



The Evaluation on Unit 7 of 9th Grade English Coursebook Published by PEP from Skills

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Abstract: Coursebook plays an important role in English language teaching. It not only offers teacher curriculum aims and contents, but also guides teacher's teaching and students' learning. Nowadays, the wealth of published materials for English language teaching available on the market makes selecting the right coursebook a challenging task. So to make effective evaluation on coursebook depending on certain evaluation criteria is of essential importance. Firstly this paper makes a brief introduction of the evaluated coursebook and the evaluation criteria. Then it makes evaluation on four skills of Unit 7 in the coursebook. Lastly it makes a conclusion on the evaluation.

Keywords: Evaluation, English Coursebook, Skills

1. Introduction

1.1. The Evaluated Coursebook

In this paper, the evaluated coursebook I chose is 9th Grade English coursebook published by People's Education Press (PEP), which is widely used by many provinces and schools. This coursebook has 15 units in total. Each unit consists of four parts—Section A, Section B, Self-check and Reading material. I chose Unit 7 Where would you like to visit? to evaluate from four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing. Through the evaluation on the skills of this unit, I can have a general understanding of the book's advantages and disadvantages in compiling language skills.

1.2. The Evaluation Criteria Used in the Paper

Some underlying principles or guidelines for evaluation are necessary in order to make effective evaluation. The evaluation criteria used in this paper are from Alan Cunningsworth's *Choosing your Coursebook*, which includes the general guidelines and the evaluation criteria founded on them. This book provides a wide range of evaluation questions for me to select from, and I will evaluate the coursebook through answering the evaluation questions of the checklists one by one.

2. Evaluation

2.1. A General Evaluation on Four Skills

Q1 Is practice in all four skills included? If so, is it balanced? If not, which skills are omitted, and why?

There are two practices including all four skills in the Unit 7. One is in the Section A, and another is in the Section B. In the Section A, Activity1a asks students to write some adjectives to describe the vacations in the picture. (see P1) In fact it also needs students to read the dialogue in the picture. Activity1b is a listening activity, and 1c is a speaking activity which combines with 1a and uses 1b's conversation. So we can say Practice1 in the Section A includes all four skills, and also these activities are closely related to each other. In the Section B, at first Activity1 asks students to write something related to vacation through brainstorming. Then Activity2a and 2b are listening practices. At last students are asked to role play after they read the conversation need to be completed. (see P2) As we can see, the conversation is related to the listening practices. Therefore, I think there is a suitable balance between the skills.

Q2 Does the skill work progress in terms of complexity and difficulty, in line with the grammatical and lexical progression of the course? How well is this achieved?

Yes, as the grammar element in the course progresses and the vocabulary becomes more extensive, the skills work become more demanding. For students, the skills work of the 9th Grade coursebook becomes much more difficult than those of 7th Grade one. For example, reading texts become longer, and the discourse structure more complex. We can see that 9th Grade English coursebook adds a new part —Reading material, which is unfound in 7th Grade one. Besides, as the course progress, some comprehension questions, which require learners to infer meaning, are found in the reading text.

Q3 Do the presentation and practice activities include the integrated of skills in realistic contexts? All four skills do not necessarily have to figure in every sequence of activities for it to be valid.

Yes, there is. For instance, in the Section B, practice2 uses all four skills in an integrated way around the same topic. The listening activity 2a is to provide students some information about Jeff who will appear in the speaking activity 2c. And the purpose of 2b is mainly to teach students how to make conversations in 2c and give some models for them to use. The three activities are around the same topic “where does Jeff want to go and where not?”

Q4 Does the coursebook use authentic material at an appropriate level (e.g. pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced)?

Yes, we know that 9th Grade students can be the English learners between the level of pre-intermediate and intermediate, so the coursebook use suitable semi-authentic material.

Q5 If semi-authentic material is used, is it representative of authentic discourse?

In the Section A, activity 3a is a reading activity. The reading text is a newspaper article, so we can be confident that discourse structure being presented is genuine. In the Section B, activity 3a is also a reading activity. But the reading text is an e-mail message, which provides a genuine model of language and brings greater realism. All these semi-authentic materials can increase students’ motivation.

Q6 If non-authentic material is used, is it nevertheless a good model for learners to follow?

In the Unit 7, we can also find some non-authentic materials for students, such as 2c and 3b in Section A. These activities both provide a conversation model and some key words for students to practice.

After evaluating on all four skills according to the evaluation criteria, we can see that the coursebook basically meets the requirements above. Now I will evaluate it in detail from listening, speaking, reading and writing, and find out its’ deficiency.

2.2. Evaluation on Listening

2.2.1. Evaluation Questions

Q1 What kind of listening material is contained in the course?

In the Unit 7, all listening activities play a secondary role compared with speaking. For instance, in the Section A, 1b forms a part of conversation work 1c and provides a

conversation model to use in 1c; 2a and 2b provides information to use in role play work 2c. In the Section B, 2a and 2b also become part of role play work 2c.

Q2 If there are specific listening passages, what kind of activities are based on them?

There is no specific listening passage in the Unit 7.

Q3 Is the listening material set in a meaningful context?

Yes. In the Section A, the listening material of the listening activity 1b is set in a meaningful context. We can see it from 1a and the picture (see P1) the listening is about two students who talk about their vacation when they see the vacation posters in the picture. So before listening students can guess something from 1a. In the Section B, from 2a’s task explanation, students can get some information about Jeff, and it set a certain context for students. So it is not hard for them to do the listening activity.

Q4 Are there pre-listening tasks, questions, etc?

As we can see, there is no pre-listening tasks or questions in the Unit 7.

Q5 What is the recorded material on audio-cassette like?

After listening to the recorded material, I think the quality of the recorded sound is high. The speed of speaking is appropriated to the 9th grade students’ ability. There are different accents in it but they don’t deviate from whichever variety the students have become used to their teacher and previous listening. As for its authenticity, it is semi-authentic because it includes the features such as elision, weak forms, assimilation, but it doesn’t have fillers, hesitation device or incomplete sentences.

Q6 Is there any video material for listening? If so, is good use made of the visual medium to provide a meaningful context and show facial expression, gesture, etc?

There is no video material for listening in this course book.

2.2.2. Deficiency

I. All listening activities are part of general oral work, including dialogues and role play, without specific listening in its own right. So the kind of listening activity is too single for students.

II. It doesn’t provide pre-listening activities to focus students’ attention on the topic of the passage. So students may lack a purpose to the activity and can not make prediction to place them in the context early.

III. There is no video material for listening in this course book, which will contribute to the difficulty of understanding recorded material due to the absence of vision.

2.3. Evaluation on Speaking

2.3.1. Evaluation Questions

Q1 How much emphasis is there on spoken English in the coursebook?

In the Unit 7, we can find that there are many speaking activities, even at least two speaking activities in each Practice, such like 1c, 2c, 3b, 4 in Section A and 2c, 4 in Section B. So the coursebook lays the emphasis on spoken English.

Q2 What kind of material for speaking is contained in the course?

This coursebook includes dialogues, role play, and communication activities. 1c and 3b in the Section A are dialogues; 2c in the Section A and 2c in the Section B are role plays; Activity 4 in the Section A and 4 in the Section B are communication activities. Activity 4 in the Section A is to talk with the partner about things you like and don't like. It is a genuine conversation or discussion between students. And activity 4 in the Section B is to make survey on classmates, which includes an element of uncertainty and unpredictability. The communication activities create an information gap between students and provide them a purpose to communicate.

Q3 Are there any specific strategies for conversation or other spoken activities, e.g. debating, giving talks?

There is no specific strategy for conversation or other spoken activities, such as debating or giving talks.

Q4 Is any practice material included to help learners to cope with unpredictability in spoken discourse?

Yes, there is. In the Section B, although activity 4 includes an element of uncertainty and unpredictability, it provides students a box in which there is a model of conversation to complete the survey, and helps students to copy with unpredictability in spoken discourse. So students can gain confidence in making the survey.

2.3.2. Deficiency

I. It doesn't provide enough speaking activity in which the situations can create an information gap for students to communicate. The speaking activities in the unit are too similar for students, and may decrease their learning motivation.

II. Due to the absence of communicative activity, students have no opportunity to develop strategies for coping with the unpredictability involved in the activity.

2.4. Evaluation on Reading

2.4.1. Evaluation Questions

Q1 Is the reading text used for introducing new language items (grammar and vocabulary), consolidating language work, etc?

Yes. In the Unit 7, there are three reading activities—3a in the Section A, 3a in the Section B, and the fourth part reading material. For example, in the Section A, the purpose of the reading text is to introduce some famous scenes in Pairs and let students know what they like and what they don't. Due to the language goal of this unit is to talk about places you would like to visit, this activity can help students to practice grammar focus in the unit.

Q2 Is there a focus on the development of reading skills and strategies?

Yes, there is. In the fourth part reading material, there are pre-reading attention-focusing activity, comprehension questions and extension to involve the students' personal experience. The pre-reading activity can develop reading strategies of predicting reading material. And in during-reading activity, there is a box in which it offers students reading strategies and skills to learn.

Q3 Is the reading material linked to other skill work?

Yes. 3a in the Section B is linked to writing work 3b. The reading text is used as a model for written work, students are asked to write an e-mail message to reply the reading text. So students can use different information to write but base on the same form. In the fourth part, the post-reading includes a writing activity, which combines the topic of the reading text and students' own experience.

Q4 Is there emphasis on reading for pleasure and for intellectual satisfaction?

No, there isn't.

Q5 How many reading texts are there, and how frequently do they occur?

There are three reading texts in the unit 7. They occur respectively in each section.

Q6 How early on in the course (at elementary level) do reading texts start to appear?

In the course (at elementary level), reading texts earliest starts to appear on the 7th Grade English coursebook. But the reading texts are often a paragraph about somebody or a brief letter.

Q7 How long are texts? Do they encourage intensive/extensive reading?

The first two reading text is short, while the third one is longer. I think the first two encourage intensive reading, but the third one encourages extensive reading. Because the first two ask students to underline and do "T" or "F" question, students need to read sentence by sentence. The third one is longer with several small titles. Students can scan the text and find the answer.

Q8 How authentic are the texts?

The first text is a newspaper article, so it is authentic. The second one is an e-mail message from guests to Ace Travel Agency. It is semi-authentic, because it may be written for specific purpose, but it provides a realistic discourse structure. The third one is an article about teenagers' dreams and hopes. It is authentic, because it records the findings of a survey about hopes and dreams.

Q9 Is the subject matter appropriate (interesting, challenging, topical, varied, culturally acceptable, unlikely to date)?

Yes, the subject matters are appropriate. The first one is related to the topic of Unit 7, and interesting to students. The second one is also related to the topic, and useful to students. The third one is about students' dream and hope, which is an extension from the topic "where would you like to visit?" to "What would you like to do?" And it is closed to students' emotional needs.

Q10 What text types are used? Are they appropriate?

In the Unit 7, we can see that it includes press extracts, e-mail message, and survey report. They are appropriate to the unit's topic.

Q11 Are the texts complete or gapped?

They are complete.

Q12 Does the material help comprehension by, for example: Setting the scene, providing background information, or giving pre-reading questions?

In the third reading text, it gives pre-reading questions. It

asks students to think of an example of hope and dream and then underline the information that they think is important to remember, so students can be encouraged to acquire effective reading strategies such as prediction technique.

Q13 What kind of comprehension questions is asked?

In the third reading text, it gives students literal and discourse-processing questions. Students can get answers by reading sentence by sentence.

Q14 To what extent does the material involve the learner's knowledge system (knowledge of the world)?

The third reading material involves the learner's knowledge system and draws on their knowledge of the world. Students can answer the questions of the reading text by combining with their background information about the topic.

2.4.2. Deficiency

I. The reading texts in the unit is not enough interesting and is hard to arouse students' interest in reading.

II. There is no vocabulary-teaching exercise linked to reading. In fact, it is efficient to develop students' vocabulary through reading.

III. The comprehension questions don't include inference question where the reader is required to bring to bear information that is not contained in the text. The inference questions are good for developing students' reading strategy.

2.5. Evaluation on Writing

2.5.1. Evaluation Questions

Q1 How does the material handle: controlled writing, guided writing, or free or semi-free writing?

In the Unit 7, there are three writing activities. I think they are all semi-free writing. Firstly, students are asked to write certain contents. Secondly, they are provided a beginning for writing. However, they have freedom to write themselves and express their own ideas.

Q2 Is there appropriate progression and variety of task?

Yes, there is. The first writing activity is 3b in the Section B, which is to write an e-mail message. Students are given a model of e-mail message, and their task is to write a reply according to the model of 3a. Then in the Self-check, the writing activity2 becomes freer. Students can write what they want to write, and express different views. In the section 4 of Reading material, students are provided an example of how to write step by step, but they still have freedom to write their own thoughts.

Q3 Are the conventions of different sorts of writing taught? If so, which does, and how are they presented?

No, there aren't.

Q4 Is paragraphing taught adequately?

No, there isn't.

Q5 Is there emphasis on the style of written English? At advanced level, is there attention to different styles according to text type?

No, there isn't.

Q6 Is attention given to the language resources specific to the written form, such as punctuation, spelling, layout, etc?

Yes, there is. The first writing activity3b in the Section B follows the reading activity3a, which aims to provide a model for writing and emphasize the layout of e-mail message.

Q7 How much emphasis is there on accuracy?

They are not mainly accuracy-based. In these activities students are given the freedom to write about themselves rather than to write what they are told to write. What they write should be more meaningful and communicative.

Q8 Are learners encouraged to review and edit their written work?

No, they aren't.

Q9 Is a readership identified for writing activities?

Yes, there is. As for the first writing activity, it is to write an e-mail message to S.T. Zhang, so the readership is specified. As for the second one, there is no readership identified for it. As for the third one, it is to write a dream you have and your plan to achieve it, and share with a friend. Obviously, the readership is a friend. With a readership in mind, students will aware that they need to write appropriately for them.

2.5.2. Deficiency

I. It doesn't provide the conventions of different sorts of writing. So teacher can add some materials about writing conventions when he/she teaches writing.

II. There is no emphasis on the styles of written English. So teacher can give some examples of different styles and point out their salient features to students.

III. Students are not encouraged to review or edit their written work. So teacher can take two forms of editing: peer editing and self-editing. Both editing activities need teacher's guidance.

3. Conclusion

From what we have discussed above, I make a conclusion about how to choose a coursebook from skills as following:

Firstly, the coursebook teacher chose should provide skill works which can equip students to use language in real situations. Students can learn English in a communicative way.

Secondly, teacher must consider students' needs as well as his/her need when he/she chooses the coursebook. It can increase students' motivation and they can also freely express their ideas through the skill works.

Lastly, there must be a balance of skills in the coursebook which can provide an appropriate situation for integrating some or all skills. The integration of skills is an important aspect of overall language ability. Students can practice to use language skills in association with one another, as happens in authentic discourse.

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