

EVALUATING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS IN CHINA

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Dong Isbister, Ph.D.

Textbook evaluation plays an important role in English language teaching and learning. This paper reviews existing research on English textbook evaluation and develops a checklist for English textbooks adopted in Chinese senior high schools.

With a comprehensive evaluation of the People's Education Press English textbook series (PEP, 2019), the findings show that this series has advantages in promoting cultural awareness and cultivating learning abilities. However, some tasks in the textbook appear to be outdated and less engaging. Moreover, world cultures beyond American and British contexts are limited, and examples of non-native speakers' interactions or multilingual discourse are scarce.

Based on the evaluation results, the paper offers recommendations to maximize the utilization of this textbook series. First, teachers should leverage table of contents and learning tips in the textbook to foster students' independent learning skills. Besides, teachers are encouraged to consult teacher's manual to design student-centered activities and improve cultural understanding. To overcome the shortcomings in the textbook, digital resources and AI tools are suggested to expose students to diverse accents and interactions.

The study emphasizes the significance of textbook evaluation and encourages teachers to gain a better understanding of their teaching materials. To enhance the validity and reliability of the evaluation, further research can survey the teachers first and refine the developed textbook evaluation checklist in the Appendix section of the paper or develop a more comprehensive evaluation framework.

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Chapter I Introduction

In response to the increasing demand for individuals with cross-cultural communication skills in the globalized world, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China ([MOE], 2020) revised and released the new English curriculum standards, highlighting the importance of cultivating students' communicative competence. Under the guidance of the new curriculum standards, many provinces in China were required to adopt a new series of English textbooks published by People's Education Press (PEP, 2019), including Hubei, where the research is based.

Nevertheless, many teachers, regardless of their years of teaching experience, find it challenging to use the new textbooks (Zhang, 2020; Zhou, 2020; Han, 2021). PEP (2019) English textbooks are designed around theme-based learning with closely related sections and rich content in each unit. While the vocabulary requirements have been reduced, there is an increased emphasis on exploring themes and cultivating critical thinking in English, expanding the focus from traditional linguistic knowledge to the cultivation of comprehensive language skills. Novice teachers struggle to adapt the rich content within the limited teaching hours. Some experienced teachers remain focused on established teaching habits and may deconstruct units arbitrarily, neglecting the updated requirements in the new series. These challenges suggest that the new textbooks failed to meet the editors' expectations.

English textbooks are recognized as an essential part of English language teaching because they provide standardized teaching content and pedagogical guidance for educators (Miekley, 2005; AbdelWahab, 2013; Wuttisrisiriporn, 2019). If teachers fail to employ the new textbooks effectively, students are unlikely to meet the requirements of the new curriculum standards (MOE, 2020) and feel uneasy to communicate across cultures in English. Therefore,

evaluating the textbooks to gain a deep understanding is a first step for their effective use. To help teachers leverage the strengths of the new textbooks, this study will undertake an evaluation of the PEP (2019) English textbooks.

This paper will first examine the existing research on English textbook evaluation and develop a localized checklist for English textbooks in China. Next, it will employ the checklist to evaluate PEP (2019) English textbooks. Finally, the paper will recommend teaching strategies on the new textbook to develop students' communicative competence to English teachers in Chinese senior high schools.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars across the world have been devoted to the research of textbook evaluation. Many countries, such as Thailand and Turkey, have developed evaluation systems from diverse perspectives, but there is still a need for English textbook evaluation in China with a localized evaluation framework. (Wuttisrisiriporn, 2019; Atar & Erdem, 2020; Gu, 2022).

In addition, as a senior high school English teacher, I have noticed growing concerns and problems among my colleagues when using the new series of senior high school English textbook published by PEP (2019). With significant structural changes and content updates, the new textbooks stress the integration and application of language skills and aim to shift the teaching focus from linguistic knowledge to the comprehensive language proficiency, but many teachers keep the traditional teaching methods by dominating classroom interactions, favoring controlled practice, and focusing on linguistic details. Unfamiliar with requirements from the reformed textbooks, English teachers in Chinese senior high schools have difficulties in finding student-centered methods for the textbook use (Zhang, 2020; Zhou, 2020; Han, 2021).

Thus, this paper intends to identify and customize an evaluation checklist for the PEP (2019) English textbook series to help teachers adjust their teaching methods and better teach the required materials. The research will answer the following questions:

1. What are important criteria for English textbook evaluation?
2. To what extent, do the PEP (2019) English textbooks used in Chinese senior high schools meet these evaluation criteria?
3. Based on the evaluation of the English textbooks (PEP, 2019), how can teachers effectively use the PEP English textbooks to improve students' communicative competence?

Definition of Terms

PEP English textbook: English textbooks are a set of teaching materials with a uniform layout and structure. They usually include multiple forms of learning resources, such as student books, workbooks, and supplementary videos (AbdelWahab, 2013; Zhou, 2020). This paper mainly discussed textbooks adopted in the EFL context. And “PEP English textbook” specifically refers to the series of senior high school English teaching and learning book published by People’s Education Press in 2019.

English textbook evaluation: Textbook evaluation is a process with judgement-making. Cunningsworth (1995) pointed out that textbook evaluation assesses if materials meet specific criteria based on student needs, curriculum requirements, and individual preferences. English textbook evaluation is a type of materials evaluation, which are divided into two categories, predictive evaluation, and retrospective evaluation (Ellis, 1997). This study will adopt a retrospective evaluation approach to figure out how to adjust textbooks for enhanced future use.

Communicative competence: Communicative competence is the ability to engage in communication in various social and cultural contexts smoothly and effectively, even without

perfect linguistic knowledge, such as grammar rules (Campbell & Wales, 1970; Hymes, 1972). Canale and Swain (1980) further categorized communicative competence into four parts: grammatical competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. The increasing awareness of communicative competence in English teaching requires educators to shift their teaching focus from the linguistic end to the overall proficiency of English.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to conduct an evaluation of PEP (2019) English textbooks for Chinese senior high schools. It is intended to encourage English teachers in China, experienced or novice, to use the textbook more efficiently and effectively to promote students' communicative competence.

For this purpose, the study sets out the following sub-objectives:

1. To review existing evaluation checklists;
2. To identify the most suitable evaluation checklist in the Chinese context;
3. To evaluate the PEP 2019 English textbooks with the chosen checklist;
4. To offer recommendations to leverage the textbooks' strengths to promote students' communicative competence.

By undertaking a critical evaluation of the PEP(2019) English textbooks and giving practical suggestions, this study attempts to support Chinese English teachers to prepare their students for successful communication in diverse English-speaking contexts with the current textbooks.

Significance of the Study

This study is crucial and meaningful for English education in Chinese senior high schools. First, despite substantial research on textbooks evaluation in language education, a significant gap still exists in evaluation focusing on the PEP (2019) series in the Chinese educational context. Therefore, this research will bridge the gap by providing a detailed evaluation of these textbooks.

Besides, with an evaluation of the existing textbooks, English teachers can take advantage of the textbooks and add supplementary teaching materials if needed. By fully understanding the new textbooks, they can also adjust their teaching methods and focus to promote their students' communicative competence.

Last, the findings of this study can serve as references to textbook editors, policy makers, and curriculum developers. They will help refine future editions of English textbooks to ensure that they are better aligned with educational goals and student needs.

Delimitation of the Study

This study will particularly focus on the use of English textbooks published by PEP in 2019. It is necessary to note that there are nine versions of English textbooks used in public senior high schools in China. While this paper centers around the PEP series, the findings regarding the challenges and opportunities of using English textbooks in China may be informative for educators who use other versions.

The final localized checklist for the textbook evaluation will be based on existing academic work and will need further validations. In addition, this study will not engage other researchers or participants in the application of the checklist and the process of the evaluation. This approach implies that the validity of the checklist cannot be empirically measured within

the scope of this paper. Besides, the conclusions and recommendations part will be inherently subjective, reflecting the independent analyses of the author based on the compiled research.

Methodology

The major research method for this study is the library research and document analysis. This paper develops an appropriate checklist to evaluate the PEP (2019) English textbooks and provides recommendations based on the evaluation findings. First, this research reviewed existing studies on English textbooks evaluation. Then, this paper developed a suitable checklist for Chinese senior English textbook evaluation and used that checklist to assess the PEP (2019) English textbook. Finally, this paper offered suggestions on creative use of the textbook based on the result of evaluation.

Chapter II Review of Literature

This chapter will explore the importance and development of English textbook evaluation to lay the foundation for further research. Firstly, it will discuss what the textbook evaluation is. Next, it will explain why it is essential to evaluate textbooks in language learning and teaching. The paper will also review the development of criteria for evaluating English as a foreign language textbooks. Last, the chapter will illustrate English textbook evaluation checklists and their applications in different teaching settings. This chapter will support the creation of a localized checklist for English textbooks in senior high schools in China.

English textbook evaluation

English textbook evaluation is a process which assesses if the targeted English textbook meets the requirements of teaching objectives and the needs of teachers and students. Despite its significance, English textbook evaluation did not catch enough attention until the 1980s. Cunningsworth (1984) pointed out that the evaluation should pay attention to the language content, learners' needs, and the learning process with the textbook. He laid the foundation for the future research. In 1995, more detailed factors, including learners' and teachers' expectations, methodological preferences, the perceived needs of the learners, syllabus requirements and personal preferences, were listed for textbook evaluation in ESL teaching (Cunningsworth, 1995).

From a broader perspective, English textbooks refer to various types of teaching resources, including workbooks, multimedia aids, and other supplementary resources (Cheng & Sun, 2011; AbdelWahab, 2013; Zhou, 2020). Therefore, when evaluating English textbooks, supplementary materials attached to the textbook, such as teacher's books, should also be considered (Miekley, 2005).

English textbook evaluation has different categories based on different perspectives. Cunningsworth (1995) divided English textbook evaluation into pre-use evaluation, in-use evaluation, and post-use evaluation. From the perspective of purpose, Ellis (1997) classified the material evaluation into the predictive and retrospective evaluation. A predictive evaluation, similar to pre-use evaluation, is conducted at the selection stage to determine if a particular set of textbooks will be adopted. In contrast, retrospective evaluation is often carried out during or after the use of the textbook to assess the effectiveness of those materials.

Based on the depth of evaluation, Cunningsworth (1995) proposed impressionistic overview and in-depth evaluation process. The impressionistic method refers to a quick overview of a certain textbook. Usually, experienced evaluators look at the blurb and contents page, and then go through the textbook to get its organization, topics, and visual elements. The impressionistic method is easier to conduct, however, it highly relies on the subjective feelings of evaluators (AbdelWahab, 2013). To gain deeper insights into one textbook and conduct more objective and scientific evaluation, Cunningsworth (1995) suggested that experts should adopt a comprehensive checklist with a detailed evaluation, but Ellis (1997) pointed out that it is time-consuming to apply the checklist to the whole textbook. Therefore, some scholars recommended evaluating certain parts of the textbook as representatives. Ellis (1997) noted that teachers could briefly review the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching tasks after each lesson. By assessing the tasks in the textbook, teachers can perform micro evaluations on some of the content, consisting of the future macro evaluations. AbdelWahab (2013) also encouraged teachers to carefully examine a specific unit of the textbook to understand the design of the entire textbook. He added that there is no denying that these time-saving methods may lead to bias because the selected part cannot always represent the whole.

Chinese researchers did not begin research on English textbook evaluation until the 1990s. In the early years, the research mainly focused on relevant theories introduced from English speaking worlds and ignored the limitations of those theories and the special contexts of English teaching in China (Gu, 2022). Considering the Chinese contexts and previous theoretical framework, Cheng and Sun (2011) divided English textbook evaluation into ad hoc impressionistic evaluation and systematic evaluation based on the depth of evaluation. The impressionistic evaluation is a quick review by experienced teachers, who follow their intuition and teaching experiences. The systematic evaluation includes internal evaluation, which centers around aspects of the textbook itself, and external evaluation, which pays attention to the relationship between the textbook and its users. This evaluation system is widely accepted in China and has paved the way for localized research on the evaluation of English textbooks in China.

The process of textbook evaluation can be varied according to different evaluators and purposes. Thus, it is necessary to carefully select appropriate methods or even combine multiple methods when evaluating a textbook.

Significance of English textbook evaluation

English textbooks are acknowledged as an essential part in English teaching and learning. Firstly, English textbooks can provide teachers with abundant teaching resources and supplementary materials, offering them teaching guidance and significantly reducing their workload (Cunningsworth, 1995; Cheng & Sun, 2011; AbdelWahab, 2013). This support is especially vital for novice teachers who depend heavily on textbooks to craft their lesson plans. Besides, textbooks explicitly show what to teach and learn, promoting a shared syllabus,

standards, and goals across diverse student groups (AbdelWahab, 2013; Wuttisrisiriporn & Usaha, 2019). This unified framework makes it practical to assess students' learning proficiency.

Despite the utility of English textbooks, it is significant to notice that teachers should be active developers of textbooks (Cunningsworth, 1995; Cheng & Sun, 2011). Textbooks should not be seen as the sole authority but as assistants in the English teaching and learning process. Therefore, to align more closely with teaching goals and objectives, teachers are encouraged to actively evaluate English textbooks before selecting them. Furthermore, the English textbook evaluation can help teachers adapt the textbook to meet the needs of different students, such as adjusting the order of the lesson sections.

The importance of English textbook evaluation is evident in the following aspect. Primarily, the textbook market is packed with textbooks of varying qualities, which complicates the task for English project directors and teachers to quickly identify qualified teaching materials (Cunningsworth, 1995; Miekley, 2005; Cheng & Sun, 2011). With objective and reliable pre-use English textbook evaluation, directors can efficiently decide which textbooks to adopt. Moreover, by revealing the strengths and weaknesses of textbooks, English textbook evaluations help teachers gain a thorough understanding of the materials and provide them with suggestions on how to use them (Cunningsworth, 1995; Cheng & Sun, 2011; AbdelWahab, 2013). Based on the results of these assessments, teachers can implement the necessary additions or modifications to make the textbooks easier to use. Additionally, post-use evaluations can determine whether or not to continue using a particular textbook or to select a more suitable one for future use (Cheng & Sun, 2011). Lastly, evaluations can offer reliable recommendations for future updates to improve the quality of English textbooks (Cheng & Sun, 2011; AbdelWahab, 2013). For example, Zhou (2020) discovered that the listening and writing sections in the workbook of a set

of English textbooks were either unused or difficult to use. Thus, curriculum designers are advised to pay more attention to the design of workbook content.

In summary, English textbooks are fundamental to the EFL educational process. Evaluating these textbooks will not only help assess learning objectives effectively, but also provide timely feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. It will also ensure the quality of learning resources that meet the needs of both teachers and students and promote the continued improvement of educational content. As a result, the significance of English textbook evaluation can never be overstated.

Criteria for English textbook evaluation

There has been growing research on the significance and utility of English textbook evaluation since the 1980s. Initially, textbook evaluations focused mainly on the textbooks themselves, such as their physical outlines, and often employed impressionistic methods that were highly subjective with abstract criteria. Over years, with the focus shifting from teacher-centered instructions to student-centered teaching approaches in pedagogical area, the relationship between textbooks and external factors, such as curriculum syllabus, teachers, and students, has been added to the research. Consequently, the criteria for textbook evaluation have evolved from abstract to concrete and from subjective to objective. However, the process of textbook evaluation is closely tied to specific contexts and requires a customized approach that considers both the commonality of evaluation criteria and the unique characteristics of the textbooks being evaluated.

As a pioneer in English textbook evaluation, Cunningsworth (1984) argued that evaluations should consider the relationships among language, learners, and the teaching process. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) agreed with Cunningsworth and introduced a checklist for ESP

(English for Specific Purposes) textbooks, pointing out that evaluating materials involves a comparison process. In this process, evaluators compare the requirements of a specific English course (subjective analysis) and the content of the textbook (objective analysis). This comparison emphasizes the connection between the textbooks and their users, highlighting the need for alignment to ensure effectiveness.

Building on this concept, Cunningsworth (1995) developed a quick-reference checklist for evaluation, which included 45 criteria across 8 categories: aims and approaches; design and organization; language content; skills; topics; methodology; teacher's book; and practical considerations. Furthermore, Cunningsworth emphasized that the evaluation should be learner centered, stressing the importance of evaluating whether the materials meet students' needs; whether they provide language content, skills, or patterns applicable in real-life settings; and whether they can foster both students' learning processes and teachers' instructional practices.

Miekley (2005) took this idea a step further and advocated a textbook evaluation that highlights the compatibility between textbooks and external factors (teachers, students, and course design). Specifically, Miekley suggested that evaluations should contain three main areas: the textbook itself (content, vocabulary & grammar, exercises & activities, attractiveness of the text, and physical make-up); the teacher's manual (general features, background information, methodological guidance, supplementary exercises & materials); and the context (Is the textbook appropriate for the curriculum, the students, and the teacher?). Focusing on ESL (English as a Second Language) textbooks, both studies assess whether they provide sufficient guidance for using language effectively in real-life situations to live in English-speaking environments.

With globalization and growing international interaction, languages have been regarded as a crucial tool for intercultural communication. Therefore, there is also an increasing number of

research on cultural factors in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbook evaluations.

Chinese scholars Cheng and Sun (2011) noted that an excellent textbook should include both the native culture and the culture of the targeted language. They argued that by learning to compare different cultures, students can avoid cultural conflicts in future life. This emphasis is reflected in the newly released English curriculum standards in China, which state that the design of English textbooks should aim to cultivate individuals with global perspectives and cross-cultural communicative competence (MOE, 2020). It is widely accepted that cultural awareness has become an important aspect in textbook evaluation.

Moreover, Böcü and Razi (2016) also agreed that textbook evaluations should consider the users' native culture. They specifically pointed out that English culture should not be limited to just American or British contexts but should also include other English-speaking cultures. Apart from that, international cultures, such as cultures in non-English speaking countries and regions, are also worthy of evaluation in English textbooks. As for specific cultural topics within textbooks, Böcü and Razi explained them from two perspectives, "big C" (politics, education, history, music, economy) and "little c" (themes of lifestyles and values like food).

To deepen the understanding of social and cultural influences in English textbooks, Atar and Erdem (2020) introduced a groundbreaking evaluation framework from a sociolinguistic perspective which includes six criteria. Firstly, they agreed with Böcü and Razi (2016) and proposed that textbooks should include a variety of English accents and dialects, such as non-native (e.g., Indian English) and non-standard (e.g., the Birmingham accent) varieties, to reflect the diverse linguistic landscape of English speakers. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of featuring interactions both between native and non-native speakers and among non-native speakers themselves. They also discussed whether the textbooks include the examples

of successful bilinguals to promote intercultural communicative competence. Moreover, they suggested considering the linguistic ecology of target learners, their first language and other languages spoken within the EFL environment. Finally, they advocated for affordable or even free textbooks of better quality. Expensive textbooks are likely to be of higher quality, and only a part of students can afford them. However, Atar and Erdem argued that English learning should never be restricted to the elites of the upper class. All students are expected to have access to higher quality content. The deeper exploration of sociolinguistic factors reveals a broader trend towards more culturally sensitive assessments in English textbook evaluations.

Review on previous research reveals that while numerous criteria must be considered for a comprehensive evaluation of English textbooks, it is equally important for evaluators to focus on the most critical and relevant factors to avoid being overwhelmed by excessive details (Cunningsworth, 1995). Evaluations should emphasize the most essential elements that meet specific needs. Regardless of the evaluation methods, Cheng and Sun (2011) proposed two principles to help evaluators prioritize the criteria. The first is the effect principle, which assesses if the textbook achieves the outcomes expected by its authors and users. The second is the efficiency principle, which evaluates if the textbook achieves these effects with fewer instructional hours than other teaching materials.

More importantly, it is crucial to recognize that there are no unified criteria applicable to all contexts. Therefore, during the textbook evaluation process, evaluators need to consider individual factors thoroughly, such as the backgrounds of both teachers and students (Miekley, 2005; AbdelWahab, 2013; Wuttisrisiriporn & Usaha, 2019). However, it is also necessary to avoid subjective biases. Evaluators should include both strengths and weaknesses and avoid personal preferences (Cheng & Sun, 2011).

Over the years, the criteria for evaluating English textbooks have become more and more comprehensive. Nowadays, scholars agree that evaluations should not only focus on the textbook content but also on the users' experiences to accurately assess its effectiveness. Additionally, incorporating cultural factors into evaluations has been recognized as fundamental in the globalized context. Last but not the least, it is essential for evaluators to select the most suitable criteria based on specific needs and ensure that the evaluation process remains as objective as possible.

Development of English textbooks evaluation checklist

Checklist has been a commonly used method for English textbook in-depth evaluation since 1980s because of their practicality and objectivity. This section will review the development of checklists and specific applications of certain checklists.

Muhundan and Ahour (2010) reviewed existing checklists from 1970 to 2008 and found that checklists in those past decades were mainly qualitative. Besides, the checklists varied in length, being either too short or too long, and the questions they included tended to be vague. To develop a more user-friendly checklist, Mukundan et al. (2011) simplified the checklist into two main parts: general attributes and learning-teaching content, consisting of 13 criteria and 38 items in total. While general attributes focus on the textbook's relation to the syllabus, methodology, suitability to learners, physical and utilitarian attributes, and supplementary materials, learning-teaching content covers specific areas such as listening, speaking, and exercises.

Later on, 207 ESL teachers in Malaysia were interviewed regarding the criteria in this checklist (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2012). Although they agreed on the importance of all items for English textbook evaluation, they also highlighted that some items were redundant. For

example, the compatibility of the textbook with the learners' interests overlapped with the need for age-appropriate content in the learners' personal information category. Therefore, based on the survey results, Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2012) revised and finalized the checklist with a 5-scale answer format for each question.

This final checklist was later applied to an evaluation of Year 5 and Year 6 textbooks at primary schools in Malaysia (Nur et al., 2014). 32 primary school teachers participated in the evaluation using the checklist. Although the study confirmed that the textbooks currently in use at the schools were very effective, the conclusions could not be generalized across Malaysia as the participants were limited to schools only in Selangor state. However, it still showed the possibility that the checklist could be used to improve the current textbooks.

Based on the research from Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2012), AbdelWahab (2013) further developed a more universal, flexible, and approachable checklist. This checklist was compromised of four parts with a total of 140 items. It expanded on Mukundan and Nimehchisalem's categories of physical and utilitarian attributes and learning-teaching content by adding separate evaluations for supplementary materials and language skills.

In AbdelWahab's checklist which uses a 3-point scale, the questions are more specific and easier to answer. For example, distinguished from the vague item "Texts are interesting" from Mukundan et al. (2011), AbdelWahab's checklist uses a more concrete statement: "Many of the reading passages are up-to-date, interesting, and meaningful." The checklist also specifies teaching approaches reflected in the textbooks. For instance, the checklist states "Activities and exercises introduce the main principles of CLT", moving beyond simple descriptions like "Tasks are interesting" or "Tasks are interactive". Additionally, it increases the emphasis on social and cultural context, asking detailed questions, such as "Whether textbooks are free from

stereotypical images and information” and “How to interact using the language within a new culture that is vastly different from their own”.

To save time and improve the efficiency of checklist evaluation, Wuttisrisiriporn and Usaha (2019) designed a shorter checklist for evaluating K12 English textbooks in Thailand, featuring only 70 items on a 5-point Likert scale. This checklist can be used before, during, and after the textbook is used. It is made up of seven parts, including 1. Layout, design, and physical makeup; 2. Unit organization; 3. Content, topics, and language; 4. Language teaching methods and activities; 5. The four language skills; 6. Vocabulary; and 7. Grammar. And the checklist referred to the well-received CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) framework to improve its reliability. In addition, Wuttisrisiriporn & Usaha emphasized the importance of reviewing the checklist together in advance to ensure a consistent understanding of each evaluation criterion, as most evaluators are native Thai English teachers with limited English proficiency.

Another case that considers CEFR principles is an evaluation of English textbooks in Turkish primary schools (Çakir, 2021). This evaluation primarily adopted the framework developed by Atar and Erdem (2020). With a focus on the sociolinguistic perspective, this checklist aimed to determine whether the textbook, *Just Fun English* (Tiras, 2019), can enhance students’ intercultural communicative competence. Authored by a Turkish writer, this textbook successfully integrates native culture, including Turkish names, cities, and cultural elements.

However, the book lacks non-native accents and interactions among non-native speakers, which may hinder learners’ global awareness. For instance, only “standard” British English speakers are used in the recordings. This case demonstrates that evaluating textbooks from a sociolinguistic perspective can help teachers and educators identify limitations in ICC

development in the textbook, showing that teachers may need to actively supplement materials to bridge the gaps. Nevertheless, Çakir pointed out the study only focused on one book, which may fail to be the representative of the findings to all English textbooks in Turkey.

Because of different curriculum standards across regions, evaluation checklists also differ accordingly. Unlike CEFR framework widely used in European research, core competencies advocated in China's English Curriculum Standards (MOE, 2020) are more commonly referred to in Chinese context. Li and Deocampo (2023) employed the core competencies to evaluate English textbooks (PEP, 2019) used in Chinese senior high schools. The MOE (2020) defined core competencies in the English curriculum as linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability. With a qualitative approach and content analysis, Li and Deocampo examined the three PEP senior high school English textbooks to determine whether they possess the features for developing these core competencies. This evaluation stressed more on the content and development of students' comprehensive abilities, while neglecting the physical features of the textbook, which also play a crucial role in promoting effective English learning.

The review of the various applications of checklists in different contexts highlights the adaptability of this evaluation method. While it is common to align with established frameworks (e.g., CEFR) or national curriculum standards, it is necessary to develop a localized checklist with specific criteria to meet regional needs and priorities. Designing effective evaluation checklists requires a balance between comprehensiveness and conciseness while understanding the local teaching context. As society advances and English language teaching evolves, checklists are likely to be refined to keep up with pedagogical changes.

Summary

This literature review explores the definition, significance, and evolving criteria and checklists for English textbook evaluation.

Textbook evaluation is defined as a systematic process of analyzing teaching materials against specific criteria to determine their suitability for particular contexts and learners' needs. Following the development of evaluation criteria, the review highlights their shift from subjective impressionistic methods to comprehensive and objective approaches. Pioneering work emphasized the analysis of language content, learners' needs, teaching methods, and real-world applicability. And with the development of globalization, cultural and sociolinguistic factors have gained more attention, requiring high-quality materials with diverse accents and cultures.

Finally, the chapter shows how checklists for textbook evaluation have evolved into more systematic, culturally sensitive, and contextualized practices. Checklists are not only designed to evaluate the effectiveness of textbooks but also to promote the quality of materials for effective English language teaching and learning experiences.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

The literature review in Chapter II clearly highlighted the important role of English textbook evaluation in language teaching and learning. As the criteria for evaluation vary across different contexts, this chapter will develop a customized checklist for assessing English textbooks used in China. This localized checklist will then be used to evaluate a series of English textbooks published by the People's Education Press (PEP) in 2019 for the Chinese senior high school curriculum.

By summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of this textbook series after the evaluation, the chapter will provide recommendations to help teachers make better use of these teaching materials and ultimately improve the communicative competence of Chinese senior high school students.

A localized evaluation checklist for Chinese English textbooks

As is discussed in the literature review, it is impractical to include all details in evaluations. So, the first step in developing a suitable evaluation checklist is to identify the most essential criteria.

Firstly, according to the literature review on the development of the evaluation criteria, physical attributes are the first step to go through because they can give evaluators a quick overview and general impression of a textbook. Additionally, in the context of globalization, culture awareness has become increasingly important in cross-culture communication. To equip students with communicative competence for various situations, cultural elements can never be neglected in English textbook. So, the sociolinguistic textbook evaluation rubric (Atar & Erdem, 2020) should be integrated into the checklist. Moreover, it is essential to evaluate whether the

textbook meets the curriculum standards. For Chinese English textbooks, this checklist incorporates the new senior high school English curriculum standards (MOE, 2017).

By adapting and combining items from the checklists developed by Cunningsworth (1995), Mukundan et al. (2011), Cheng and Sun (2011), AbdelWahab (2013), Wuttisrisiriporn and Usaha (2019), Atar and Erdem (2020), and Li and Deocampo (2023), this chapter has developed a concise but comprehensive evaluation checklist (See the Appendix A) to suit the Chinese English teaching context. The items in the checklist are grouped under two main domains:

1. Physical attributes (4 items)
2. Learning-teaching content (28 items): General, Linguistic Competence, Cultural Awareness, Learning Ability, and Supplementary Material.

Findings of PEP (2019) English textbook evaluation

The localized checklist for evaluating Chinese English textbooks was applied to assess the widely adopted the PEP (2019) English textbook series in Hubei province, where this research is based. This series includes seven books. Book 1 to Book 3 are compulsory textbooks with a basic level for senior one students, while Book 4 to Book 7 are optional compulsory textbooks with higher difficulty levels for senior two students. A detailed evaluation of this textbook series with the tailored checklist can offer valuable insights into its strengths, limitations, and areas for improvement in the local educational context.

Physical Attributes

Generally speaking, this newly published series textbook has visually appealing physical appearance that can help users to feel comfortable and approachable. The layout throughout the books maintains a consistent typography design, where the uniform font sizes and the outlay of

texts make the textbook easy to read and follow. Users can easily get used to the layout and organization of the textbook. Also, with appropriate font sizes and line spacing, the textbook provides ample space for students to take notes. Additionally, each unit begins with an exquisite thematic image that effectively sets the context. Each section also contains relevant illustrations to help students better understand the topics being studied. Priced at around 10 yuan per book, the textbooks feature high-quality binding and durability to withstand frequent classroom use. The affordable price coupled with the visually attractive design contributes to the overall positive physical evaluation of this textbook series.

Learning-teaching Content

General Impression. The textbook series demonstrates a well-structured and logically sequenced learning content, with a gradual increase in difficulty levels to meet students' evolving English proficiency. Each book offers a detailed table of contents on the first two pages, which outlines the learning objectives and scope of every unit. This effectively presents a road map for learning and teaching. The topics of each unit range from personal aspects (e.g., healthy lifestyles) to cultural themes (e.g., heritage protection). Each unit includes an "Assessing Your Progress" section to help students to evaluate their mastery of the covered material. Notably, the content is error-free.

Furthermore, the textbooks incorporate a variety of discourse types within each topic. For instance, in Unit 2 of Book1, centering around the topic "Traveling Around", the listening part has two different dialogues: one between friends discussing travel preparations and the other between strangers showing a ticket reservation. As for reading texts, this unit provides an encyclopedia entry and a brochure which introduces Peru, and a letter which shares travel plans with friends.

Across the teaching materials, the textbook uses language that suits various social situations. For example, the conversation between friends presents a closer and more casual tone, while the reservation conversation adopts a politer register. These distinguished language features in textual and non-textual materials show that the language used in this series textbook is attempting to be as natural and real-world-like as possible. Importantly, the tasks are also meaningful and contextualized. For example, one speaking task is a phone call role-play to practice booking reservations for tickets, hotel rooms or meals.

Linguistic Competence. This series textbook aims to develop students' comprehensive linguistic competence in each unit, encouraging skill integration and real-world applications. The goal is to equip students with the necessary English language proficiency to become globally competent individuals and to interact effectively in authentic contexts.

The textbooks cover all language skills and language knowledge components with an appropriate balance. Each unit has separate sections to focus on two skills, such as listening and speaking or reading and writing. Multimedia resources are largely incorporated to meet the requirements of the Internet era, including an additional viewing section. Additionally, each unit features a separate section on vocabulary and grammar. Overall, language skills and knowledge are recycled sufficiently across units and levels to consolidate students' learning. For instance, in Unit 4 of Book 1, the writing period focuses on argumentative essays, which is reviewed in Unit 2 of Book 4 ("Should We Fight New Technology?") and Unit 3 of Book 5 ("Studying abroad: Is it a good or bad idea?"), guiding students to apply the same writing skill across different topics.

However, there appears to be an imbalance between form and use, particularly in the case of vocabulary. Throughout the series, compared with usage, vocabulary explanations of forms are relatively limited. New words and expressions are usually included in the texts without

additional visual aids. But many students, especially those who have grown up with the spread of multimedia, prefer to remember vocabulary visually. Although the tasks are generally contextualized, the vocabulary exercises mostly consist of controlled practice like fill-in-the-blank exercises.

Furthermore, some tasks in other sections may need to be updated to fit current practices. For example, as mentioned in Unit 2 of Book 1, the role-play task (“Making reservations by phone”) is a bit outdated because more and more people now prefer to make reservations online.

Cultural Awareness. Cultural Awareness is a significant focus in the design of this textbook series, including native and world cultures. Teaching materials and tasks are designed to improve students’ intercultural communicative competence. For instance, in Unit 4 of Book 2 (History and Traditions), the Listening & Speaking section presents a dialogue between a Chinese teenager, Xiao Kong, and a British teenager, William. When they share their perspectives on historical sites, the Kong Family Mansion, William also compares it with historical buildings in his hometown, where Shakespeare lived. During their conversation, William uses idioms like “Achilles’ heel”, which initially puzzles Xiao Kong. William then adds explanations to keep the conversation going. Through this listening task, students gain insights into the features of Chinese and British historical buildings. More than that, this task helps students understand that words can carry cultural connotations beyond their literal meanings, reminding them of cultural backgrounds during intercultural communication.

Cultural sensitivities have also been fully considered in the textbook. In Unit 4 of Book 4 (Body Language), the reading text (“Listening to How Bodies Talk”) explores how people from different countries interpret the same body language differently. For example, it is noted that in Middle Eastern countries, social norms prohibit eye contact between men and women, whereas

in Japan, making eye contact is a common way to show respect. Students are expected to remember these rules to behave properly and avoid culture conflicts in the future.

In addition, the textbook stresses the linguistic ecology of students by incorporating numerous Chinese elements, including festivals, cities, and musical instruments. For example, in Unit 1 of Book 3 (Festivals and Celebrations), the textbook introduces festivals worldwide and compares Chinese festivals with foreign ones that share similar origins and celebrations, enabling students to understand festivals from a broader perspective. This design helps students promote their native culture during future international communication.

Clearly, this textbook series aims to include various cultures to develop students' communicative competence. However, the representation of world cultures (cultures from English-speaking countries other than the USA or the United Kingdom and non-English speaking countries) is relatively limited. Only a few units integrate other world cultures, such as Unit 5 of Book 1 (Languages Around the World), Unit 1 of Book 2 (Festivals and Celebrations), and Unit 4 of Book 4 (Body Language). While the textbook includes different English accents and varieties in the viewing sections, such as Chinese accents in Unit 1 of Book 2, these instances are not common. Also, there is an absence of interactions among non-native speakers of English or bilingual/multilingual examples within the textbook.

Learning Ability. One of the outstanding features of this textbook series is the learning tips for respective skills in every unit. For example, in Book 1 Welcome Unit, the textbook shows students how to use context clues to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, laying a foundation for their future vocabulary learning practice. Many learning tips are introduced across the series and recommended to help cultivate students' self-learning skills in English.

Besides, the textbook series aims to develop students' thinking skills. Many open-ended questions are set up for students to discuss and dig deeper into the topic. For example, in Unit 1 of Book 2, at the end of Reading and Thinking section, the textbook encourages students to discuss why so many countries contributed funds to help Egyptian governments build Aswan Dam and protect Egypt's cultural heritage.

By equipping students with effective learning tips and challenging them with thought-provoking tasks, this textbook series meets the requirement of the new curriculum standards and promotes students' linguistic competence and learning abilities for their academic and personal growth.

Supplementary Material. The major supplementary materials are the teacher's manual, audio recordings and videos for listening and viewing parts, and the student's workbook.

The teacher's manual encourages student-centered teaching approaches by providing detailed guidance and various specially designed student-centered activities. It also offers step-by-step instructions for transitions between sections. The instructions are in Chinese and English for convenience. Importantly, the manual provides valuable notes on cultural backgrounds, and assists teachers to design culturally responsive lessons. For example, in Unit 1 of Book 3 (Festivals and Celebrations), where teachers may be unfamiliar with the festivals in the listening task (Coming-of-Age Day in Japan and Rio Carnival), the teacher's manual includes cultural notes for comprehensive understanding.

However, multimedia resources, such as audio recordings and videos, are not easy to access. Teachers often rely on colleagues for assistance, because there is no official website for downloading these materials. While CDs are provided, their use are not convenient in all classroom settings. And the resources on the CDs can not be copied.

The students' workbook aims to reinforce learning through additional exercises. However, due to the limited class time, it is difficult for teachers to use all the exercises. Also, the listening resources for the workbook are not accessible, as is explained in the previous paragraph. Additionally, the "Expanding Your World" section within the workbook tends to have long articles without any supporting materials, such as guiding questions or vocabulary learning aids. When teachers do not have time to cover this optional section, students may find it challenging to approach these materials independently.

Recommendations on using the PEP (2019) textbook

While the PEP (2019) English textbook series demonstrates strengths, particularly in its emphasis on cultural awareness and the development of learning strategies, there is still room for improvement in certain areas. This part will offer recommendations for teachers to optimize the use of this textbook series and address potential limitations to improve the overall learning experience for students.

Firstly, teachers should make full use of the table of contents and the learning tips provided in each unit to cultivate students' independent learning abilities. The table of contents helps students clearly understand the ultimate goals to be achieved for each skill, while the learning tips guide students to improve specific skills efficiently.

Furthermore, teachers should consult the instructions in the teacher's manual, especially for novice educators. It serves as a model for designing student-centered activities for new teachers and alleviate burdens of designing lessons. Additionally, the cultural notes should be thoroughly considered to promote cultural understanding, particularly for non-native teachers without extensive international exposure. Only when teachers possess cross-cultural communicative competence can they effectively cultivate similar abilities in their students.

To address the drawbacks identified in the textbook, teachers should leverage the modern technology and digital resources.

Firstly, online resources can be excellent additional teaching materials. For instance, to improve the phone call reservation task in Unit 2 of Book 1, teachers can introduce platforms like Trip Advisor or Airbnb to allow students to experience reservations in real life. To overcome the limited amount of world cultures and English accents, especially the lack of non-native-non-native interactions, teachers can search for videos of international meetings online. Teachers can also turn to international students' vlogs, which usually contain the rich cultural diversity.

Secondly, teachers should embrace technological changes and explore the possibility of AI tools to improve teaching efficiency. As previously discussed, the vocabulary tasks in the textbook are mainly about controlled practice like fill-in-the-blanks or sentence construction, which can become boring and meaningless. To engage students, teachers could ask them to create narratives using the newly learned vocabulary and then compare their stories with AI-generated version on the same unit topic. Apart from that, for speaking tasks, AI tutors can be employed to increase opportunities for interaction with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. These AI tutors can be set up with different cultural backgrounds and language proficiency levels to ensure the authenticity of the cross-cultural communication.

Recommendations above intend to maximize the effectiveness of the textbook itself and compensate for the identified shortcomings. Teachers are expected to create a more engaging learning environment to promote students' communicative competence when adopting the PEP (2019) English textbook.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper reviewed the existing research on English textbook evaluation, developed a localized checklist for Chinese senior high school English textbook, evaluated the PEP (2019) English textbook, and offered recommendations on the use of this series textbook.

This paper stresses the importance of textbook evaluation and adaptation to ensure effective English language teaching and learning. The recommendations, including leveraging digital resources and integrating AI tools, offer practical approaches to making better use of the textbooks. The results of the evaluation reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the PEP (2019) English textbook, which can also provide the editors with implications for future updates and editions.

For future research, validity and reliability assessments for the developed evaluation checklist can be conducted. To enhance the validity and reliability of the checklist, researchers can survey a small group of teachers for feedback first, and then adjust items in the checklist. In addition, apart from cultural considerations, more sociolinguistic factors, such as gender and social status can be included in the criteria. By continuously refining the evaluation process and broadening the perspective, researchers and educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of English textbooks.

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Appendix A: A localized evaluation checklist for Chinese English textbooks

Items of Evaluation	Good	Not bad	Poor
I. Physical Attributes			
1. The textbook's layout is clear, consistent and visually attractive.			
2. The illustrations are relevant, informative, and complement the textual content effectively.			
3. The textbook is reasonably priced for its quality and content.			
4. The binding is high-quality and durable.			
II. Learning-teaching Content			
A. General			
1. The textbook contains a detailed list of contents and objectives to guide users.			
2. The textbook has a variety of topics from different cultures.			
3. The unit design is logically structured and level-appropriate.			
4. The textbook has periodic reviews for the purpose of diagnostic assessment and reinforcement.			
5. Tasks in the textbook are meaningful, authentic, and contextualized.			
6. The language in the textbook is natural and real.			
7. A variety of textual and non-textual genres are included.			
8. The content is error-free.			
B. Linguistic Competence			
1. The textbook covers all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing) and language knowledge (vocabulary and grammar) with an appropriate balance.			
2. The textbook help to develop students' sub-skills within each major skill area.			
3. The textbook encourages skill-integration and real-world applications.			
4. The textbook has a good balance between form and use of vocabulary.			
5. The textbook has a good balance between form and use of grammar.			
6. The level of difficulty in language skills and language knowledge gradually increases as the unit progresses.			
7. Language skills and knowledge are recycled sufficiently.			
C. Cultural Awareness			
1. The textbook includes different English accents and varieties (e.g., Indian English).			
2. The textbook provides native-non-native and non-native-non-native examples of interaction.			
3. The textbook includes examples of successful bilingual/multilingual interaction.			

4. The textbook considers the linguistic ecology of learners.			
5. The textbook offers examples of world cultures.			
6. Tasks are designed to improve students' intercultural communicative competence.			
7. Cultural sensitivities have been considered.			
D. Learning Ability			
1. Tasks in the textbook help to develop students' learning strategies.			
2. The textbook develops higher-order skills (e.g., critical thinking and problem-solving skills).			
E. Supplementary Material			
1. Teacher's manual encourages student-centered teaching instructions.			
2. Teacher's manual provides sufficient guidance on cultural understanding.			
3. Students' workbook can efficiently reinforce learning.			
4. Multimedia and additional resources are easy to get and use.			