

An Evaluation of the *Senior High School Students' English Book 1* Published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press

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Abstract

The evaluation of a textbook includes the evaluation and analysis of the curriculum design and the arrangement of the textbook contents, material resources, activity design, and exercise composition. Senior High School Students' English Book 1 Published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press is the current textbook for all high schools in Sichuan – one of the western provinces of China. The success of the design of this book produces the success of the English teaching and learning in Sichuan and some other provinces in China. The evaluation of this book will help teachers who use it to make a deeper understanding of the book and lead them to think critically and creatively, thus will empower them the ability to make some supplements for it when necessary.

Key words: evaluation; *Students' English Book 1*; textbook

1. Introduction

Effective teaching and learning can happen when well-designed textbooks are made appropriate use of with awesome extra instructional materials. The book published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2010 for the first year students in senior high school is used in many high schools of Sichuan, China. The organization and the arrangement of this book have a giant influence on the development of the current English education in Sichuan, China. People there are looking forward to guaranteeing the children's great achievements in the subject of English learning. However, most of the parents in China who want to evaluate their children's achievements in English learning tend to focus on the children's final scores of each school term, especially the scores of high school or college entrance examination, which are the symbols of

the enrollment of a better high school or a better college. Therefore, the role of the high school textbook is quite essential for almost all Chinese families. While learning a foreign language, the authentic materials are needed all the time (Richards J. C., 2001). The exposure to the authentic language materials is a standard for English listening instructions. It is widely believed that, “No authentic input leads to not any local-like output.”(Slavin R, 2001)

2. The Principles of an Appropriate Textbook

Textbook are part of plenty of instructional materials in learning and teaching a second or a foreign language. They play a lot of significant roles in language teaching and learning. They provide useful instructional materials, practical exercises and some instructional hints for classroom teachers and language teaching researchers. A textbook without hundreds of times of error-correction and revision will be a waste.

The Principles of an Appropriate Textbook

2.1 The Role of Instructional Materials

As was discussed by Cunningsworth(1995) and Dudley-Evans (1998) that teaching materials play many significant roles in language teaching and learning. They are the resources of both written and spoken materials. They are the providers of the classroom instructional activities. They are, sometimes, the references for learners when learning new words, new pronunciation and new grammar. They are the critical and creative ideas motivators and stimulators while composing a classroom role-play or finishing an indoor activity. No matter what shape they are in, what size they are, where they are published, the instructional materials are seen as the most powerful support in the course of learning and teaching a foreign or a second language.

It has been in a fierce debate that whether authentic or created materials could be chosen as instructional resources in a foreign or second language teaching. Authentic materials have positive effects on language learners' motivation(Phillips, 1978). The reasons are that they offer authentic and the most local-like cultural message to the material users, and provide them the exposure to the real use of the target language instead of the man-made or artificial passages created by the textbook writers(Richards J. C., 2001). However, commenters on authentic materials hold the opinion that created materials are quite easier for teachers to understand than the authentic ones. Teachers with authentic materials in hands may spend more time on the comprehension of the text itself rather than on the teaching of the meanings or the methods. Furthermore, created materials are designed for the instruction of some specific language items, and have been expected to make students' understanding of those items happen. Therefore, educators in current occasions tend to use both authentic materials and created ones for pedagogical purposes.

2.2 The Principles of an Appropriate Textbook

Tomlinson (1998) advocates that good language teaching materials and textbooks should have the following elements and principles. Teaching materials and resources in the book should achieve impact and should bring ease to the language learners. Students who use these teaching materials will be motivated and more confident. The resources inside the teaching materials of the textbook should be relevant to students' daily life and will be used by them someday. Thus the teaching materials in the book should be useful for the

learners. Materials should be arranged with the requirements of learners' meta-cognitions, which will assist the learners to monitor and invest their study. Learners will get the exposure to the authentic use of the target language by using the textbook. The instructional materials should be selected and organized under the condition of authenticity. Materials in a textbook should respect the learners' diversity in learning methods and styles. Materials should not be too hard to finish, but are expected to give students access to success and achievements.

2.3 How to Evaluate a Textbook in Language Teaching and Learning

Materials inside the book should meet learners' needs. The design and composition of both long-term teaching goals and short-term instructional objectives should follow the currently national curriculum. Materials in the textbook should be useful for learners at present or someday in the long run. Things learners learn from the textbook can be used in their life in the future. The function of the textbook is to facilitate learners' learning processes rather than provide so-called "standard" or "target" in language learning (Cunningsworth, 1995).

3. The Evaluation of the Senior High School Students' English Book 1

The Senior High School Students' English Book 1 is a book published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2010 for the first year students in senior high schools. The evaluation of the book will provide English teachers and learners for clearer understandings of the current instructional materials in China, and assist foreign language researchers in China to create new textbooks which are more useful and more meaningful for both teachers and learners, furthermore, facilitate the English teaching and learning in China. The evaluation process will begin with the introduction of the teaching aims and approaches of the book, followed by the formal design and the organization of the instructional materials selected in the book. Then it comes to the language contents, skills and topics arranged in the book. Methodology inserted into the book will also be discussed before the judgements on the guidance for teachers. The last part will focus on the practical considerations of it. All those chain elements of textbook evaluation are advocated by Cunningsworth (1995). Taking Module Two (The New Teachers) as an example, the following analyses about the textbook will be started.

3.1. Teaching Aims and Approaches

The first thing to be found is that whether the aims of the textbook correspond with the educational goals of the government and with the personal needs of the students who will use it. The teaching aims of *the Senior High School Students' English Book* are written and edited based on ideas in the new national English curriculum of China (MOE, 2003). It claims that there are 11 modules in high school's English course teaching. Under the study of the first five textbooks, students will be able to achieve the standard on the seventh level set by the new national English curriculum (2003). After finishing the study of book six to the eighth textbook, students will be able to reach the integrated English ability on the eighth level of the national curriculum. The educational goal of the new national English curriculum (2003) is the overall development of the students of high schools. Thus the all the presentation of the teaching resources and the teaching procedures are linked to learner-centered approach (Wang, 2000). The textbook aims education for

all students and emphasizes the significance of the teaching quality rather than the speed or the quantity. The mainly designed purpose of the English curriculum is to help students construct their overall language ability, which is made of by five parts of sub-abilities - learning ability, language skills, linguistic ability or language ability, cultural ability and the affective ability. All those abilities are put together in the following figure.

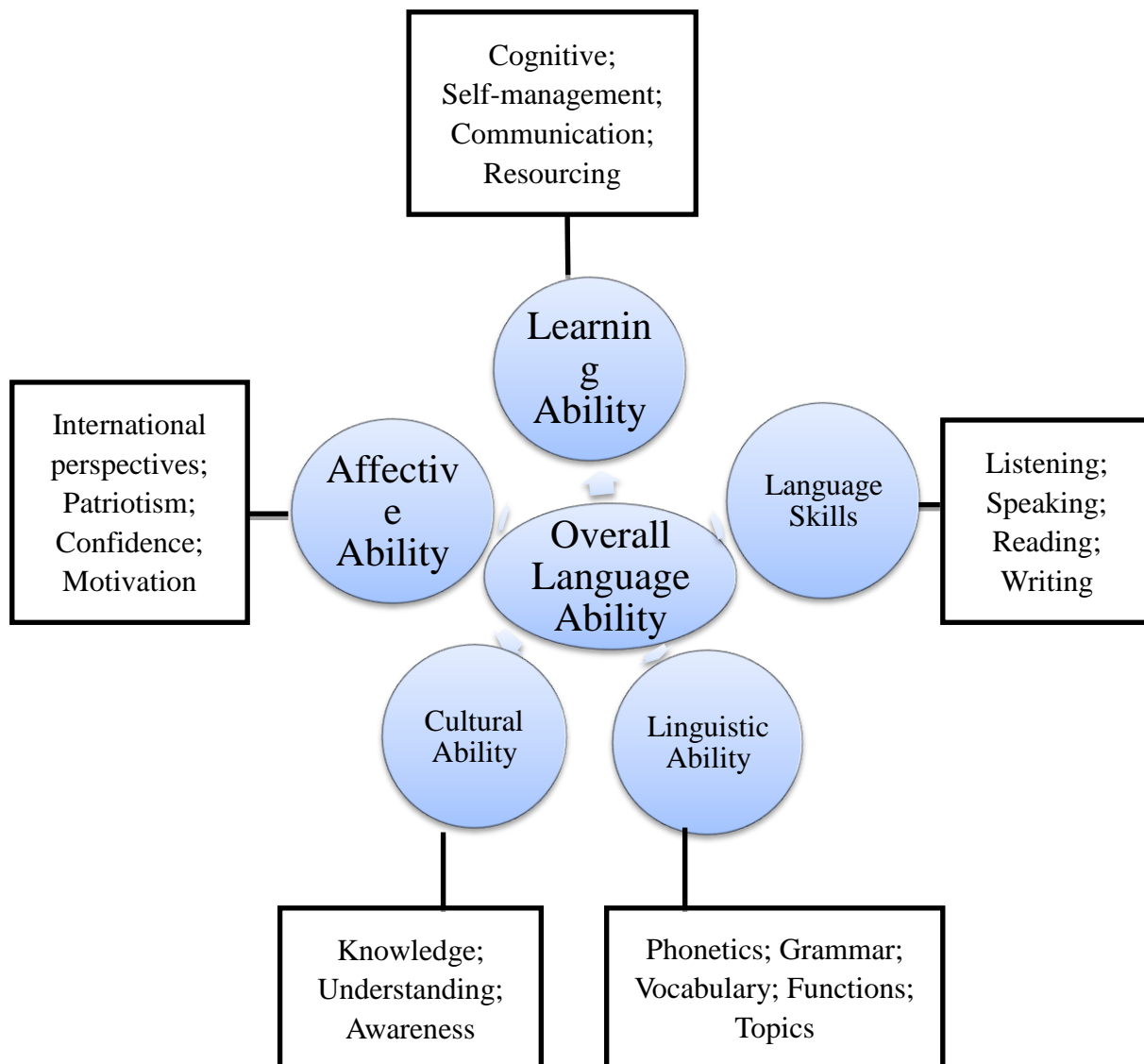


Figure 3.1 Framework of objectives in the new National English Curriculum (MOE, 2003)

3.2. The Design and the Organization of the Teaching Materials

Taking Module Two as an example, all of the materials are selected based on the same topic: My New Teachers, presenting the descriptions about the new teachers in a totally new place – the senior high school. In order to finish the grammar objective – making students understand verbs followed by *-ing*, this module is divided into 6 parts, with each focusing on one or two particular abilities. As the tasks were parted, it would be much easier for teachers to finish those goals one by one instead of trying to achieve them altogether at the same time.

The purposes of the first part are to present the topic of this module and to give the overall task of this module. In Module Two, the topic is “My New Teachers”, and the task of this module is “setting criteria for a good teacher”. Putting the topic and the task at the beginning of a module would assist the students to preview the whole module, and remind the teachers of the overall topic and the task. Thus while having classes, teachers would try their best to make the whole class focus on the central topic.

The second part is about grammar and functions. The instructions of these two tasks are finished by using exercises with different difficulty levels. With the finishing of the exercises, the grammar points can be understood and used by students. In the part of grammar, there are more closed questions and exercises, while there are more open questions in the function part. The mixture of open-ended questions and closed questions can improve both students’ logical and creative thinking. While talking about their preferences in function part, students can express their different ideas and thoughts, thus they can be critical thinkers in that way.

The third part is about skills. This part is not an isolated part as other parts but inserted into and mixed with other parts. For example, the reading skill is trained in the topic introducing part; the listening skill is practiced in the topic introducing and grammar exercising parts; the speaking skill is practiced in the function settings to practice students’ critical thinking; the pronunciation skill is practiced in every part of this module; and the writing skill is trained after Every-day English part. By inserting skills into these parts, it will be more possible and easier for students to get unconscious acquisition while learning in classrooms. Unconscious knowledge is of better significance than conscious knowledge (Wang, 2000).

Part four is about culture and learning to learn. In Module Two, the culture corner introduces the school differences in different countries, trying to expand students’ horizons and thinking styles. In cultural corner, there are not so many exercises as in grammar part. Thus it gives students the chance to enjoy the differences of cultures without any mental pressure. This is a way of finding for ease after the busy learning of all the topics previously.

Part five is the instruction and learning of vocabulary and every-day English. In the vocabulary part, words and phrases learned in the first part or linked to the topic will be seen in some exercises to check whether they are understood or can be used appropriately by students. Every-day English is a good way to inform students of the current oral information used in English spoken countries. Therefore, students will not only be able to read and write in English, but also listen, understand and speak in English about the similar topics as they have learned.

The last part is the work-book, which is put at the end of the book with all the same part of each module together before the vocabulary lists and the appendixes. Editors of the textbook might think that putting the work-book in the end could help the students to finish the review and reflection of the knowledge learned in the module before, but it might be possible for teachers to forget to give instructions or guidance to this part because of the page-distance between them.

3.3. Language Contents

Most of the materials prepared in this textbook are created materials, which have the ability and the mission of instructions. In Module Two, for example, the passage of the topic *My New Teachers* is written by educators for instructional purposes. With the presentation of the passage, a series of exercises are designed

based on the passage. Those materials like the passage *My New Teachers* are particularly designed and composed for students at the right ages. They are suitable for students to learn a foreign language. And they look much easier than authentic materials – easier for teachers to teach and prepare for exam-design, and easier for students to understand and prepare for the exam-taking (Richards J. C., 2001). However, the nature for learning a language is to acquire its authentic and genuine use. More authentic materials should be selected as the instructional resources.

In Module Two there are also some authentic materials, such as the passage in cultural corner: *Different Countries, Different Schools*. Because the authentic materials are arranged at the end of the module, students and teachers may not pay enough attention to them while dealing with the tasks of the whole module. Authentic materials bring authentic cultural information to students, thus will make them more motivated and interested in. They provide students exposure to real language and give them the access to the real language world (Richards J. C., 2001). More authentic materials should be selected as tasks in textbooks and should be arranged on some front pages.

3.4. Skills

The five skills trained in English learning and teaching are all considered by the book writers. Listening and speaking are always mixed with each other in this book. Reading is the main part for each module. There is also one exercise for writing. Pronunciation is a mainly considered in the reading part, and will be study again at the last of a module to check students' mistake-correction.

3.5. Topics

All the topics in this textbook are designed based on students' daily life. They are closely linked to each other, such as the first three topics: *My First Day at Senior High*, *My New Teachers* and *My First Ride on a Train*.

3.6. Methodology

Teaching and learning methods in this book are not clearly pointed out for teachers or students. Only in that way, can teachers come up with new, practical and fashionable teaching methods to give instructions, while students figure out exercises and acquire difficult knowledge with diversified learning ways. However, that are only the occasions of those teachers who love teaching and students who love learning. For other teachers, they might use the only dull and rigid teaching method in all modules and for all students, while the students do not like to learn English at all, or finish the exercises on the book reluctantly.

3.7. Guidance for Teachers

There is not enough guidance for teachers in this book mainly because the handbook for teachers' use is prepared by the editors. However, some teachers would find it inconvenient to look up an extra textbook, so they firmly insist that the guidance about the teaching methods be inserted into the textbook. It is believed guidance arranged in that way would be more convenient.

3.8. Practical Considerations

The book is been sold at the price of 9.55 yuan, which is not an expensive deal for most Chinese families. It is on the shelf of each local official bookstore, thus the convenience can be gurranteed. In total, this book is practical for most Chinese families.

4. Conclusion

It might be possible for teachers to forget to give instructions or guidance to the work-book part on the ending pages of the book because of the page-distance between them. Therefore, the advice is that the work-book part can be put right beside the main part of each module rather than at the end of the book. Then students and teachers can handle it immediately after the learning of the main parts.

For the reason that most of the reading and listening materials are created ones, more authentic materials should be selected as texts or tasks in the textbook and should be arranged on some front pages

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