A Comparative Study of After-school Exercises in Road to Success (Upper Elementary) and New Practical Chinese Reader 2

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Abstract: The rapid spread and development of Chinese language education internationally have stimulated the continuous publication of textbooks teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Currently, there are various Chinese textbooks available. "Practice is the only criterion for testing truth." Therefore, the effect of learning Chinese should be reflected in students' performance in after-school exercises. Based on predecessors' research on Chinese teaching materials, the author chooses two primary Chinese teaching materials used by domestic universities (Shanghai International Studies University) and foreign Confucius Institutes (Confucius Institute at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru), Road to Success (upper elementary) and New Practical Chinese Reader, respectively. To be convenient, this article refers to Road to Success (upper elementary) and New Practical Chinese Reader as Road to Success and New Practical 2. Specifically, the comparison starts from the following aspects. The first is the analysis of the number of after-school exercises. The number of after-school exercises in the two sets of textbooks and the number of question types in each lesson should be compared to see if the number of questions can meet the needs of students and the most suitable question number. The second is a comparative study in terms of exercise types. The common question types of the two sets of textbooks should be investigated to analyze their advantages and disadvantages and indicate what areas need attention in the classroom. The third is the content. The fourth is the comparative analysis of fun and difficulty.

1. Theory and Principles of Textbook Compilation in Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second language acquisition theory describes the nature and process of second language acquisition, including language transfer, learning strategies, and learner mistakes and biases. Its main research goal is to explore how and why learners acquire a second language.

(1) The prerequisite for language acquisition is to place learners in a rich, meaningful, and understandable language input environment when applying the language. To acquire the ability to use language effectively, learners need a variety of language experiences to serve various communicative purposes [1]. For the development of teaching materials, there are four essential inspirations: 1) Ensure that there are enough oral and written discourses in the teaching materials to provide a large amount of language experience for students to deal with different topics, themes, events, etc. in various discourse types; 2) Ensure the authenticity of the input, i.e., the language in the input should be used in everyday life. If language materials are simplified or made up to illustrate certain language features, it will be difficult for learners to truly acquire the ability to use the language ordinarily and effectively; 3) Ensure that language input is contextualized. Input out of context cannot contain enough relevant information about users, communicators, communicative intentions, and communicative effects. Therefore, only truly contextualized language input can cultivate learners' sense of language; 4) Ensure that enough language samples appear in the actual application to provide learners with recurring language units or features conducive to natural language acquisition.

(2) To maximize learners' exposure to natural and practical language, language input must enable learners to engage in emotion and cognition fully. Learners who experience language will likely learn

nothing if they do not think and feel it. Active thinking is experiencing language that helps learners obtain the deep information processing required for effective and lasting learning [2]. It is conducive to learners' transfer of high-level skills to second language use, such as prediction, association, interpretation, evaluation, etc. For the development of teaching materials, the enlightening significance of this principle is: 1) Stimulating the cognitive and emotional engagement of learners should be the priority; 2) Make full use of learning activities to mobilize learners to think about the language materials they are exposed to; 3) Make full use of learning activities to allow learners to think and understand the language they are learning before, during, and after communicating using the target language.

(3) Language learners with positive emotions are more likely to acquire communicative competence than those without. In language learning, learners should have a positive emotional attitude towards the target language, learning environment, teachers, learning companions, learning materials, etc. In language learning, they should gain positive emotional experiences and be free to express happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy at any time. For the development of teaching materials, it has the following meanings: 1) to ensure that learning materials and tasks are as interesting, relevant, and enjoyable as possible to enhance learners' positive attitude toward language learning and to influence the learning process; 2) to set up some appropriate challenges to improve learners' self-esteem; 3) to stimulate learners' emotional responses before asking them to analyze the language materials they have learned, through means such as music, literature, art, controversial and challenging discourse topics, personally imitation or directly emotional expression.

(4) Language learners can benefit from noticing significant input features. If learners can actively notice how language items or features are used, learners are more likely to gain a sense of the target language and acquire the language more easily. Especially when learners fully engage in cognition and emotion, the effect of such intentional attention is more significant [3]. The inspirations for developing teaching materials are: 1) Advocate experiential teaching, allowing learners to experience the language in an all-around way. In this kind of language experience, implicit learning occurs. And when learners re-experience or reflect on their language experience, they will consciously pay attention to the language features and produce explicit learning; 2) Help learners (preferably in a cooperative way) to actively discover one or more features of the language, which is more effective than reminding learners to notice such language features and then explicitly explain or illustrate them.

(5) Learners need opportunities to use language to achieve communicative purposes. Such assumptions are built on learners' ability to abstract or use language effectively regarding their language intake [4]. Enlightenment to the development of teaching materials includes providing enough opportunities for learners to produce language to achieve the desired results. And these production activities should allow learners to use the language realistically rather than practicing certain language features. Therefore, production activities should be able to be fully contextualized since learners have to respond to natural language stimuli. And at the same time, the communicative object is specific, and the communication purpose is also evident. Finally, feedback opportunities should be integrated into output activities, and these results should get back to learners in subsequent learning activities.

2. Four Principles for Compiling After-school Exercises

Compiling after-school exercises is an integral part of the compilation of Chinese textbooks. The first few chapters have comprehensively analyzed and explained the characteristics, rules, and existing problems in *Road to Success, New Practical 2, and Comprehensive Workbook* regarding the amount, type, content, and arrangement of exercise questions from the compiled charts and relevant statistics.

To improve the overall writing level of after-school exercises, textbook writers need to pay more hardships and effort in the future to conduct more detailed, comprehensive, and in-depth discussions and research to summarize some basic principles [5]. The following are the writer's opinions on the design principles and compilation of after-school exercise workbooks.

2.1 Scientific Principles

Scientific theories should guide the compilation of after-school exercises. Theoretical understanding is the basis and premise of writing after-school exercises. Only when theoretical research is solid and in-depth can the design of after-school exercises be more practical and reasonable. The continuous development of Chinese international education, second language acquisition, and teaching research have significantly progressed in recent years. When compiling after-school exercises, writers should pay attention to absorbing the latest theoretical achievements, keeping pace with the times, integrating with modern life, and trying to apply the latest language theories. The after-school exercises of each set of textbooks always have their own overall goals and staged goals. The standards and requirements to be achieved for each stage and each type of after-school exercise are also subject to the overall goals to have their staged standards and quantitative requirements. For example, a certain type of exercise improves the accuracy of students' Chinese pronunciation, and a certain type of exercise trains students' understanding of particular grammar. And the way to test whether these questions are suitable is to put them into the overall system for inspection and determination. Therefore, the qualitative and quantitative objectives of the science should be established. Generally speaking, after-school exercises should include three types: mechanical, comprehensible, and flexible. The specific proportions of the three exercises should all be expressed in charts or numbers. Finally, it is necessary to systematically arrange the various contents from shallow to deep, from easy to complex, step by step, with clear layers. Knowledge and language skills training should be balanced and coordinated and have certain rules.

2.2 Interest Principle

The compilation of any teaching materials should obey the interest principle. Interesting knowledge, culture, games, things, and new anecdotes will enhance students' interest in learning. Interest is also closely related to the practicality and diversity of the after-school exercise content. The former requires the content to be vivid and reflect reality. In contrast, the latter requires lively and diverse exercise methods that inspire and enlighten people with humorous and elegant language style. And based on the research in this paper, the vivid and interesting illustrations in the design of after-school exercises greatly help the exercise effect. The 21st century is an era of continuous development of the Internet. With the continuous development of modern technology, such as audio technology, especially computer and multimedia technology, the method of multimedia CD-ROM can be used to strengthen the compilation of after-school exercises [6].

2.3 Pertinence Principle

When compiling teaching materials, the more targeted the content, the better the effect. The same is true for writing after-school exercises. When compiling teaching materials, writers must thoroughly consider the teaching objects, such as students' knowledge level, language skills, age, interests, learning purposes, etc. Different students' environments, cultural backgrounds, and language foundations vary widely. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills according to the particularity of each learner. Writers should also consider different psychological characteristics and the laws of language learning. It is necessary to fully understand the knowledge structure of learners at each stage and their potential need for new knowledge to formulate targeted amounts and types of questions.

Second, the after-school exercises' content should consider regional differences. Textbooks in different countries and regions have different after-school exercises. For example, "Road to Success" and "New Practical 2" studied in this paper have different users from different countries. Therefore, it is necessary to carefully consider the arrangement of different types of after-school exercises according to their characteristics. For example, for Japanese and Korean students, there could be fewer exercises in vocabulary and Chinese characters and more exercises in pronunciation and grammar. However, students from Europe, America, Latin America, and other countries have a better grasp of conjunctions and associated words in Chinese. Their grammatical concepts are more precise, so the exercises in this area can be appropriately reduced.

Again, the number of exercises should match the local school hours and system. The teaching materials used by full-time Chinese schools, half-day Chinese schools, after-school Chinese schools, and weekend Chinese schools should be suitable for their class hours. In addition, good after-school exercises should also consider students' individual differences at the same level. So, the textbook should arrange supplementary exercises based on fundamental exercises, ensuring that students with more energy can further improve after completing the basic teaching objectives and tasks.

2.4 Applicability Principle

The value of an exercise depends on whether it is suitable and practical. Therefore, the applicability principle runs through the compilation of after-school exercises. First, it is necessary to ensure that the number of exercises is moderate; secondly, the exercise form should be practical. The third is that the content of the after-school exercises should be practical and closely related to ordinary life, including the vocabulary, sentence patterns, functions, and context involved.

3. Suggestions for the Number of After-school Exercises

First, if each type of exercise has clear goals, the number of after-school exercises should be as sufficient as possible. Through the analysis of the relevant after-school exercises in the two sets of textbooks based on the practical experience of previous teaching and survey questionnaires, it is found that the number of after-school exercises in Chinese elementary textbooks should be controlled between 30-50 questions per lesson, which is easier for students to learn and is also beneficial for teachers to complete corresponding teaching tasks within the designated time.

It is believed that a sufficient number of after-school exercises play a crucial role in students' mastery of Chinese knowledge and communication skills. The increase in the number of questions, on the one hand, can meet the practice needs of learners, but on the other hand, it will inevitably bring some problems. To increase the number of exercises, the amount of a certain type of question is increased (such as "replacement exercises"); therefore, learners will inevitably feel monotonous and bored when practicing. Although the number of practices increases, the effect of practice has yet to be apparent. Therefore, the control of the number of after-school exercises is significant. The appropriate number of after-school exercises should meet two criteria: to facilitate teachers to organize teaching and to improve students' language ability.

4. Suggestions for After-school Exercise Content

As for the content of after-school exercises, it should be ensured that it is complete. A good set of Chinese teaching materials should be complete, detailed, and effectively coordinated with the subjective and objective. It is reflected in after-school exercises that it is systematic and contextual. Mastering a language is inseparable from the framework of the basic theory and the fluency of spoken expressions. Secondly, for the elementary Chinese stage, each set of textbooks can select exercises based on their specific content. For the knowledge that students need to master, high reproducibility of the main exercises allows learners to examine what they have learned in the text. Finally, it is necessary to pay attention to the combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all of which are indispensable, to exercise students' Chinese expression comprehensively.

5. Suggestions for After-school Exercise Arrangement

The arrangement of the after-school exercises, the use of the target language and the first language in the after-school exercises, whether the instructions for the exercises are clear enough, and the authenticity of the exercise materials all affect the compilation of the after-school exercises to varying degrees. The arrangement of teaching materials should follow the principle of easy before difficult, step by step, following the "perception - imitation - application" pattern.

It is necessary to grasp the textbook from the overall perspective. After-school exercises are part of the textbook and should be consistent with the textbook. Therefore, the design and arrangement of

after-school exercises shouldn't be separated from compiling textbooks. Compiling after-school exercises must be consistent with teaching materials' text, language, and grammar points. Moreover, the writing of after-school exercises must also be connected with each teaching component. For example, vocabulary, sentences, grammar, or discourses should all be reflected in the after-school exercises. In writing textbooks, the writers can only compile reasonable after-school exercises that adapt to the textbooks by grasping these two perspectives.

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