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A Comparative Analysis of Writing Sections in Old and New Editions of FLTRP Senior High School English Textbooks — A Case Study of Unit 1 in Compulsory Book 1

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Abstract

This study takes the writing sections of Unit 1 in the compulsory English textbook for senior high school (Grade 10) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) in the 2004 and 2019 editions as the research objects, and conducts a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between the two editions in terms of writing content, activity design, exercise arrangement, and other aspects. The research shows that the new edition (2019) places greater emphasis on the design of writing tasks in real-life contexts, highlights the expression of personal experiences in the form of diaries, and demonstrates stronger communicative and authentic characteristics. In terms of activity design, the new edition follows the cognitive process of "Comprehension—Development—Practice", focuses on the construction of writing scaffolds and process guidance, and embodies the concept of the process-based approach to writing. Additionally, the new edition has strengthened the diversity and operability of writing practice activities. The study points out that the 2019 edition is more in line with the core literacy requirements specified in the National English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020). It reflects a shift from "output-oriented" to "literacy-oriented" and "process-oriented" approaches, which provides important implications for the updating of teachers' teaching concepts and the improvement of students' writing abilities.

Keywords

Senior high school English; the old and new editions of the textbook; Writing Sections; Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Basic English education in China is undergoing a critical phase of in-depth reform.

The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020) (hereinafter referred to as the New Curriculum Standards), issued by the Ministry of Education in 2017, formally put forward a system of core literacy for the English discipline consisting of linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. This marks a transformation of senior high school English teaching objectives from cultivating comprehensive language application ability to holistic student development.

Against this backdrop, English textbooks, as core resources for curriculum implementation and classroom instruction, necessitate systematic and directional restructuring and updating. Senior high school English textbooks published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) enjoy extensive nationwide adoption, and the evolution of their editions carries strong representativeness. The 2004 edition exerted a profound influence on senior high school English teaching across China, while the 2019 new edition is the latest compilation strictly compiled in accordance with the philosophies of the New Curriculum Standards. The disparities between the two editions vividly reflect the shifts and developments in foreign language education ideologies in China over the past fifteen years. Textbooks are closely intertwined with curriculum standards, serving as pivotal materials and vehicles for putting curriculum standards into practice. Linguistic materials contained in textbooks constitute a primary source for students to acquire language skills, and the language practice activities and exercises therein function as vital pathways for students to develop linguistic proficiency.

Among the five fundamental language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing, writing is classified as a productive skill. The New Curriculum Standards set explicit and concrete requirements for senior high school students' writing ability: "Students can narrate the process of events clearly; describe personal experiences and characteristics of things in written form; establish logical relations via cohesive devices such as conjunctions, demonstrative pronouns and lexical cohesion in written expression; and convey information and express meanings with the aid of titles, icons, tables, layout and other visual elements". In short, writing performance comprehensively reflects students' integrated language application competence, logical thinking capacity and creativity, and writing teaching is universally acknowledged as a difficult segment in instruction. Textbooks serve as the primary basis for teachers' classroom teaching and core learning materials for students. The design of writing sections within textbooks directly shapes the orientation of writing instruction.

Therefore, writing bears irreplaceable significance in English learning, and an in-depth comparative analysis of writing sections across different textbook editions is imperative. This research carries important theoretical significance and practical value for understanding how the philosophies of the New Curriculum Standards are implemented and guiding teachers to effectively utilize new textbooks to deliver

writing instruction.

1.2. Research Purposes

Textbook selection exerts a bearing on teaching practice. Based on an analysis of the grammatical sections in old and new textbooks, this paper formulates the following research purposes: First, conduct a multi-dimensional comparative analysis of writing content, writing activity design and writing exercises in the writing sections of old and new textbooks, summarize their similarities and differences to enrich textbook research. Second, gain a thorough grasp of the activity design philosophies embedded in the writing sections of the new edition, so as to provide directional guidance for subsequent writing instruction. Third, compare and analyze the writing sections of Unit 1, Compulsory Book 1 from the old and new FLTRP senior high school English textbooks, optimize the content of writing sections in senior high school English textbooks, and enhance students' English writing ability.

1.3. Research Significance

Textbooks constitute an indispensable component of English curriculum implementation. Well-structured, logically organized textbooks facilitate the organization and delivery of English teaching. This study selects the writing sections of Unit 1, Compulsory Book 1 from the 2004 and 2019 FLTRP editions as analytical samples for comparative research, which bears the following research significance: First, under the guidance of the New Curriculum Standards, renew teaches' philosophies of writing instruction and improve the quality of writing teaching. Second, conduct a scientific comparative analysis of the two textbook editions to interpret the design principles of writing activities in the new textbook, enabling more effective instructional design and delivery. Third, explore the diverse presentation modes of identical knowledge modules across different textbooks, which can not only broaden teachers' background knowledge but also deepen their understanding of linguistic knowledge.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Textbooks

The New Curriculum Standards stipulate that textbooks encompass not only student textbooks but also teaching software, audio-visual materials, realia, student workbooks and activity handbooks. Nevertheless, the term "English textbooks" in daily reference generally refers to student textbooks. In English Textbook Analysis and Design, Cheng Xiaotang (2011) proposes a broad definition of textbooks: all teaching materials conducive to cultivating and improving students' English knowledge, language skills and core literacy. This includes in-class resources such as textbooks and exercise books, out-of-class printed materials like newspapers and

journals, as well as all electronic curriculum learning resources retrieved online. In the narrow sense, textbooks specifically denote student textbooks.

In summary, textbooks, also known as student textbooks, serve as the primary basis for teaching and specialized publications elaborating teaching content. They are the core foundation of curriculum instruction and a major channel through which students acquire knowledge.

2.2. The Evolution of English Writing Teaching Theories

Western writing pedagogy has undergone an evolution from the product approach to the process approach (Badger & White, 2000). Prevailing throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the product approach regards writing as imitation and reproduction of vocabulary, grammar and sentence patterns, prioritizing linguistic accuracy and centering assessment on final written products. This approach neglects the cognitive process and communicative purposes of writing, leading to mechanical and monotonous classroom instruction. The process-based writing approach emerged in the 1980s. Its core representatives Hayes and Flower (1980) conceptualize writing as a complex, cyclical cognitive process encompassing pre-writing motivation generation, brainstorming, mind mapping, free writing, outlining, drafting, editing, revising, proofreading and peer conferences. This approach emphasizes nurturing students' thinking through repeated revisions, highlights feedback from peers and teachers, and places students at the heart of writing activities (Zamel, 1983). Subsequently, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) introduced the dimension of "authentic communication" into writing instruction, stressing that writing tasks should feature real communicative purposes and contextual settings (Nunan, 2004).

The New Curriculum Standards absorbs these advanced pedagogical philosophies, requiring writing instruction to "focus on purpose, audience, content and form for creative meaning expression" and prioritize designing communicative writing tasks relevant to students' daily lives. Its core literacy framework further frames writing as an integrated pathway to develop linguistic competence, refine thinking quality, cultivate cultural awareness and boost learning ability.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

Based on the literature review and requirements of the New Curriculum Standards, this study intends to address the following research questions:

(1) What similarities and differences exist between the old and new textbook editions in terms of writing section content, activity design and writing exercises via multi-dimensional comparison?

(2) What implications can be drawn for teachers and students from the comparative analysis of writing sections in the two textbook editions ?

3.2. Research Subjects and Content

The research subjects of this study are the writing sections of Unit 1, Compulsory Book 1 from the 2004 FLTRP senior high school English textbook (hereinafter referred to as the old edition) and the 2019 FLTRP senior high school English textbook (hereinafter referred to as the new edition), as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Writing Sections of Unit 1 in the Old and New Senior High School English Textbooks

Comparison Items	New Textbook Edition	Old Textbook Edition
Unit Title	A New Start	My First Day at Senior High
Writing Genre	Journal entry	Reply email
Section Arrangement	1. Read the journal entry and answer the questions. (1) What is the passage about? (2) What happened in her PE class? (3) What did she do after class? 2. Recall your own first-week senior high experience and complete the notes. (1) My impression of the first week (2) An enjoyable class (3) After-school activities (4) How I made a new friend 3. Write a journal entry about your first-week senior high experiences, using the expressions provided in the box for reference. (1) Things are going well... (2) At junior high,... (3) After class,... (4) I'm going to... 4. Share your journal entry with the whole class	1. Read an email written by an American Grade 10 student. 2. Write a reply answering the questions raised in the email.

4. A Comparative Analysis of Writing Sections in FLTRP Old and New Senior High School English Textbooks

4.1. Comparative Analysis of Writing Content

As shown in Table 1, the unit title of the new edition is A New Start, while that of the old edition is My First Day at Senior High. Both units revolve around the theme of students' feelings and experiences upon entering senior high school, and both require learners to compose detailed accounts of their early high school life, including impressive first-week campus experiences, favorite classes, interesting after-school activities and processes of making new friends. The core distinction lies in writing genre: the new edition adopts journal writing, whereas the old edition requires students to write a reply email.

4.2. Comparative Analysis of Activity Design in Writing Sections

In terms of section layout, the new edition designs four sequential activities. Activity 1 requires students to read a sample journal and answer three guiding questions: (1)

What is the passage about? (2) What happened in her PE class? (3) What did she do after class. The first question tests students' ability to summarize main ideas, while the second and third examine their capacity to locate detailed information. Collectively, the questions form a question chain guiding students to track the protagonist's emotional shifts and growth trajectory. Activity 2 prompts students to reflect on their personal first-week senior high experiences and complete structured notes covering four dimensions: overall impressions, favorite classes, after-school activities and making new friends. Activity 3 guides students to formally draft a journal recounting their first week of senior high life, with a bank of functional expressions provided for writing support. Activity 4 invites students to share their finished journals with the whole class.

By contrast, the old edition only contains two simplistic activities. Activity 1 asks students to read an email from an American Grade 10 student, who shares his senior high experiences and raises four relevant questions. Activity 2 requires students to write a reply responding to all questions in the email.

It is evident that the activity design of the old edition lacks coherence and features monotonous activity types, while the new edition boasts diversified, closely interconnected activities arranged in a progressive, staged sequence aligned with the cognitive process of "Comprehension—Development—Practice". Its logical and cohesive design manifests in three aspects: First, a sample journal is provided, and a question chain steers students to clarify the text framework and key details, laying a foundational understanding of journal format and senior high themes for subsequent writing. Second, students are guided to reflect on authentic personal experiences to guarantee writing authenticity consistent with real communicative contexts; meanwhile, structured note-taking builds writing scaffolds in line with scaffolding pedagogy, enriching writing content and deepening thematic exploration. Third, the new edition progressively elevates students' thinking from low-order to high-order cognitive levels, with logically arranged writing activities and complete supporting materials.

From an instructional perspective, teachers must design classroom activities rooted in textual interpretation to realize educational objectives. Scientific, high-quality teaching activities constitute the cornerstone of effective teaching and learning. Accordingly, teachers should not merely utilize the pre-set textbook activities but also conduct creative supplementary design to enrich instruction.

4.3. Comparative Analysis of Writing Exercises

In terms of writing exercises, the new edition delivers richer, more vivid and layered practice activities that fully embody the tenets of process-based writing, which conceptualizes writing as a continuous developmental process rather than a mechanical task limited to reading samples and producing final drafts. Specifically, the new edition supplements detailed interactive segments absent from the old

edition, including scaffold construction and functional expression prompts, which embed procedural guidance throughout the writing process. The old edition, by contrast, only contains a single drafting task without any process-oriented support, hindering the cultivation of students' writing competence and thinking capacity and inevitably resulting in low-quality written outputs.

Notably, the new edition refines writing practice through multi-faceted procedural guidance: first, it leads students through writing step by step; second, it emphasizes text structure, logical expression and linguistic richness; third, it strictly follows the workflow of process-based writing, requiring peer draft exchange, opinion discussion and self-evaluation against standardized rubrics covering handwriting, expression, structure and punctuation; fourth, it organizes whole-class presentation and sharing. Sharing written work boosts students' English learning confidence, motivates them to pursue precise writing and continuously enrich their linguistic repertoires. Additionally, the assessment rubrics in the new edition are far more specific than those in the old edition, enabling objective student self-evaluation and fostering sound writing habits.

5. Research Findings and Pedagogical Implications

5.1. Research Findings

While inheriting many merits of the old edition, the new edition revises its content to align with contemporary educational demands, translating the philosophies and requirements of curriculum standards into operable classroom activities for accessible implementation. Most importantly, the new edition exhibits four distinctive new characteristics compared with its predecessor:

First, its writing tasks are rooted in authentic real-life contexts, centering on students' personal campus experiences instead of reply email tasks driven solely by question response.

Second, its writing section design fully conforms to process-based writing theory, prioritizing progressive writing procedures and achieving a fundamental shift from output-oriented to literacy-oriented and process-oriented instruction, with core literacy concepts permeating every segment of the design.

Third, the writing section attaches great importance to building writing scaffolds, significantly enhancing the teachability and learnability of the textbook.

Fourth, it redefines the role of students and embodies learner-centered pedagogy, adhering to the principle of teacher guidance and student subjectivity. Rather than passively completing isolated writing tasks, students are guided to become active thinkers, collaborators and self-regulated learners.

5.2. Pedagogical Implications

The comparative analysis of writing sections in the two FLTRP textbook editions yields the following implications:

For teachers: First, transform teaching philosophies: thoroughly comprehend the compilation intentions of the new textbook and shift identity from mere paper correctors to instructional designers, learning guides and facilitators. Second, fully leverage writing scaffolds: organize teaching strictly following the textbook's pre-set procedural flow and uphold process-based writing principles, avoiding skipping preparatory stages to rush directly into drafting. Third, diversify assessment methods: adopt the evaluation checklists provided in the textbook and develop multi-dimensional assessment forms such as peer review.

For students: The new textbook demands more active participation across the entire writing process. Students should fully utilize all supporting resources provided in the textbook, reflect on their learning progress, and gradually evolve into autonomous learners.

5.3. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

The sample of this research is restricted to Unit 1, Compulsory Book 1 of the old and new FLTRP textbooks. Though representative, the generalizability of its findings requires further verification through analyses of other units and the full textbook series. Future research can conduct in-depth investigations into the real application effects, practical challenges encountered by teachers and students when utilizing the writing sections of the new textbook, so as to propose more operable pedagogical suggestions.

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