



Analysis and Evaluation on the Use of *Contemporary College English: Intensive Reading 2 (Third Edition)*

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Abstract: Teaching materials are a bridge connecting teachers, students and knowledge, and they play an irreplaceable role in ensuring the quality of education and promoting the all-round development of students. Among all the courses in the basic stage of English majors, the Integrated English Courses occupies a large proportion in the English majors' curriculum. And the textbook for Integrated English 2, *Contemporary College English: Intensive Reading 2*, is widely used in colleges and universities in China. This study collected the data from questionnaire and interview to assess the *Contemporary College English Intensive Reading 2 (Third Edition)*, in order to gauge student perceptions of its components and identify the textbook's strengths, weaknesses, and usage challenges. The analysis indicates that while the textbook is largely effective in meeting educational goals and is appreciated for its content and organization, there are areas for improvement, particularly in the underuse of audio-visual resources and the need for differentiated support for students facing difficulties. To enhance the textbook, this study recommends the integration of AI in language learning, the use of interactive technologies, and the flipped classroom approach to foster a more dynamic and personalized learning experience. These adaptations aim to prepare English major students for modern challenges while maintaining the textbook's relevance and efficacy.

Keywords: *Contemporary College English: Intensive Reading 2*, Integrated English, English majors, evaluation

Introduction

Textbooks play a crucial role in the education system; they are the building blocks for knowledge transfer and skills development. As the core resources for teaching and learning, textbooks provide students with a systematic and structured learning framework that helps them to gradually build up their understanding and mastery of a particular subject. They not only cover the necessary theoretical knowledge, but also include practical applications and skills training, enabling students to consolidate and apply what they have learned in practice. The importance of textbooks is also reflected in their motivation for learning^[1]. Well-written textbooks can attract students with fascinating content and diverse teaching activities, increasing their interest and participation in learning. In addition, textbooks are an important basis for teachers' instructional design and implementation, providing them with clear teaching objectives and guidance, helping them to organize the classroom effectively, and assessing students' learning progress. In today's globalization, textbooks also carry cultural understanding and the expansion of international perspectives. They develop students' intercultural communication skills and global awareness by introducing knowledge from different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, with the development of educational technology, the form of teaching materials is also being innovated, and the wide application of digital teaching materials and online resources provides more possibilities for personalized learning and independent learning.

In China, where English is a foreign language, English teaching materials are an important source of input for students' English learning. Among all the courses in the basic stage of English majors, the Integrated English Courses occupies a large proportion in the English majors' curriculum. It runs through four semesters in the first and second years of the university and plays an important role in improving students' English proficiency and promoting their overall growth. It plays a pivotal role in improving students' English proficiency and promoting their overall growth^[2]. Integrated English Courses can help students to improve their language skills in a comprehensive way. As the main source of language input for the course, the teaching materials play a very important role in realizing the objectives of the course as stipulated in the syllabus. High-quality Integrated English Courses teaching materials could provide English majors with high-quality language input, help students improve their comprehensive language proficiency and humanistic and moral qualities, and help them to improve the quality of their teaching. Moreover, it also helps students to establish a correct outlook on life and the world, and to cultivate the ability of independent learning, autonomous learning and lifelong learning. This paper analyzes the newly published textbook, *Contemporary College English: Intensive Reading 2 (Third Edition)* (Yang Limin, Qiu Feng, Chen Juebin, 2022) (hereinafter referred to as Intensive Reading), which is more widely used and representative of the English majors in China's colleges and universities^[3].

Literature Review

Teaching materials research started earlier in foreign countries and has grown quite large since the 1970s and 1980s. Especially in the evaluation of teaching materials, the far-reaching theories of Cunningsworth, McDonough & Shaw, Breen & Candlin, etc. have appeared. A pioneering monograph in the study of foreign language teaching materials was



Alan Cunningsworth's 1984 book *Evaluating and Selecting EFL Teaching Materials*. This book discusses the principles of textbook evaluation, the selection, grading, presentation and practice of language items, the adaptation and updating of materials, and the development of language skills and communicative competence; at the same time, it discusses the selection and use of supporting materials such as audio-visual materials, teacher's books, and test materials. It is worth mentioning that the book also provides a very detailed checklist for the evaluation of teaching materials. And Breen and Candlin (1987) suggest that in the first stage the materials should be evaluated in terms of the needs of the learners. They suggest that the learner should always be kept in mind during the first stage of assessment and that both teachers and learners should be encouraged to participate actively in the whole assessment process during the second stage so that both parties can benefit. It can be seen that Breen and Candlin's assessment guide attaches great importance to the learner and reflects the learner-centered philosophy. In 1993, McDonough and Shaw wrote the book *Materials and Methods in ELT: A Teacher's Guide*. They proposed three methods of evaluating materials: external evaluation, internal evaluation and holistic evaluation. Furthermore, Cunningsworth (1995) proposed a list of eight dimensions for evaluating educational materials, which has been cited by many scholars. The eight dimensions are: objectives and approaches, design and organization, language contents, skills, topics, methodology, teacher's books, practical use, and the use of the materials, practical consideration^[4].

In contrast, there are fewer papers on the study of English textbook assessment by domestic scholars. Most of these articles are only empirical and subjective evaluations and comments on existing tutorials by textbook users. In addition, some scholars have introduced foreign textbook evaluation standards, for example, Qian Yuan (1995) introduced Hutchinson & Waters' Textbook Evaluation Checklist to the domestic foreign language community at an early stage^[5]. Since 2001, when the Ministry of Education issued a three-dimensional textbook construction program, there have been few research results on English teaching materials in China, and most of the existing studies have been conducted from the theoretical construction level, such as Zhuang Zhixiang, Huang Wei (2003), Ma Junbo (2006), Chen Jianlin (2011), Li Kesheng (2018), and so on^[6]. Qiao Ailing (2002) explored how to evaluate the quality of textbooks from the viewpoints of macro-design and micro-design of textbook writing; He Anping (2002) discussed the issue of how to evaluate the quality of textbooks from the viewpoint of macro- and micro-design; He (2001) introduced Sheldon's (1988) methodology for evaluating English language teaching materials; Cheng (2002) introduced Gran's (1987) three evaluation forms for selecting teaching materials^[7]. Xia Jimei (2003) introduced Cunningsworth's (1987) list of evaluation forms and emphasized the content and methodological aspects of Cunningsworth's (2002), Grant's (1987), and Cules' (1995) textbook evaluation forms, Ur's (1996) criteria for curriculum evaluation, and Tomlinson's (1998) textbook analysis form^[8]. In 1996, Zhou Xuelin presented six criteria for evaluating textbooks and a textbook evaluation checklist^[9]. What's more, there is a growing body of international and domestic research on English language textbooks in China (Cheng et al. (2019), Le (2014), Xiong (2012), Xiong et al.(2017), F. Zhang (2012)^[10]. Many of these works have concerned the principles and processes of material design, investigating both the content and effectiveness of English language textbooks for Chinese learners. Hua Weifen(2014), Lv Lan(2016), Li Xue(2019) analyzed certain textbooks of Integrated English^[11].

The above assessment studies provide theoretical guidance on the assessment of English language teaching materials to a certain extent. There are a lot of researches on college English teaching materials, but there are relatively few researches on newly published teaching materials for English majors.

Methodology

This research engaged some teachers and students from the Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences as respondents, who are utilizing the *Contemporary College English Intensive Reading 2 (Third Edition)* by Yang Limin, Qiu Feng, Chen Juebin(2022). The study focused on first-year English major students (totaling 113) and six experienced English teachers with over five years of teaching Integrated English Courses at the same institution.

The evaluation instrument was a questionnaire informed by Alan Cunningsworth's (2002) evaluative criteria for language teaching materials. It encompassed 15 items across five dimensions of the textbook: teaching objectives, material structure, design, language content, and topics. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaires were administered in-class and collected immediately afterward, achieving a perfect response rate of 100%. Furthermore, to deepen the understanding of the textbook's impact and gather comprehensive feedback, interviews were conducted with a subset of both teachers and students. These interviews utilized identical questions to ensure a consistent exploration of perceptions and to identify the textbook's advantages, shortcomings, and practical challenges in its application within the educational context.

Results and Discussions

Contemporary College English Intensive Reading plays an important role in the cultivation of China's undergraduate English majors. And the results of the data collected could indicate the users' attitudes towards various components of the newly published textbook, *Contemporary College English Intensive Reading 2(Third Edition)*(Yang Limin 2022), from the following five aspects.

(1)Teaching objectives

The results of the data show that 67.3% of the students believe that the textbook focuses on the development of students' ability to use the language in a comprehensive way, and 70.8 per cent agree that the textbook meets their learning needs and helps them to improve their English language proficiency. It can be seen that the textbook basically meets the needs of the students and helps the teachers to implement the teaching objectives of the course.

(2) Structure of the textbook

The majority of students make little use of the audio-visual resources provided on the learning website. This may be due to students' weak sense of independent learning and their weak independent learning ability. Teachers said that the supporting materials of the teaching materials could be improved; the accompanying audio-visual teaching materials or online courseware of the package were very helpful in improving students' comprehensive application skills (64.4%). This indicates that teachers and students were generally satisfied with the design of the teaching kit. The accompanying courseware and teaching aids of this textbook uploaded by teachers with the help of this platform of Xue Xitong are of great help. However, some individual teachers said that the courseware provided by the publisher is too complicated for the students of applied undergraduate colleges and universities.

(3) Design and organization

67.6% of the students thought that the layout of the teaching kit was clear and beautiful. 85.7% of the teachers thought that most of the illustrations and texts provided realistic and meaningful scenes for teaching, highlighted the central content and were attractive. The design of the package was generally satisfactory.

Intensive Reading 2 consists of twelve units. These units are text-centered. The results of the questionnaire showed that 30% of the students preferred Text A and 11% preferred Text B. Compared to Text A and Text B, students preferred Text A more. In regular English teaching, teachers also focus on detailed explanation of Text A, while Text B mainly depends on students' self-learning. From the analysis of the English learning status of the target group, it was found that students did not have enough time to use the teaching materials for English learning outside the classroom, and it could be inferred that students basically did not study Text B. In addition, the whole text of Text B was written in a way that it could not be used as a textbook. Interviews showed that some experienced teachers encouraged students who had the capacity to do so to form study groups for in-depth reading and discussion of Text B, which was similar to Text A. Some teachers and students mentioned that Text B was a good choice for students to learn English in the classroom. At the same time, some teachers and students said that the overall organization of Text B was much shorter than that of Text A. Therefore, in the future, the teachers and students should be encouraged to read Text B in depth and discuss it in small groups. Therefore, in the future development of the teaching materials, it could be considered adding some exercises to Text B to help students consolidate and deepen their understanding of the content of the text, so as to make its overall arrangement and specific content more suitable for students' self-learning.

(4) Learning contents

The results of the survey showed that 61.5% of the students felt that the amount of knowledge was moderate and they were able to complete the learning content of the textbook, while 38.5 per cent of the students felt that the content was on the high side and that they had difficulty in learning it, it revealed the different feelings and reactions among the student body about the difficulty of the textbook. The positive feedback from the majority of the students indicated that the materials largely met the learning abilities and needs of the students. However, there was also a significant proportion of students who needed additional learning support and tutoring to keep up with the material. This variation may stem from differences in individual learning abilities, learning styles, and levels of mastery of the material. This finding highlights the need for greater attention to individual student differences in teaching and may prompt teachers to adjust their teaching methods and pacing to meet the learning needs of different students. It also provides feedback to materials developers that materials may need to be designed with more careful stratification to better accommodate students at different levels. In addition, the results suggest that students may need more instruction to develop effective learning strategies. These findings are an important guide for the improvement of teaching materials and the optimization of teaching practices.

The purpose of this organization is to consolidate what has been learned through exercises, to allow students to carry out self-assessment through tests, and to leave room for teachers to do the necessary filling in of the gaps according to the situation. The overall design emphasizes humanistic concern and humanistic qualities, with rich content, which helps students to place language learning in the context of the theme and to carry out a series of listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing activities, so that they can effectively acquire language and learning methods. The textbook is based on various types of texts, incorporating linguistic and cultural knowledge, and is presented in the form of units. The exercises are designed to develop students' multilingual skills. In *Intensive Reading 2*, each unit of Preview contains a large number of listening and speaking exercises designed to develop students' multilingual skills and communicative skills. 89% of the students recognized that each unit has relevant topics for students to preview and they are asked to try to solve the difficult points independently, to understand the text, to discover, organize and summarize the main points of the language independently, so as to cultivate the ability to think critically. The exercises in the textbook not only cover the examination of basic knowledge points, but also include advanced questions for in-depth training of thinking and flexible application of language, and such a set of exercises demonstrates the principle of hierarchical teaching. What's more, exercises in intensive reading materials are essential for learners, not only to consolidate and deepen their understanding of the content of the text, but also to strengthen their mastery of grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure through the drilling of various language points^[12]. Intensive reading exercises are usually designed to enhance learners' reading skills, including the ability to think critically, analyse and synthesize information. In addition, these exercises help learners to apply their language knowledge to real-life communication, increase flexibility and adaptability in language use, and thus improve their overall English language proficiency. This reflects the scientific design of the exercises in the textbook, which is in line with the general concept of the educational discipline, i.e. to ensure that the teaching content can be adapted to the needs of all students.

(5) Topic dimensions

A wide range of themes and genres are covered in a wide range of thematic texts of *Intensive Reading 2*, with texts on social, cultural, technological, political, economic and historical themes of the times, providing learners with a large amount of linguistic input and presenting a realistic and all-encompassing view of the Western world. More than half of the students (57.2%) recognized the diversity of topics in the textbook *Contemporary College English: Intensive Reading 2 (Third Edition)*. The richness of the topics provides students with the opportunity to expand their knowledge while developing their language skills, and also reflects the importance that the editors attach to the development of students' correct outlook on life, worldview and values, because the four years of university is a critical period for the formation of students' outlook on life and worldview. And the genres of the texts are diverse: expository essays, essays, narrative essays, novels, argumentative essays, etc., aiming to stimulate students' interest in learning, provide students with opportunities to learn a variety of writing styles, and also lay a certain foundation for their future literary creation. In addition, 85.7% of the teachers also expressed their recognition of the diversity of topics in the survey. In the interviews, teachers further pointed out that the topics in the textbook not only helped to broaden students' horizons and increase their knowledge, but also helped them to better understand Western culture. Overall, the textbook was generally well received by users in terms of topic selection.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The analysis of *Contemporary College English: Intensive Reading 2 (Third Edition)* reveals that the textbook effectively meets the teaching objectives and learning needs of the majority of students. The structure, while generally satisfactory, shows underutilized of audio-visual resources, suggesting a need to enhance independent learning skills. And the design and organization are appreciated. In addition, the textbook's content is considered moderately challenging by most students, but some users find it somewhat difficult, indicating a need for differentiated support. The exercises are praised for their hierarchical design, balancing basic knowledge with higher-order thinking and application, aligning with educational principles to cater to all students. With regard to the diversity of topics is seen as beneficial for broadening perspectives and understanding Western culture, underlining the importance of a well-rounded curriculum during the formative university years.

In the new era, to further optimize the textbook, teachers can integrate AI-powered language learning tools into their curriculum to provide personalized learning experiences, incorporate interactive whiteboards, learning management systems, and educational apps to create engaging and participatory lessons and adopt a flipped classroom model where students review instructional materials outside of class and use class time for interactive activities, discussions, and problem-solving. By integrating these suggestions into their teaching, teachers can create a more flexible, responsive, and technologically enriched learning environment that prepares students for the challenges of the modern world.

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