

## *Original Paper*

# The Characteristics of Selected Topics and Content Innovation of Core Textbooks for English Teacher Training—Taking the New Century Teacher Training English Textbook Series as an Example

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### **Abstract**

*Teacher education is related to the future talent training of the country and has far-reaching significance. Teacher-training students majoring in English not only need to learn English well but also need to learn how to teach English. Therefore, teacher-training English majors should emphasize the cultivation of English subjects and teaching ability, which should not be limited to either language learning or teaching skills. At present, all levels and types of education attach great importance to the role of teaching materials, and education for future teachers is no exception. It can be said that the quality and level of teaching materials are directly related to teachers' teaching and students' learning, and directly related to the quality and specifications of talent training. The article takes the series of textbooks—"English for Teachers in the New Century"—published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press as an example. From the perspective of the characteristics of the selected topics and content innovation, it discusses the feathers of "teacher training" and "political thinking" of the core curriculum textbooks for English teacher training. Also, some scientific suggestions will be made to help teachers penetrate the concept of teacher education while cultivating students' language abilities.*

### **Keywords**

*English teacher training materials, characteristics of selected topics, content innovation*

Teachers are the foundation of education and the source of its prosperity, carrying the strategic mission and historical responsibility entrusted to universities in realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese

nation. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, “Our teachers should not only be proficient in professional knowledge as ‘scholars’, but also cultivate virtues and become ‘role models’, striving to become the unifiers of being an ‘expert in imparting knowledge and resolving doubts’ and a ‘role model for others’”. This is the purpose of the development of university teachers in the new era and the direction of talent cultivation in normal colleges and universities. As the training base for teacher talent, graduates of normal majors have always been the direct source of the majority of primary and secondary school teachers. The table below shows the employment statistics of English education graduates from my college in the past three years. Despite the tight job market and intense competition, at least 65.6% of normal graduates are still entering primary and secondary schools and training institutions each year. Therefore, the importance of cultivating normal students can be seen.

**Table 1. Employment Destinations of English Education Graduates in the Past Three Years**

		2020 (142)		2021 (94)		2022 (120)		three-year average percentage
Nature of the Organization	of number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage		
school	50	35%	33	35%	48	40%		38.3%
Training institution	49	34%	22	23%	20	16%		27.3%
total number	99	69%	55	58%	68	56%		65.6%

In the entire process of talent cultivation, textbooks play an extremely important role. They disseminate new knowledge to students, lead them to understand new ideas and concepts, and serve as the main carrier of teaching content, fundamentally ensuring the achievement of teaching objectives. Due to the unique nature of teacher education, the textbooks used for teacher education should also have their own characteristics. However, currently, most teacher training institutions still use textbooks from comprehensive universities, which cannot highlight the specialized nature of teacher education. According to the list of English course books for teacher education majors published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press (Table 2), it can be seen that there is only one set of comprehensive English textbooks designed for teacher education students, which is the New Century Teacher Education English series. Moreover, its usage scope is much smaller than that of comprehensive professional textbooks.

The core textbook of the New Century Integrated Course is the main teaching material for the English major in teacher training colleges and universities. It is designed for the comprehensive English

foundation stage of the English major. The writing of this textbook adopts the popular multi-dimensional syllabus model, integrating the advantages of various syllabus models and fully considering the topics that contemporary college students are interested in, as well as essential content such as grammar, functions, and skills. The detailed framework of the units in this textbook is listed in Table 2. The arrangement and design of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and other related content aim to develop the four basic skills and the ability to use language comprehensively. In addition, through analytical reading and writing activities and discussion activities, students' ability to think and express themselves in English is cultivated. Therefore, each unit in the textbook includes activities such as knowledge sharing, reading comprehension, discussion, listening and speaking, reading, and writing. Each unit also includes specific vocabulary and grammar activities and exercises.

**Table 2. “Basic Framework of Units in Integrated English 1-4 Textbook”**

Main Study Task Module	Main content
Topics	Enumerate the main learning objectives of this unit
Speak for yourself	Introduce a diverse range of formats to introduce unit themes
Vocabulary	Provide some vocabulary and exercises related to the unit topic
Listening and Speaking Activities	Include both listening and speaking tasks, relevant exercises and topics based on the dialogue content will be designed to integrate listening and speaking training.
Reading and Writing Activities	Include reading and writing activities
Grammar in use	grammar topics will be selected from the language materials in this unit, and simple tips and exercises will be provided to practice those grammar points.
Reading to learn	select additional domestic and international reading materials that are related to the topic of this unit for further reading.
Simulation	Provide a context and give step-by-step instructions to guide the group in simulating the activity.
Culture Corner	Engaging in knowledge expansion and sharing helps to cultivate critical thinking skills.
Word list	Arrange the keywords of this unit in alphabetical order and provide their pronunciation, part of speech, meanings in this unit, and other commonly used meanings for students to browse and refer to.

It is not difficult to summarize the topic characteristics and content innovations of this series of textbooks by analyzing the basic framework of each unit and summarizing the main themes of each

unit.

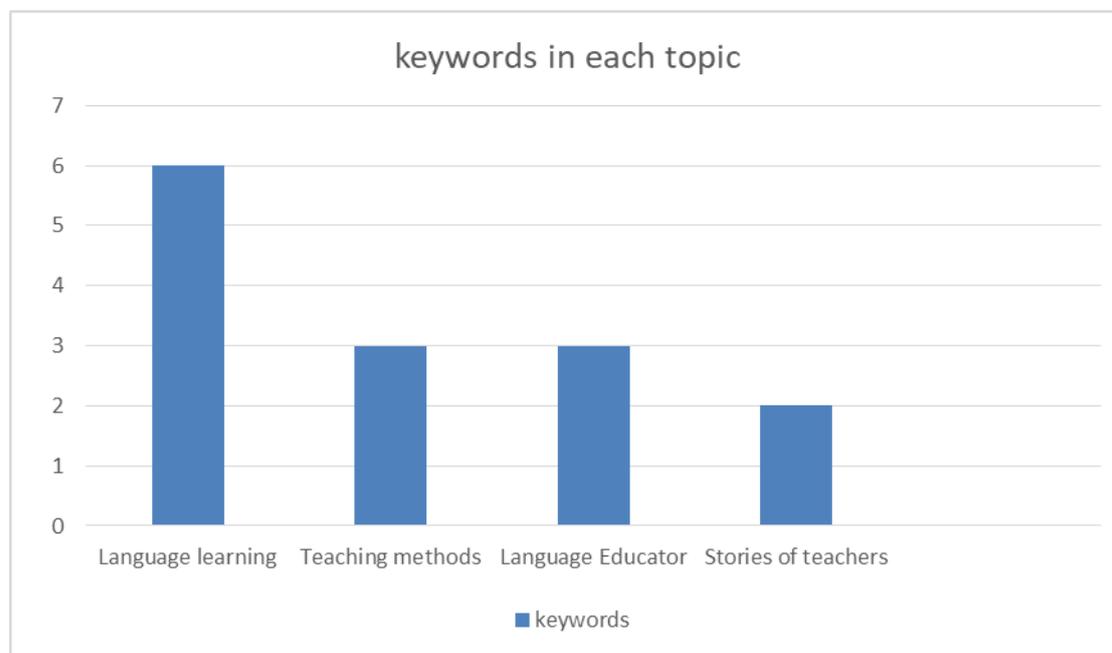
#### 1) Teaching English to Service English Education (Normal)

In 2019, the “Management Measures for Textbook Construction in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions” issued by the Ministry of Education further specified the standardization of textbook development. The “Management Measures for Textbook Construction in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions” points out that “textbook development should be based on subject specialties or curriculum teaching standards, serving higher education teaching reforms and talent cultivation; it should reflect the latest developments in relevant disciplines and scientific research, reflect the new requirements of economic, social, and technological development for talent cultivation, comprehensively and accurately expound the basic theories, basic knowledge, basic methods, and academic systems of subject specialties; the structure should be rigorous, logical, and comprehensive, able to reflect the inherent connections, developmental laws, and disciplinary-specific thinking methods of teaching content.” This set of textbooks places special emphasis on the selection of language materials, with topic materials mainly sourced from newspapers, magazines, or books from English-speaking countries. Some materials have been appropriately adapted, with a particular focus on the knowledge and humanistic education connotations of the articles, while the language strives to be elegant, standardized, and contemporary.

2) From the perspective of textbook input, the listening, speaking, reading, and writing materials are organized around topics, with each book containing several main topics and subtopics. The content of each unit revolves around the main topic. The aim is to allow students to experience authentic and real language materials, effectively improve their comprehension and expression abilities, and, in the process of systematic learning, directly or indirectly incorporate the three aspects of English education teaching philosophy, teacher awareness, and teaching skills.

In order to strengthen teacher education, the teaching of core courses should be appropriately aligned with the curriculum in terms of content and format, while ensuring the learning foundation of basic teaching skills. Therefore, the selection of content in this series of textbooks also tends to lean towards English education. The reading materials include a series of relevant materials, such as materials on language learning, teaching methods, language educators, and teacher stories. There are a total of 36 reading materials in textbooks 1-4. According to the Table (Table 3), there are 3 selected readings related to language educators and historical figures, which showcase Chomsky’s views on the relationship between language and grammar, as well as selected excerpts from Franklin’s autobiography. Students can also enjoy 6 materials on the theme of language learning, helping them appreciate the charm of language through learning. The textbook content includes topics such as gender differences in language learning, how language influences thinking, and the relationship between language and energy. Additionally, as a core textbook for English majors, the text also includes some teaching methods and learning strategies, such as online reading strategies, teaching innovative or dialectical thinking, how to think critically, and how to read effectively. It is worth mentioning that the

textbook also provides some teacher stories for teacher education students, such as “Why I Teach” shared by Alice H. Reich, and the controversial educational concepts sparked by Dr. Benjamin Spock, giving students the opportunity to reflect on their original intention of choosing teacher education and compare popular educational concepts both domestically and internationally.



**Table 3. Keywords in Different Reading Materials**

Taking the example of Unit 2 “Why I Teach” from the first volume of the textbook, the post-activities simulation (Table 4) focuses on the topic of teacher performance pay, which is of great interest to students. The textbook explains the meaning and origin of performance pay and discusses the controversies it has caused in society. It also provides clear instructions for classroom group activities, allowing students to think and imitate the teacher-related topics. In the Culture Corner section (Table 5), there are additional materials related to the unit theme, such as the education system in the United States. Comparing the cultures of the East and the West can cultivate students’ habit of thinking from multiple perspectives, which in turn helps develop their ability to think critically.

### The merit pay system

In some societies, in order to raise the quality of education, the government is promoting a performance-based compensation program for teachers, which is called "merit pay for teachers". Proponents of the idea of merit pay for teachers argue that paying teachers according to their effectiveness would be consistent with management precepts from the private sector and would lead to better educational outcomes. But many educators and others are not willing to support such a pay system.



#### Step 1

Work in groups of four. Brainstorm the reasons why some people support the merit pay system while other people are strongly against it. If you find it difficult to come up with enough ideas, search the Internet with "the merit pay system". Of course this will have to be done before or after class.

#### Step 2

Still work in groups of four. Based on the discussion in Step 1, decide who support the merit pay system.

### Table 4. Simulation

### Teachers and teaching in the U.S.A.

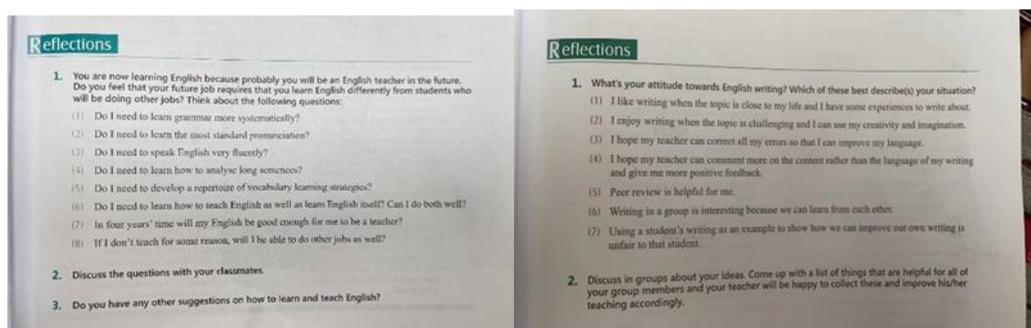
U.S. elementary and secondary school teachers receive their pre-service training at four-year colleges and universities. Although the requirements for coursework and practice teaching vary by university and state, most prospective teachers must complete an undergraduate degree and pass one or more state certification exams.

### Table 5. Culture Corner

3) From an output perspective, the exercises in the textbook are mainly divided into three parts: comprehension of the text, consolidation of vocabulary, and further practice of grammar. The textbook systematically integrates the language skills that students need to master, as well as necessary grammar knowledge, into the reading materials and exercises of each unit, combining old and new knowledge in a spiral manner. Furthermore, teaching methodology is directly or indirectly incorporated into the process. Most of the teaching activities are task-based, and constructing teaching scenarios through group collaboration can better promote students' active participation and help them better achieve the teaching objectives. The inclusion of sections such as "your voice" can guide students to think about problems from multiple perspectives, effectively helping them develop the abilities of problem discovery, analysis, and resolution, as well as cultivating their critical thinking and innovation skills. This textbook emphasizes the cultivation of students' ability for autonomous exploration and independent learning. The principles of activity design are to fully mobilize students' engagement, explore the rules of language, experience the authenticity of language, and appreciate the charm of language through self-study and cooperative learning. In addition, the design of the grammar and vocabulary learning sections aims to allow students to observe language phenomena and discover patterns in order to form their own learning accumulation.

4) Reflection section: Teaching reflection is an important component of teachers' professional competence and a reflection of their professionalism. Cultivating pre-service teachers' ability for

teaching reflection is particularly important for improving students' professional skills. Each unit of the textbook includes a reflection section for teachers and students, with the hope that through this part of the practice, teachers and students can reflect on the content of the textbook, teaching activities, and classroom practices. The reflection section can greatly promote teachers' professional development and students' self-growth, and it is an indispensable core component in the process of "teacher education". The following table randomly selected the reflection sections of Unit 2 (Why I Teach) from the first book and Unit 2 (Happy to Be a House Father) from the fourth book. It can be seen that the reflections are based on the topics of the units, such as thinking about a teaching career, the importance of grammar teaching in English learning, vocabulary teaching strategies, writing teaching strategies, and students' professional needs for teachers. The reflection topics guide students to think about and summarize their teaching process, textbook content, and their own practical situations. They timely classify and organize the knowledge they have learned and continuously improve and enhance it. This serves as a good accumulation and foundation for their future careers, based on both materials and experiences.



**Book 1. Unit 2 Why I Teach Book 4 Unit 2 Happy to Be a House Father**

In this set of teaching materials, both the input materials such as audio-visual materials for listening and speaking, and reading materials, as well as the output materials such as exercises, grammar, and reflection, are designed in the form of task-based learning activities as much as possible. Each learning content is designed as an actionable task, and specific operational steps are provided in the textbook. Different types of tasks can enhance and improve students' language expression ability, teamwork ability, and professional teaching skills. A series of classroom practices, such as "listening-speaking-evaluation," can promote the improvement of the ability to transform roles between teachers and students.

## **2. Implementing the Educational Philosophy of Cultivating Moral Character and Nurturing Students' Growth**

On May 28, 2020, the Ministry of Education released the "Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Curriculum". It emphasizes the importance of

incorporating ideological and political education resources into various courses and teaching methods so that students can grasp the laws of development, understand the principles of the world, enrich their knowledge, broaden their horizons, and cultivate their character. The guidelines also suggest designing a systematic approach to integrating ideological and political education into different disciplines and professional courses, considering the characteristics and advantages of each discipline and extracting the ideological values and spiritual connotations embedded in the professional knowledge system. This is to enhance the knowledge and humanistic aspects of the curriculum from the perspectives of the profession, industry, nation, international, culture, and history.

As a teacher-training university, we are responsible for nurturing future educators who will pass on knowledge and values to future generations. The primary and secondary school stages are crucial for the formation of students' worldviews, life outlooks, and values. Teachers have the power to influence generations of students and even the entire society. Therefore, the cultivation of "teacher qualities" during the training process is not only about educating students in professional skills but more importantly, it is about developing professional ethics and conduct.

As one of the disciplines that encounter the most intense collision with foreign ideologies and cultures, English majors are more susceptible to the influence of external trends and cultures. This is especially true for English teacher trainees, who have a greater significance and responsibility in terms of ideological and political education. In the process of compiling core materials for English teacher trainees, the selection of unit materials should consider incorporating ideological and political elements that can be integrated into language materials. The goal is to provide students with direct or indirect experiences of ideological and political education while learning the English language.

In terms of the input level of this series of textbooks, the selected study materials should inherently contain ideological elements that can be explored and have valuable guiding and leading effects. At the same time, teachers also need to carry out necessary secondary development of the textbook content to reflect the function of transmitting values. This set of textbooks consists of four volumes, including 36 thematic units, 72 reading and audio-visual materials, and 36 extended reading materials. According to statistics, the input materials of the textbooks can be roughly divided into several categories, namely: parenting, friendship, growth, education, culture, and technological development. The abundant textual content related to foreign cultures and the diversity of world cultures in the unit themes provides rich materials for cross-cultural comparison and reflection. It lays the foundation for English education majors to cultivate humanistic literacy, establish value orientation, broaden international horizons, and build cultural confidence in the learning process.

### **3. In the Multimedia Age, there Are Several Characteristics That Define This Era of Information Technology**

In the era of "Internet +", the curriculum content for undergraduate English majors includes several aspects such as course objectives, teaching philosophy, and project execution, aiming to form a blended

curriculum system based on information technology. With teaching as the core, it clearly defines the knowledge and technology requirements, uses tasks as carriers, leverages the internet, and fully integrates various modes of educational resources and learning support services, providing three-dimensional content to achieve high integration of printed textbooks, digital learning resources, and internet teaching platforms. In addition to traditional printed textbooks, it is also necessary to utilize the internet to create a networked, digitalized, and personalized digital teaching resource system, such as using online electronic textbooks, case studies, micro-video recordings, and question banks as the main forms and content, realizing the diversification and dynamism of digital resources, providing students with multimodal experiences, greatly stimulating their interest, and facilitating interactive teaching through online platforms and client applications.

The teaching resource library provided by the publisher mainly includes electronic courseware, teaching materials, audio recordings, and supplementary videos for this discipline. The content is focused, concise, easy to understand, and can enhance students' learning interests, making it convenient for them to learn anytime and anywhere. The resource library complements classroom teaching, allowing students to browse and download unit lesson plans and complete courseware provided by the platform. At the same time, the publisher's official website offers a wealth of extracurricular learning resources, allowing students to personalize their learning based on their own level and needs.

#### **4. Feasible Suggestions**

##### *4.1 In terms of Textbook Positioning, according to the Training Objectives, It Is Necessary to Cultivate the Application Abilities of Teacher Trainees*

In 2020, the Foreign Language Committee released the "Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate English Majors in Regular Higher Education Institutions", which provided direction for the development of foreign language teaching. The guidelines propose that "the English major aims to cultivate English professionals with good comprehensive qualities, solid English language skills, strong cross-cultural abilities, solid English professional knowledge, and necessary relevant professional knowledge. They should be able to adapt to the needs of national and local economic construction and social development, and be proficient in using English for foreign-related industries, English education and teaching, academic research, and other related work". Therefore, the core textbook construction for teacher education English majors should aim to cultivate students' application abilities, emphasizing the development of language usage, cross-cultural abilities, critical thinking abilities, and lifelong learning abilities, reflecting the development trend of modern educational technology and improving teaching effectiveness. The textbook should reflect the "comprehensive" and "teacher education" characteristics of the curriculum, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation in terms of input and output materials, in order to promote the comprehensive development of basic skills. The design of textbook content should include specialized training in phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse, especially highlighting the cultivation of teacher trainees' discourse analysis abilities.

The selection of language materials should reflect the characteristics of humanities disciplines, showcasing the history and culture of China and English-speaking countries, while also reflecting the modern pace of social development.

#### *4.2 In Terms of Textbook Format, Leveraging Online Platforms to Upgrade Digital Resources*

In the era of “Internet +”, QR codes have become essential learning tools for textbooks. QR code images should be added to important sections of the textbook, allowing students to scan the QR codes attached to the physical textbook to quickly access the basic content and supplementary information related to the knowledge, enabling faster understanding and mastery of knowledge. This achieves a new integration of printed materials and multimedia resources.

In addition to the teaching resources library for professional courses, the resources accompanying the textbook should actively respond to the needs of ideological and political education, establishing a resource library for ideological and political education and integrating relevant ideological and political content based on topics. The teaching resources library should include not only basic electronic textbooks, courseware, question banks, and supplementary resources but also high-quality micro-lessons or public welfare MOOC resources related to the content. These resources effectively supplement and expand textbook knowledge, enhance student interest in learning, and facilitate learning anytime and anywhere. The ideological and political resources library should cover ideological and political elements related to the themes of the textbook units, primarily through English short stories, audio, and video to meet the diverse learning needs of students, providing support for personalized and diversified learning.

#### *4.3 In Terms of Textbook Content, Enhance Ideological and Political Characteristics and Promote Chinese Culture*

The development of ideological and political teaching resources in foreign language courses involves cultural differences and ideologies, but more importantly, it has the dual mission of promoting excellent Chinese culture and absorbing and introducing advanced world cultures. Based on the analysis of the content of this series of textbooks, most of the authors are Americans, while there are very few works by Chinese authors, and there are no selected or adapted versions that depict Chinese stories. Therefore, as professional textbooks for teacher trainees, while considering educational aspects, the cultivation of cultural self-confidence should not be neglected. The textual materials should increase the proportion of Chinese culture, fully embody Chinese style and characteristics, consciously integrate socialist core values and the excellent cultural traditions of the country, and balance the proportion of Chinese and Western cultures in the content. Implicitly reflect ideological and political elements in post-lesson exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks and translation, making use of proverbs and quotations that reflect the spiritual characteristics of Chinese culture.

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