school English teachers should properly set up compulsory, selective compulsory courses, and elective courses, and they emphasize the importance of thematic meaning, among other things[1]. In the section on teaching suggestions, the New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools offer many useful recommendations, and these suggestions are highly related to ensuring the interest, comprehensibility, and richness of the treatment of high school textbooks. So we can see the strong connection between the New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools and Krashen's Input Hypothesis. For high school English teachers, being familiar with the New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools is significant. It can serve as a

scientific guide for English teachers in handling high school English textbooks. The New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools are a scientific guide not only for directing teachers on how to teach students to pass the College Entrance Examination but also for guiding high school English teachers in nurturing high school students into individuals with key competencies. The New English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools can be a valuable tool for high school English teachers to address textbook issues.

The trainings we have suggested above can change high school English teachers' ideas about the high school English books. In other words, these trainings can help high school English teachers realize how important textbooks can be in the English teaching of high school students.

6.3. Taking Various Actions to Deal with the High School Textbooks

According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the richness, comprehensibility, and sense of fun of the input materials play a key role in learners' language learning. And nowadays, there is a lack of such traits in the treatment of high school English textbooks. Therefore, high school English teachers are supposed to take various actions in their actual teaching classes. And here are some specific suggestions.

6.3.1. Collecting Additional Relevant Materials to Enrich the Teaching of High School English Textbooks

Sometimes, the texts and discourses in the textbooks are limited. So, in order to meet the richness of students' input needs, high school English teachers have to prepare more materials to compensate for the limitations of the textbooks. Taking Unit 2 of the compulsory textbook 2 published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as an example, it introduces some Chinese festivals to showcase Chinese culture. For instance, the Lantern Festival and the Spring Festival are used to introduce these two traditional Chinese festivals and improve students' cultural awareness. However, introducing just these two festivals is not enough for high school students to gain a comprehensive understanding of Chinese festivals. As we all know, there are many other famous festivals in China, so this reminds us that teachers should add more festivals to enhance students' understanding of Chinese culture. Similarly, the introduction of western festivals is also limited. Therefore, teachers can discuss western festivals as well. Furthermore, teachers can design an activity to compare and contrast festivals between China and the West. When it comes to enriching the textbooks, supplementary materials can be sourced from various ways, such as magazines, newspapers, or websites. The form of these materials can also be presented in various ways. In conclusion, English teachers should not only enrich the content of high school English textbooks but also diversify the form of the textbooks.

6.3.2. Designing the Teaching of High School Textbooks to Be Appropriately Challenging and Allowing Students to Raise Doubts to Ensure Comprehensibility

Many high school teachers tend to design textbook lessons in a complex manner because they believe it will improve their students, often only considering the average student's competence. For instance, when teaching the passage "Time for a Change", there are many grammatical points, such as the present perfect tense. When the English teacher discusses the phrase "have eaten", they simply state, "It is a usage of the present perfect tense." This exemplifies an improper lesson design as it overlooks the fact that the present perfect tense may be beyond some students' actual competence. Therefore, the teacher would be better off revisiting the present perfect tense and then allocating time for students to ask questions, thus catering to the needs of every student.

So, when high school English teachers are preparing their lessons, they should ensure that their design caters to the "i+1" principle for all students. Including all students in the class does not necessitate making the content of the textbook lessons overly easy, as this would disregard the needs of some advanced students. Advanced students have their own "i+1" needs. Hence, high

school English teachers should approach the high school English textbooks holistically, and giving students opportunities to ask questions is crucial.

6.3.3. Learning More Methodologies and Taking More Actions to Engage with the Materials in the High School English Textbooks so that Teaching with These Textbooks Becomes More Interesting

High school English teachers should acquaint themselves with a broader range of methodologies for teaching textbooks. Nowadays, online resources facilitate access to such knowledge. Furthermore, it is highly beneficial for frontline high school English teachers to delve into a variety of articles and research papers focusing on strategies and techniques for enhancing English language instruction. They can then apply these insights to their approach to teaching high school English textbooks. For instance, Cui's paper titled 'Project-based Learning Practice of Primary School English Grammar Teaching Based on Text Reconstruction' [5] offers valuable insights. Upon reading this paper, high school English teachers can learn about text reconstruction and the project-based learning method. Text reconstruction, a popular approach nowadays, involves manipulating the given texts through various means such as addition, editing, or revision. The project-based learning method, on the other hand, centers on learner-driven activity design. Both methods offer opportunities for injecting vitality into textbooks, thereby transforming the teaching of potentially tedious high school English textbooks into an engaging and interesting experience. Thus, lifelong learning is crucial for high school English teachers, as acquiring and applying additional methodologies from diverse sources can enrich the content and presentation of textbooks.

7. Conclusion

Although numerous ideas, approaches, and methodologies have been formulated to direct English language instruction, a myriad of challenges persist within actual high school English classrooms in China. Specifically, in the domain of managing high school English textbooks, several issues arise. For instance, high school English educators frequently demonstrate a textbook-centric approach, wherein their utilization of textbooks fails to consistently accommodate the diverse needs of students and often lacks engaging pedagogical elements. Nevertheless, the adept management of high school English textbooks is of paramount significance, as these textbooks constitute vital input resources for secondary school learners. Krashen, a preeminent linguist on the global stage, posits the Input Hypothesis, which consistently offers a theoretical framework for analyzing the shortcomings in the handling of high school textbooks. Consequently, drawing upon Krashen's Input Hypothesis, we can systematically derive insights and recommendations aimed at assisting frontline high school English teachers in effectively managing these textbooks.

References

- [1] Ministry of Education. General High School English Curriculum Standards (edited in 2017, revised in 2020). People's Education Press, 2020.
- [2] Wang Lifei: *Introducing Second Language Acquisition* (Higher Education Press, China, 2009).
- [3] Li Bolin: A Review of Krashen's "Input Hypothesis". *Overseas English*, 2021(12), 103-104.
- [4] Jia Xue: The Correspondence between Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory and China's New English Curriculum Standards. *Exam Weekly*, 2015(75), 94-94.
- [5] Cui Jingmei. Project-based Learning Practice of Grammar Teaching in Primary School English Based on Text Reconstruction [J]. *Education Vision*, 2021(21), 39-42.
- [6] Chen Lin, Editor in Chief: *High School English Textbook Volume II*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, June 2019 (reprinted in December 2020).