

Evaluation and adaptation of coursebook assignment



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Evaluation and Adaptation of Coursebook for EFL Senior High School

Students: External and Internal Coursebook Evaluation 1. Introduction

Language teaching material plays an important role in EFL classroom. With the rapid development and competitiveness of materials publishers, ' the wealth of published material for English Language Teaching (ELT) available on the market makes selecting the right coursebook a challenging task'(Cunningsworth, 1995, p5).

However, there is no coursebook can be absolutely ideal for a particular group of learners (Cunningsworth, 1995); evaluation and selection of suitable material would be essential and important issues for language teachers. Each group of learners has its own needs and language teachers should choose suitable materials that best fit the learners' needs in terms of the purpose of the course, learners' language proficiency, learners' learning styles and the aim of the materials. Allwright (1981, p5) also suggests that the role of materials should switch from ' teaching material' to ' learning material'.

David (2006) conducts a class-specific questionnaire survey to identify learners' needs so as to " create in learners a level of interests involvement and investment that would not be possible to achieve with textbook-driven courses (p9)". In this view, when evaluating materials, more emphasis needs to be put on the learners to satisfy their needs and interests. This paper will present ways of material evaluation based on previous researches. Then, a coursebook, ' Lung Teng English Reader for Senior High School: Volume I' (Lin S. & Tian, W.

S. , 2005) will be evaluated in terms of the ' external' and ' internal' approach to material evaluation. (McDonough and Shaw, 1993). In addition, two tasks from this coursebook will be adapted to be more appropriate for the teaching context that I work in. Finally, I would like to provide teacher's notes for these two adapted tasks. While making a retrospective assessment of this coursebook, the paper aims to gain insight into the coursebook development in the specific EFL pedagogical context. 2. Literature reviews on material evaluation

Materials evaluation is a huge research area in language teaching profession. (Cunningsworth: 1995, Tomlinson: 1998, McGrath: 2002, Graves: 2003). This area will be in connection with many different issues in language teaching, for example, the course design, curriculum development, or school management. For language teachers, it is time consuming to design or write their teaching materials specifically for their learners (Cunningsworth, 1984). Thus, a mixture of using a coursebook and self-made materials would be a possible solution.

However, choosing a suitable coursebook for the specific group of learners is not an easy task. Cunningsworth (1995) has claimed four essential guidelines that coursebooks should follow in order to have a better interaction with learners. First, they need to correspond to learners' need. Second, they should reflect the uses which learners will make of the language. Third, they ought to facilitate the learning processes without dogmatically imposing a rigid method. Fourth, they need to have a clear role as a support for learning.

Language teachers should know how to evaluate and adapt the materials for their learners. There are no two evaluations can be the same in that ' the needs, objectives, backgrounds and preferred styles of the participants will different form context to context' (Tomlinson 2003, p15). He claims that there are three types of evaluation: (1) pre-use evaluation which involves the predication of what potential value will bring to the learners; (2) whilst-use evaluation involves the measurement of the value of the materials while using the coursebook.

This type of evaluation is more objective than the first type in that we can actually know how this coursebook affect the learners from their feedbacks and comments; (3) Post-evaluation is the last stage and the most valuable type of evaluation " as it can measure the actual effects of the materials on the learners', either their short term effects regarding to motivation, impact, or instant learning etc. or their long term effect as regards durable learning and application. (ibid, p23-25)

McGrath (2002) cites from Cunningsworth (1979, p31), there are no good or bad materials but materials which effective in helping students reach particular goals in specific situations. The pre-designed course materials, though effective in some contexts, may inappropriate in others. This raises the issue of text and learner authenticity (Lee, 1995), which advocates that the authenticity can only be achieved when there is an agreement between the material writer's intention and the learner's interpretation (Widdowson, 1980).

Lee (1995) conducts a small-scale research in which particular course materials are prepared to EAP students based on the feedback from a need analysis questionnaire. However, it is not feasible for the teachers who are tightly constrained in the coursebook selection to develop their own materials, like the ESL context where I worked in. Then, evaluating the given materials according to the certain teaching context and adapt these materials in the light of the information gained from evaluation become crucial for the teacher in this context to implement the course materials in an effective way.

Littlejohn (1998, p205) sketches a coursebook evaluation framework which might be useful for language teachers (See Appendix 1). This systematical approach to material evaluation starts at the analysis of the teaching context and the learners, then evaluation the appropriateness of the design, and finally makes decision to adapt the materials to the teaching context. The model for materials evaluation can be divided into two stages: external and internal evaluation. McDonough & Shaw, 1993) External evaluation is to gain an overview of organization and gives teachers a general introduction to the material. The advantages of the materials can be found in the introduction and content page since valuable descriptions of materials are explicitly listed in the light of different aspects. However, sometimes the publishers may exaggerate the effectiveness and usefulness of their books for commercial purposes. A more detail internal evaluation would be needed to see whether the materials in accordance to what the publishers have been stated.

This two stages of evaluation are defined by Cunningsworth (1995, p1-2) as the 'impressionistic overview' and 'in-depth evaluation' which sharing the similar ideas with McDonough & Shaw's definitions. Ellis (1997) also distinguished two types of materials evaluation: a "predictive evaluation" and a "retrospective evaluation". The former aims to determine what materials to use; however, the latter was designed to examine the practicality of the materials that have been used with a more objective view.

Ellis (1998) further indicates two dimensions of the retrospective evaluation, namely, a macro-level and a micro-level evaluation. According to Ellis (ibid: 218), a "macro-evaluation" involves an overall assessment "carried out for accountability and developmental purposes by collecting information relating to various administrative and curricular aspects of the programme" (p. 218); a micro-evaluation deals with "specific aspect of the curriculum or the administration of the programme" (p219). The questionnaires or checklists of materials evaluation developed by researchers show their different considerations.

Shih (2000) suggested that a materials evaluation scheme should comprise seven categories: (1) general features (e. g. , aims/goals, methods, or topic selection), (2) activities for language components (e. g. , pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar), (3) activities for language skills (e. g. , listening, speaking, reading, writing, or integrated activities), (4) layout and design, (5) teachers' manual/guide, (6) students' workbook, and (7) other related teaching/learning aids (e. g. , CDs, tapes, and flash card).

Besides Shih, many ELT researchers in Taiwan have also generated practical frameworks for local teachers and administrator to apply. Based on her needs survey for high school students and on the EFL pedagogy, Su (1998) generates eight components of materials evaluation (generality, listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar and layout). Huang (1999) also suggests ten criteria for senior high school textbook selection, including content, dialogue, vocabulary and idioms, grammar, activities, workbooks, teacher's manual layout and price, supplementary materials, and the whole set of materials.

Although a numbers of suggestions have been generated, yet no one is certain about the criteria and constraints that should actually be operative in English Language Teaching contexts (Sheldon, 1988). Since checklists intended as ' an instrument, or a useful tool for evaluating teaching material' (Cunningsworth 1984, p74) in that it bears systematicity, efficiency, convenience and explicitness (McGrath, 2002, p27), the whole evaluation process in this paper will mainly base on the checklist by McDonough & Shaw (1995) and the one by Cunningsworth (1995). . Coursebook evaluation

3. 1Introduction of the teaching context

In Taiwan, the textbook selection policy has recently undergone a tremendous reform. School textbooks around the country were published by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT) before 1999 (Shen & Chou, 2003). With the development of the variety of teaching materials and the liberalization of the curriculum, the Ministry of Education (MOE) have allowed all schools to use the textbooks from the private publishers.

Since then, the production of senior high school textbooks has been completely authorized to qualified textbook publishers and Government-published textbooks are not the only choices for teachers and schools. Moreover, the purposes of learning English for most high school students are not merely for the entrance college examination but for some personal goals or interests. Therefore, the publishers need to design and the teachers need to know how to choose and adapt the most suitable textbook for their students.

The textbook I would like to evaluate, Lung Teng English Reader for Senior High School: Volume I, is specifically designed for the first year students in senior high school in Taiwan. Generally, most first-year senior high school students in Taiwan are intermediate learners who have studied English for at least 3 years in junior high school. However, some of them started to learn English when they were in the elementary school. There are five hours English classes in a week and usually all students are assigned certain amount of homework after each class.

For some students, they go to after-class English language institution to learn English more than other classmates. These students sometimes show their better performances than their classmates. Selecting and preparing language materials for this mixed-level class could be a challenge job for language teacher. Therefore, in planning the lesson, a language teacher needs to know his/her learners' language proficiency in order to adapt materials that meet all the learners' needs.

3. 2 External evaluation of the coursebook

In this section this coursebook will be examined by the external evaluation approach. A checklist, based on McDonough & Shaw (1995) and Cunningsworth(1995), will be provided to show how this coursebook meets these criteria. Criteria Yes/No Does the content have a clear organization? Y Do the aims of the coursebook correspond closely with the aims of the teaching programme and with the needs of the learners? Y Does the coursebook cover adequate language knowledge like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation? Y Is the language presented and organized into teachable unit lesson?

N Is the vocabulary list included? Y Does it include audio or video material and resultant cost? Y Does this extra material essentially in order to use the textbook successfully? Y Does it provide useful tests for these particular learners? N Is a teacher's book in print and locally available? Y Is there adequate recycling and revision? Y Is the layout and presentation clear? Y Is there sufficient place provided for learners to take note in the coursebook? N Is there variety in layout? Y Is there enough illustration? Y Does the font of word large and clear enough?

Y Table 1. Checklist for external evaluation. Overall comment for the external evaluation: First of all, in the first few pages, this coursebook provides some clear aim and a good introduction of this book. The point 3 in page i provide four main beliefs of this book: they are (1) learner-centered, (2) the emphasis of the importance of what have learned and what will be learned, (3) the focus on the communication and the functions of language, and (4) the consideration of the needs and interests of senior high school students.

In page v and vi of this coursebook provide a general overview of the content of this book which consists of six main topic areas: communication (Lesson 1-2), natural environment (Lesson 3-4), sport and health (Lesson 5-6), personal relationship (Lesson 7-8), Literature (Lesson 9-10), and famous people (Lesson 11-12). Topic choice in worldwide textbooks may range from the field of world affairs, medicine, technology, science, environment, sport, world culture, and social and family life to everyday topics.

The selection of topic is quite important since “ it is the most obvious way in which learners’ needs and interests can be taken into account” (McDonough and Shaw, 1993, p53). This textbook covers many different topics and language knowledge to meet the different learners’ interests. However, there seems to be the lack of topics relating to science and cultural issues. The layout of this book is very neat and clear with many colorful pictures and illustrations. Moreover, the size of words is large enough for students to read so that they will feel comfortable when reading.

The vocabulary list is provided after each reading passage with definition both in the first and target language and an example sentence was given for each vocabulary. Besides, there are some more new words in example sentences, which offer learners more opportunity to accumulate their vocabulary knowledge. However, there are not enough spaces for student to take notes. The general comment on the layout is positive. In terms of the extra materials, there are five useful appendixes (pp 216-242) in the final part of the book.

They are (1) spotlight on grammar, (2) forms of irregular verbs, (3) abbreviations, (4) vocabulary index, and (5) list of notations. These are very useful guides for students to refer to. There are also three pages of cardboard with vocabulary of each lesson. Students can cut them into many small vocabulary cards so that they can bring these cards if they want to memorize those words.

3. Internal evaluation of the coursebook

After generally evaluating this book, I would like to choose Lesson Two: I like Email (coursebook pp18-39) to take a closer look in terms of its design, language content, methodology and the text.

McGrath (2002, p43) suggests that most of the checklists have covered four points: design, language content, subject matter, and some other practical considerations including availability, durability and price. Therefore, an internal evaluation approach will be applied to examine how specific items are dealt with and how different aspects of language are dealt with in this unit. The analysis of the content will be presented as follows: The presentation of the skills in the materials:

Comment: Reading, listening, writing and speaking practices are provided, but they are not treated in an integrated way. A more integrated activity should be provided to enhance the possibility of learning the four skills of English. For example, a pre-reading discussion of personal experience about writing a mail, and writing email to friends or teacher can be implemented into the course activity. The grading and sequencing of the materials:

Comment: This is well-organized sequencing with pre-reading activity, reading passage and post-reading activity. Where reading/discourse skills are involved:

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Comment: It does not deal with the language use above the sentence level; however, it puts more emphasis on the grammar practice (pp32-37). Where listening skills are involved, are recording 'authentic' or 'artificial':

Comment: The recording in the listening task are not authentic from the real conversation. However, the designed-conversation might be easier for high school students to follow. Do speaking materials incorporate what we know about the nature of real interaction or are artificial dialogues offered instead?

Comment: It provides a natural way of real conversation.

The post-reading discussion topic is: Do you find it easier to talk about or write about personal matters? The topic is quite an issue for students to think about and which is relevant to their life experience. Is the material suitable for different learning styles? Comment: Yes, it provides different self-study materials in the appendix of the coursebook. Overall comment on the content of the Lesson Two: I like Email: This lesson starts with a picture with two students using computer. On the bottom of the page 18, two questions are provided for students to think about.

This activity is designed for a short discussion with other classmates to brainstorm some points which can be brought into the later reading activity. After the reading activity, some follow-up activities (p21) are given to test the learners' comprehension to the text. Part one: reading for the main idea aims to examine how well student understand the general understanding of the reading text. Part two: reading for the detail tests students' comprehension of the detail information in the reading text. Both of these activities can help students enhance the reading ability by using the strategies of skimming and scanning.

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Besides, three short answer questions and one extended question for discussion are provided to give students opportunity to practice speaking in the classroom. These post-reading tasks, in my view, can cover different level of learners. After the activities, some vocabulary explanations are given both in first and second language. There are also some post-reading activities which cover four skills for practice. They are conversation practice, listening comprehension, sentence patterns, pronunciation, collocations, optional activity and writing corner. However, these four skills are discretely treated.

An integrated activity would be helpful for learners to make them 'communicatively competent' and use language skills in conjunction (McDonough & Shaw, 1995, p173). Although, in this lesson, four skills training and practice are provided, it might not useful and practical for every learner in the classroom. Thus, language teacher needs to adopt and modify some activities according to the different level of learners. I would like to adapt two tasks in the next part and provide a teacher note with suggestions for language teacher in the final part of this paper

Adaptation of two tasks

Allwright (1981) argues that textbooks are not flexible to be used as teaching materials. Moreover, he also emphasizes that textbooks control learning and teaching. However, language teachers can adapt or produce his/her teaching materials for the learners to meet their needs. Block (1991, pp213-214) offers three reasons for adaptation and producing teacher-made materials. Firstly, materials should be contextualized and relevant to students' life experiences. Secondly, some reading texts in the materials are not updated.

This is not practical and easily gives wrong information for the learners.

Thirdly, the argument might be what Block (ibid) calls “ personal touch. ”

Students might appreciate if the teacher prepares something different from coursebook personally. In the next part, I would like to choose two tasks from the book and adapt them for the learners. 4. 1Task adaptation 1: Pre-reading activity (see p18 in the coursebook) The reading text starts with a pre-reading task to familiarize the students with the topic in response of the schema theory (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983).

According to schema theory, understanding a reading text is “ an interactive process between the reader’s background knowledge and the text” (ibid, p556). The ability enable to facilitate learning from the previous background knowledge. However, there is no clear instruction for this activity. A speaking activity will be suggested to integrate in this activity. The adapted task is presented as followed: Task 1: Pre-reading Activity INSTRUCTION: Find a partner and discuss the following two questions in ‘ English’. You need to prepare a five-minute presentation talking about your experience using computer. . Have you ever used a computer before? Did you like it? 2. Do you know what e-mail is? How do you feel about communicating by writing e-mail messages? Task 1: Pre-reading Activity Rational for adaptation: The adapted task enriches the variety of different activities in this unit. This can also balance the grammar activity and motivate learner to speak in the target language. In my teaching context, speaking practice is the least implemented activity in the classroom because too much emphasis put on the grammar practice and the limitation of teaching hours and the large group in class.

Thus, I would like to adapt this task with integration of speaking and presentation skills. It would be helpful to develop learners' think skills through the exchanging and expressing their ideas with others. . Teacher's notes: Aim: This task aims to draw upon learner's previous experience which will be an introductory to the latter reading passages. This will be activated through discussion and group brainstorming. Stage 1: To begin with the lesson, a picture will be showed to learners in relating to the topic of this unit (p18).

Teacher can talk about his/her experience using computer or e-mail and reinforce the importance of computer in this technological era. Stage 2: Delivery the task instruction and explain the instruction to learners. (Note: make sure they all understand what they should do) Stage 3: While the discussion is processing, teacher need to move around the classroom and check if anyone needs any language help. Listen to what they are discussing and give them any possible feedback or comments. (Note: in this stage, teacher should make sure that students are speaking in English) Stage 4: Choose some groups to present what they discussed. When they are giving presentations, teacher may take notes both their ideas and the common errors they make. (Note: Time control is important in this stage. The numbers of groups for presentation depend on how much time available.) Stage 5: Give comments on the presentation and point out the language errors they make during the presentation. Draw back the discussion to the topic and list ideas in preparation of the next reading text. (Note: some minor mistakes can be omitted if they did not cause any

misunderstandings.) . 2Task adaptation 2: E-mail writing activity: The <https://assignbuster.com/evaluation-and-adaptation-of-coursebook-assignment/>

second task I will adapt is the writing activity (p. 18 in the coursebook).

Writing e-mail is very common for the students. The task is authentic because it reflects on the real life experience. Lee (1995, p324) suggests that the authentic materials are “ not written for teaching purposes, but for a real-life communicative purpose... ” Therefore, I will design a task asking students to write a real e-mail to me. Task 2: Email your teacher Instruction: (1) You are asking to write an e-mail to your teacher (c. uk) talking about either (1) your difficulties in learning English or (2) any interesting thing that happened in your life. (2) The deadline of this assignment will be on 24 September, 2008. Note: If you have any difficulty accessing the internet, please let me know. An alternative task will be provided. Task 2: Email your teacher Rational for adaptation: For the practical consideration, it is applicable in that there are many free on-line mailboxes to be used such as Yahoo mail, Hotmail, Google mail as well as free mailboxes provided by some Internet companies.

For some students with difficulty accessing internet at home can be allowed to use school computer after class. This task can be a take-away task and set the deadline for the task to be sent to the teacher's mailbox. Moreover, it is authentic because they are writing real e-mail to a person they know. The teacher can not only know their language proficiency from their writings but also importantly, the answers either to the option one or to the option two. That gives the teacher more understandings about the learner and it might develop the relationship with students.

In my teaching experience, I found students like to experience different ways of learning and they prefer to do the teacher-made tasks which are more
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challenging and interesting. This task can meet learners' need to a certain extent. Teacher's notes: Stage 1: Firstly, go through the example e-mail either on page 29 or a real e-mail from teacher. Spend some time discussing the format of an email. This could be how to structure the layout of an email or how the formal letter can be different from an informal letter. Then, make a list on the board to compare these two types of mails.

You might collect the list from the whole class and then provide your own list. Stage 2: Then, deliver the task instruction to all the students and explain again what they should do and set a deadline for the task. For some students who cannot access the Internet, an alternative option might be given to them. You can ask those students to write a paper mail with the same email layout so as to help those students sort out their problems. It would be helpful to cooperate with the staff in the school computer center Stage 3: Once you receive the mail from the students, give feedback and comment on the mail they have sent to you.

The focus of the feedback would be on the language use, grammatical mistakes, or the content of the mail. 5Conclusion The commercial market of language teaching materials is very huge since learning a second language has been a trend worldwide. Many materials publishers are competing. These commercial-based materials are usually produced with many advertisements and through the promotion. Therefore, language teachers and educators have to be aware of what this information tells you when they are selecting materials for the learners. Another issue is whether these materials are suitable for your learners.

In most school, they are a group of people who select textbook for the next semester. These people might collect as much as information from teachers, students, parents, and even from the school administration to know the aim and objectives of the course so that they can decide which book is the best suitable for the learners. At the end of the semester, an after-use evaluation meeting is required to gather information from both language teachers and students the practicability of the coursebook as the considerations of selecting the coursebook for next semester.

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