

Discourse Analysis in Junior High English Material Adaptation: Holistic Unit Teaching and Activity-Based Approaches in China

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Abstract: This paper addresses the misalignment of junior high English teaching materials in China, with reference to the 2022 English Curriculum Standards. Using discourse analysis, it evaluates the “Go for it!” textbook, suggesting a shift to holistic unit-based teaching and activity-based learning. Proposed adaptations include integrating Western and Chinese educational methods and enhancing critical thinking and cultural awareness. The study underscores the need for materials that foster language skills, cultural understanding, and critical competencies, realigning them with contemporary educational philosophies.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; Holistic unit teaching; Activity-based approach

1. General information

The “English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)” in China focuses on core English competencies, incorporating language skills, cultural understanding, critical thinking, and learning capabilities within a six-element integrated learning framework. This approach moves away from traditional knowledge and skills-based teaching, promoting moral character and holistic development. It advises educators to emphasize thematic significance and establish unit-based objectives aligned with core competencies. However, a reevaluation of current materials, especially in junior high schools in Yunnan Province, is required to ensure alignment with these standards and contemporary teaching methodologies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is vital in aligning teaching materials with new standards, assessing content authenticity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. It helps ensure materials foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and linguistic competence in students. Additionally, discourse analysis is key in reconciling Western educational methods with Chinese educational values, enhancing China’s modern educational landscape.

2.1.1 Western research into discourse analysis

Since the 1980s, advancements in course material analysis have been led by foreign experts who have set influential standards and methodologies. Cunningsworth (1984) established four principles for evaluating teaching materials, focusing on learner needs, authentic language use, effective learning methods, and linking materials to learning objectives and engagement. Tomlinson (1998) emphasized innovative materials that connect learners with real-life experiences for maximal potential. These methodologies highlight the importance of authentic content and a learner-centered approach, catering to diverse learning styles and promoting active language learning.

2.1.2 Chinese research into course analysis

In China, course analysis research, influenced by foreign methodologies, developed unique evaluation standards. Hu Zhuangling (1995) emphasized alignment with teaching syllabi and effectiveness, while Liu Daoyi (2004) integrated national curriculum standards, focusing on compliance with national policies, students’ developmental needs, and practicality in regional educational reforms. Distinctively, Chinese course analysis melds national standards and political considerations, aiming to combine English cultural assimilation with Chinese integrity, acknowledging the socio-political impact of language.

2.2 The new English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education

The 2022 revision of China’s “English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education” represents a significant shift towards contemporary pedagogical models, emphasizing comprehensive linguistic proficiency over traditional vocabulary and grammar focus. This holistic, learner-centered curriculum integrates theory and practice with real-world relevance and transitions from an exam-centric to a competency-based assessment system, blending formative and summative evaluations. This update merges Western and Chinese educational philosophies, offering a dynamic framework for English education in China’s evolving educational landscape.

2.2.1 The approach of unit-based integrated teaching

The revised English curriculum standards in China endorse a unit-based integrated teaching approach, which is a significant departure from traditional language education methods. This approach integrates various language skills, knowledge, cultural insights, and learning strategies within comprehensive thematic units. Teachers are encouraged to develop lessons that include a variety of activities such as reading, discussions, research, and interactive tasks, all aimed at enhancing practical language use and cultural understanding. This student-centered methodology fosters active engagement, inquiry, collaboration, and the development of linguistic proficiency and key competencies.

In essence, these standards represent a transformative shift towards a more holistic and integrative language education framework, seeking to cultivate a comprehensive skill set and broader competencies in students.

2.2.2 The activity-based approach

The activity-based approach in China’s revised English curriculum standards for compulsory education underlines a dynamic, student-driven learning methodology. It elevates students as pivotal agents in acquiring language skills, encouraging their active participation in diverse, authentic linguistic tasks, including oral and written communication. Educators assume the role of facilitators, steering students towards applying their language skills in practical situations. This strategy accentuates experiential learning, aiming to boost student motivation and language proficiency via engaging, practical tasks such as role-plays and group projects.

Ultimately, this approach aspires to enhance students’ linguistic abilities and comprehensive competencies through proactive, experiential engagement in English learning.

3. Case study

3.1 The unit-based analysis for teaching

The Unit 8 from “Go for it!” Book 4 (published by People’s Education Press for the English teaching in junior high school) was selected for the analysis, appraisal and possible betterment.

The unit, themed around literature and music, fits the broader categories of ‘Humans and Themselves’ and ‘Humans and Society.’ Section A focuses on literature, using classics like ‘Little Women’ and ‘Oliver Twist’ to engage students in English language and culture through various activities. The teaching challenge lies in grasping the usage of “already” and “yet” in the present perfect tense.

Section B, themed on music, reinforces understanding of the present perfect tense and involves activities related to American country music, presenting a challenge in familiarizing students with this cultural context. Teachers are encouraged to provide relevant cultural background and potentially use music videos to enhance learning.

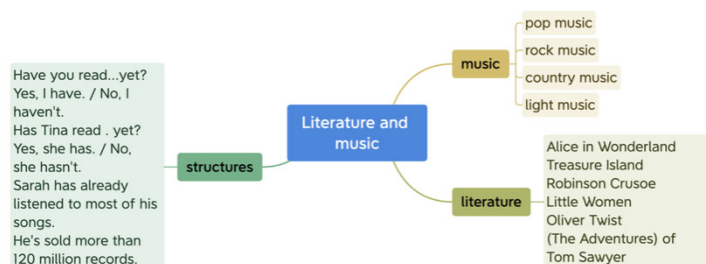


Figure 1: the structure analysis of Unit 8, Book4

Overall, this unit, abundant in foreign cultural discourse, offers a valuable platform for enhancing students' critical thinking and cultural awareness through debates and discussions. Teachers must address the unit's Western-centric content by providing context and analyzing cultural themes for alignment with Chinese social values. This process involves promoting compatible concepts and encouraging students to critically discern and exclude misaligned elements, thereby cultivating critical analytical skills.

3.2 The activity-centric improvement: Section A. 3a-3c. reading

3.2.1 The textual background

Section A. 3a-3c of the unit, featuring an abridged version of "Robinson Crusoe," depicts his challenges, achievements, and interaction with Friday, portraying Robinson with self-reliance akin to monarchical sovereignty. This portrayal, reinforced by illustrations, suggests a colonial master-servant dynamic. Educators are encouraged to critically assess the narrative's underlying attitudes and cultural ideologies, with a focus on the subtleties of implicit colonialism inherent in some aggressive Western culture.

3.2.2 The improvements from activity-based approach

To enhance this part, an activity-based approach placing students at the center of learning with authentic materials for deeper comprehension is recommended. This includes facilitating discussions that probe deeper into the narrative and its underlying themes.

Activity 1: Q: What do you think of Robinson's life on the island? Do you think it is terrible?

Educators can boost student engagement and critical thinking by using questions for genuine responses and fostering diverse interpretations, including original literary excerpts. Analyzing instances like Robinson's reaction to footprints in texts can deepen analysis and affirm student perspectives.

Additional discourse 1: ↩

IT HAPPENED one day about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition; I listened, I looked round me, I could hear nothing, nor see anything; I went up to a rising ground to look farther; I went up the shore and down the shore, but it was all one, I could see no other impression but that one; I went to it again to see if there were any... ↩

Activity 2: Then I begin the teaching of the second paragraph. The first activity is to look for some basic information by filling the information chart about Friday.

The information about "Friday"

- 1.He got this name because he was saved .
- 2.The cannibals have one of his friends.
- 3.He is and he has already some English.

After the task, the researcher will offer an activity that will inspire the students to think about the invisible but existent culture pattern.

Activity 3: Discuss with your classmates: what does the last sentence imply (He is smart and I have already taught him some English.)?

Additional discourse 2: ↩

At last he lays his head flat upon the ground, close to my foot, and sets my other foot upon his head, as he had done before; and after this, made all the signs to me of subjection, servitude, and submission imaginable, to let me know how he would serve me as long as he lived. ↩

If students have problems venturing out the answers I desire. I can provide them with another authentic discourse from the original literature book.

The added discourse effectively mirrors the accompanying illustration on textbook, aiding students in interpreting deeper meanings in the text. This approach facilitates a critical examination of colonialism and racism,



themes prevalent in “Robinson Crusoe.” As an educator with a Chinese perspective, it becomes natural to highlight these controversial aspects, enabling students to recognize the portrayal of colonization and racism, and understand their status as cultural taboos in the contemporary global context.

4. Implication for teaching

Contemporary junior high school instructional materials need realignment with the New Standards, focusing on unit-based integrated instruction and activity-centered approaches. This realignment involves prioritizing literacy goals, thematically centered teaching, and critical analysis of texts, integrating cognitive and experiential learning for comprehensive unit plans that enhance students’ understanding and competencies. English education should emphasize active student participation in language learning through thematic acquisition, knowledge development, and problem-solving, thereby enriching language skills, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness. Overall, English education should align with modern societal and educational needs, cultivating individuals contributing to China’s development and renewal.

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