English Language Teaching; Vol. 15, No. 10; 2022
ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750
Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

Analyzing Task Types Used in Four High School English Textbooks in China

Yixin Qian[1]

[1] School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States

Correspondence: Yixin Qian, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15260, United States.

Received: August 31, 2022 Accepted: September 23, 2022 Online Published: September 26, 2022

doi: 10.5539/elt.v15n10p32 URL: https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v15n10p32

Abstract

In the past decade, many scholars conducted research concerning cultural content, policy changes, and other issues in the field of EFL textbook evaluation in China. However, a limited number of studies shift their attention to task types used in EFL textbooks. This study employs Nunan's (1999) task taxonomy to investigate how task types are presented in four main government-approved English textbooks at high school level in China and use Pearson's Chi-square test in two stages to examine whether any significant difference exists in the four textbooks. The findings reveal that at a macro level, linguistics tasks are viewed are the most important type while domestic educators show a mixed attitude toward the rest four task types. Under closer scrutiny, some sub-task types are payed more attention to than others in different versions of textbooks. This should raise concern because each task type exerts its unique effects on language learning. The aim of the study is to evaluate the quality of the four textbooks and spot potential problems in these teaching materials.

Keyword: textbook, evaluation, task type, English teaching

1. Introduction

In 2019, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued sweeping new guidance on textbook editing. In the following years, new textbooks have gradually been put into use on a national scale and covered a large number of students. According to the guidance, huge changes were made in these new versions of textbooks that would be used throughout high school. In terms of English textbooks, changes occur in areas such as multicultural issues, thinking abilities, healthy personality development, task types and so forth. A textbook is viewed as an important working instrument for both teachers and students. In a typical language class in China, textbooks are used to enliven the teaching profession and empower students. Teachers regard textbooks as guidelines in their daily teaching practice while students take textbooks as their road map for addressing challenges in the path of academic and professional success.

As is known to all, a textbook is an indispensable component in language education (Alemi, Ensafi, & Rezanejad, 2021; Dabbagh & Safaei, 2019; Vellenga, 2004; Wu, 2010). Research about the roles and influence of a textbooks has been conducted by many scholars for years (Alharbi, 2015). A language textbook is even dubbed the second important factor after the teacher in a language class (Chapelle, 2009). It is used not only to guide teachers how to teach but also present key knowledge points through tasks (Ayu & Indrawati, 2018). A high-quality textbook provides essential knowledge structure, a syllabus, and elaborately selected materials, helping standardize instruction and providing rich learning resources, the role of which is thus self-evident.

A task, defined as a piece of meaning-centered work, allowing language learners to understand, produce and communicate in the target language, figures as one of the vital elements that compose of a textbook (Rozati, 2014). A well-designed task helps foster students' thinking ability and facilitate their academic performance. In a task-based language teaching class, students are given abundant opportunities to become active learners when they proceed with different types of tasks (Abraham, 2015). Little research, however, has been done to evaluate the qualities of those new versions of English textbooks in terms of their task designing and further investigate whether goals such as improving students' language abilities or boosting academic performance have been achieved. Thus, this study aims to examine and evaluate the qualities of those newly edited textbooks from the aspect of task type presented in four main versions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Research on Textbook Evaluation in China

The English language is playing a pivotal role in China (Jiang, 2014). Against this background, the English language textbooks has undergone numerous changes since its first modernization movement in the last century. A variety of textbooks, especially school textbooks, have been evaluated based on different criteria and from several dimensions. For example, in Xu's (2013) study, scholars evaluated textbooks from a cultural aspect. A full set of English textbooks, published by the People's Education Press of China, used in secondary schools in China were evaluated to examine how indigenous and international cultural content co-existed in a textbook and whether the content helped students develop multicultural and globalization awareness. In this study, multiculturalism was found incorporated in the texts. In addition, students were able to focus on both worldwide and local "functionalities" of English through learning. Similarly, in order to examine ideologies of English in Chinese high school EFL textbooks, Xiong and Qian (2012) applied critical analysis method in their study. They emphasized the importance of intercultural understanding of both global and domestic culture after they found that the textbooks they evaluated could not help students foster cross-cultural awareness.

In terms of policy changes, for example, in Lam's study where 214 non-foreign-language specialists and 193 foreign-language-specialists participated, it has been found that foreign-language education policy has experienced six historical phases and younger language learners have been studying in more favorable circumstances because policy efforts gradually escalate (Lam, 2003).

From the perspective of task usage in English language textbooks, current studies also have some noticeable findings. For example, after scholars compared government-approved language textbooks from China and South Korea at junior high school levels, not enough meaningful tasks have been found to facilitate students' cognitive mindsets though those tasks were differentiated according to grade levels (Butler, Kang, Kim, & Liu, 2018). While in Yu and Reynolds's (2004) study, scholars found that the use of writing tasks in PEP High School English did obtain satisfactory effects according to the requirements in the New Curriculum Standard after they've examined task type, genre, covered topic, input, writing prompt, teaching method, and writing approach. Students were given enough opportunities to be exposed to different topics familiar or unfamiliar to them and write with proper instructions and prompts. However, one concern was that teachers would probably be constrained by textbooks. To eliminate the concern, scholars suggested that textbook users should customize tasks and use learning materials more flexibly. In order to evaluate a listening textbook—ALC, used in most Chinese universities—Zhang (2020) applied Cunningsworth's checklist with some modification in the study. Three aspects, namely text types of listening materials, listening tasks and activities, distribution of language skills, were investigated, leading to a conclusion that the overall organization of the tasks and listening materials were suitable. Meanwhile, several problems were detected. For example, authentic listening materials should be considered to foster students' phonetic awareness. More task types such as group discussion or debate should be involved to boost learners' confidence. All in all, ALC is a well-designed textbook in the Chinese context, though leaving space for improvement.

However, the number of empirical and theoretical studies that have been conducted to evaluate tasks used in textbooks is still limited in China. More studies about textbooks have been carried out from teachers' and students' perspectives rather than from the textbook per se. Thus, this study aims to discern the merit and demerit of some new versions of English textbooks under a close scrutiny of how tasks are used in those teaching materials.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Mao's (2012) study briefly reviewed the history of task taxonomy. In this study, several models were introduced to build a general idea of how tasks were classified historically. For example, in Willis' classification model, tasks—listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, and problem solving, to name a few—were labeled based on the actual use of language. While in Prabhu's model where the importance of cognitive training outstanded, three kinds of tasks were identified: information-gap, opinion-gap and reasoning-gap tasks. In addition, based on how tasks are structured, they are also divided into closed or open ones. A closed task means it is goal-oriented and highly structured. By contrast, an open task has a more loose structure and vague goals. In Oura's (2001) model, tasks could specifically be classified regarding their goals, inputs, activities, settings, and role. This study uses Nunan's (1999) task taxonomy to analyze data since this model is more specific and comprehensive than aforementioned models. In Nunan's model, tasks are divided into five groups with sub-categories (see Table 1). Briefly speaking, cognitive tasks mainly train students' thinking abilities while interpersonal tasks focus on how students' interact with peers and teachers. A linguistics task helps students acquire target knowledge points and

practice linguistic patterns. In an affective task, students are required to do some reflection and their attention has been shifted from the outer world into feelings and ideas they perceived more from their own perspectives. Creative tasks place value on students' creativity ability and help them elicit new ideas.

Table 1. Task Type (Nunan, 1999)

Cognitive tasks	Interpersonal tasks	Linguistics tasks	Affective tasks	Creative tasks
Classifying	Co-operating	Conversational Patterns	Personalizing	Brainstorming
Predicting	Role Playing	Practicing	Self-evaluating	Other Tasks
Inducing		Using context	Reflecting	
Note Taking		Summarizing		
Concept Mapping		Selective reading/listening		
Inferencing		Skimming		
Discriminating				
Diagramming				

2.3 Purpose of the Study

After Chinese Ministry of Education launched a project to revise compulsory education courses' textbooks in 2019, multiple changes have been made in new English textbooks. One change is the introduction of different types of tasks. As one part of a textbook, tasks are playing an indispensable role in facilitating students' learning process and fostering thinking skills (Krause, Béneker, & Tartwijk, 2021). The present study attempts to evaluate four latest versions of English textbooks that are widely used in Chinese high schools and are reputed to be the most authoritative learning materials. It aims to identify task types based on Nunan's (1999) classification of tasks and reveal the frequency and percentage of these task types. Further, the study investigates whether there is any preference of task types in the four textbooks. The following are the two research questions:

1) What kinds of task types are applied in the four textbooks and what is the frequency and percentage of each task in those textbooks?
2) Is the occurrence and frequency of task types in the four textbooks significantly different?

3. Method

3.1 The Corpus

The high school English textbooks used in this study are from four most magisterial textbook series used in most regions in China. Each series has six volumes, three of which are for compulsory courses—labeled volume one, two, and three and used sequentially—and the other three are used in selective courses. Since it is unlikely that every student is required to take selective courses, this study mainly focuses on the third volume of compulsory textbooks from each series. Because those series are published by Shanghai Education Publishing House, The Yilin Press, People's Education Press, and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press respectively, the abbreviations of the four versions of textbooks in this study are SEP, YL, PE, and FLTR. All four textbooks were first published in 2019 and reprinted in the following years. In this study, the first edition is chosen.

3.2 Procedure

This study uses a mixed method. To answer the first research question, qualitative analysis is applied when tasks are extracted and manually classified into groups according to Nunan's (1999) framework. In the first step, tasks are discerned from other parts of the textbooks. Second, the ultimate purpose of each task and the basic skills required in this task are identified. On the basis of previous analyses of tasks' purposes and skills involved, all tasks are classified into different groups under the forementioned framework. In the quantitative part, the frequency and percentage of each task type is calculated and presented in diagrams. For the second research question, Pearson's Chi-square test is performed to examine if there is any significant difference in the occurrence and frequency of task types in these textbooks from both micro and macro levels.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Research Question 1: Task Type and Frequency

Through careful analysis of each textbook in terms of its task types, it is clear that all five types are included in every textbook. The total numbers of the five task types are demonstrated in Figure 1, showing a general idea about the distribution of the main task types. The percentage of each task type is presented in Figure 2. Frequency and percentage of sub-categories of each task listed in Table 2 demonstrates more details about how sub-tasks are arranged in each textbook.

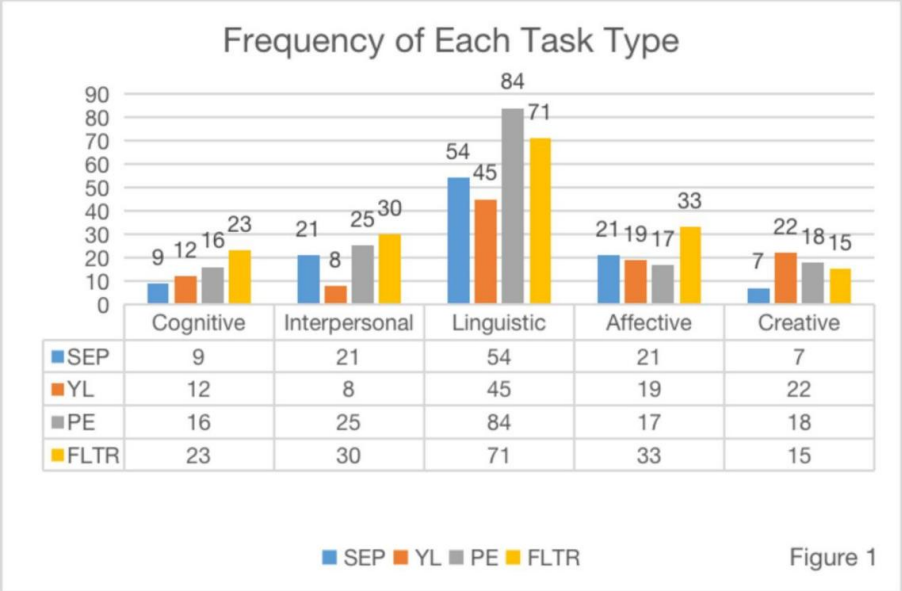


Figure 1. Frequency of Each Task Type

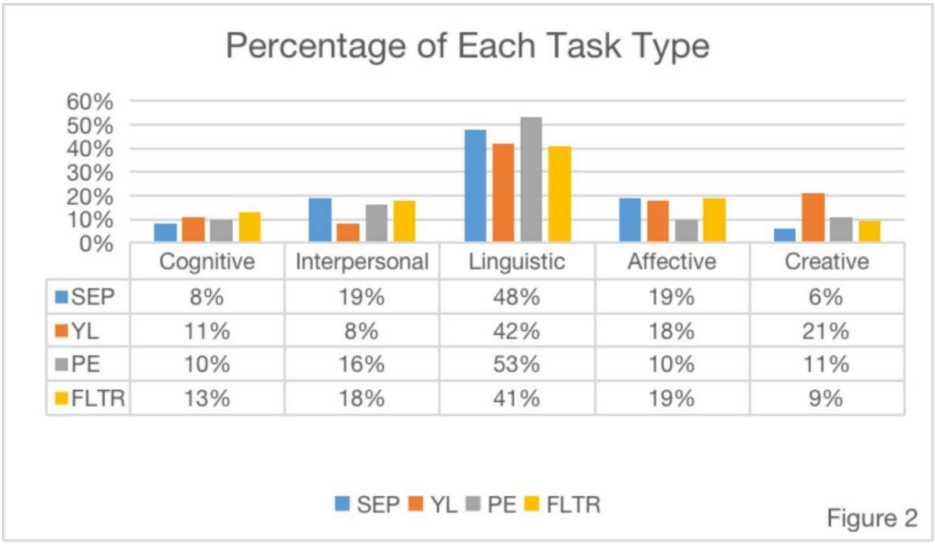


Figure 2. Percentage of Each Task Type

At a macro level, linguistic tasks are the core of each textbook, which reveals that the essential goal of all four textbooks is associated with language acquisition and relevant linguistic skills. This result also aligns with findings in other researches. For example, in Alemi, Ensafi, and Rezanejad's (2021) study, scholars found that linguistic tasks occurred the most in their global business English textbooks. In a similar vein, Elmiana's (2018) study concerned with evaluation of local senior high school English textbooks showed that the importance of linguistic tasks overshadowed the others'. The priority of other task types in the four textbooks, however, is noticeably different, probably indicating that each textbook is re-edited with disparate pedagogical philosophies.

Regarding the cognitive task, the frequency of this task type is ranked the fourth position in version SEP (8%), version YL (11%), version FLTR (13%), and fifth in version PE (10%). This result indicates that the value of this

task type is under-emphasized in all four textbooks. The second task type, interpersonal task, is the second frequent in version SEP (19%) and PE (16%), the third in version FLTR (18%), and the fifth in YL (8%). This fact reflects an inconsistent attitude from the four editor groups toward the value of interpersonal skills in language learning. Educators editing version SEP and PE highly appreciate the value of interpersonal task while this task type is considered apparently less important in version YL. In regard to the frequency of affective task, this type ranks the second place in version SEP (19%) and FLTR (19%), the third in version YL (18%), and the fifth in version PE (10%). The ranking conveys a mixed message that some scholars highly value internalized learning process while others think affective tasks carry less weight. Similarly, educators harbor divergent views of the importance of creative task. In version YL, the number of creative tasks occupy 21% of the total number of tasks, ranking the second; yet, this task type ranks the lowest in both version SEP (6%) and FLTR (9%). In conclusion, linguistic task type has the highest frequency, a clear sign of its importance, in the four textbooks. Cognitive task type, however, is of less significance in the four versions. With regard to the rest task types, scholars' ideas are divided.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of sub-categories of tasks

Book	SEP		YL		PE		FLTR	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Cognitive								
Classifying	5	4.46	3	2.83	1	0.63	1	0.58
Predicting	3	2.68	1	0.94	8	5.00	2	1.16
Inducing	1	0.89	5	4.72	4	2.50	6	3.49
Note Taking					1	0.63	2	1.16
Concept Mapping			1	0.94	1	0.63	1	0.58
Inferencing								
Discriminating			1	0.94	1	0.63	2	1.16
Diagramming			1	0.94			9	5.23
Total	9		12		16		23	
Interpersonal								
Co-operating	20	17.86	8	7.55	19	11.88	21	12.21
Role Playing	1	0.89			6	3.75	9	5.23
Total	21		8		25		30	
Linguistic								
Conversational Patterns			2	1.89	11	6.88	7	4.07
Practicing	24	21.43	18	16.98	34	21.25	27	15.70
Using context							1	0.58
Summarizing			5	4.72	3	1.88	2	1.16
Selective reading/listening	30	26.79	20	18.87	36	22.50	25	14.53
Skimming							9	5.23
Total	54		45		84		71	

Affective								
Personalizing	17	15.18	7	6.60	12	7.50	27	15.70
Self-evaluating	4	3.47	8	7.55			6	3.49
Reflecting			4	3.77	5	3.13		
Total	21		19		17		33	
Creative								
Brainstorming	2	1.79	5	4.72	1	0.63	1	0.58
Other Tasks	5	4.46	17	16.04	17	10.63	14	8.14
Total	7		22		18		15	
Total	112		106		160		172	

Note. F=Frequency; P=Percentage.

4.1.1 Cognitive Task

In terms of cognitive tasks, FLTR places the greatest value on this task type and involves the most types of sub-tasks (N=7) when compared with the other three versions of textbooks. The YL version, though not including as many cognitive tasks as FLTR, also has a wide variety of activities (N=6) in its textbook. Predicting, inducing, and classifying are the three most preferred sub-tasks which are employed in all four textbooks while note taking, concept mapping, and discriminating are the least considered. Inferencing is utterly disregarded in all four textbooks.

Sub-category classifying in the four textbooks is mainly used to categorize vocabulary, which helps students render a text more comprehensible and thus enhance students' reading ability (Granda & Ramirez-Avila, 2020). All four textbooks use classifying (4.46%, 2.83%, 0.63%, and 0.58%) to help students better review key words or acquire target words. Predicting is another commonly used task in the textbooks. Predicting helps language learners prepare in a new context more sufficiently, resulting in effective language acquisition (Elmiana, 2018). The four textbooks employ predicting (2.68%, 0.94%, 5.00%, and 1.16%) as part of the in-class activities to trigger students' curiosity and students may be more attentive in class because an answer for the question is under exploration. What is more admirable is that in version PE, the predicting task is assigned in forms of blank filling, which can later be reused to review newly taught words and expressions, and requires students to check their previous answers after studying, as a result of which students' learning memory is probably strengthened through self-correction or peer-correction (Ganji, 2009). Inducing is the third task type (0.89%, 4.72%, 2.50%, and 3.49%) appearing in all four textbooks. Inducing is reckoned as a more effective pedagogical method when compared with deductive approaches in teaching grammar (Correa, Torres, Cueva, & Saritama, 2019). In a traditional English class in China, teachers usually use deductive approaches to guide students while after this textbook reform, some versions of textbooks, especially the version YL, PE, and FLTR, have a breakthrough in grammar instructions. Only versions YL (0.94%) and FLTR (5.23%) apply diagramming, a simplified visual formatting device that conveys essential information, to instruct students to extract and tease out key points from passages (Aryanti, 2019).

Note taking (0.63% and 1.16%), concept mapping (0.94%, 0.63%, and 0.58%), and discriminating (0.94%, 0.63%, and 1.16%) are less used in four textbooks. A compelling explanation is that the three task types are less likely to be encountered in a formal test. In some regions, for example, students are less likely to be required to take listening tests where note-taking should be trained to get a higher score. Nonetheless, these task types are all effective cognitive training strategies. For example, discriminating is conducive to processing language and discerning information, whilst concept mapping has positive impact on vocabulary learning, critical thinking awareness, and other learning achievement (Chen & Hwang, 2019; Chularut & DeBacker, 2004; Liu, 2016). Note taking strategy also plays its part in improving students' reading comprehension, listening skills, and other basic skills (Özçakmak, 2019; Bahrami & Nosratzadeh, 2017). Inferencing functions as a facilitator in further meaning guessing and better reading comprehension (Juliana, 2018; Lee, 2013). Unfortunately, no textbook uses inferencing as a learning strategy. It may be because this type of tasks is more demanding while the probability of inferring questions appearing in important standard tests is not high.

Cognitive tasks provide students with opportunities to link their background knowledge to further study and may contribute to effective learning in that this type of tasks engages higher-order thinking (Elmiana, 2018). Thus, it is suggested that more sub-categories should be involved in textbooks, thereby improving students' cognitive skills and leading to more effective language learning.

4.1.2 Interpersonal Task

All four textbooks apply more co-operating task (17.86%, 7.55%, 11.88%, and 12.21%) than role playing task (0.89%, 3.75%, and 5.23%). Part of the reason behind the preference is that Chinese students are used to keeping silent and reticent in a classroom setting (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2020). Encouraging students to speak up in a class can even be a challenge to language teachers, let alone requiring students to play a scenario. Consequently, role-playing task where there are more dramatic behaviors like acting out a situation than normal idea expression is less likely to be fully completed as assumed.

The use of co-operating task may improve students' collaboration and communication skills since students have opportunities to share their ideas under a subject where students consciously or subconsciously repeat target language patterns, which further helps students to acquire target knowledge. Meanwhile, when voices are heard from disparate aspects, students are inspired and enlightened to explore more in class. Furthermore, some co-operating tasks, for example, in version FLTR, ask students to provide detailed definition, simple explanation, sound reasons, supporting or counter examples, and a logical conclusion. During the process of making such a persuasive speech backed up with rational and cogent arguments, students have to collect information from their peers and do careful analysis while modifying their original views and refining the whole speech and therefore co-operating task is more like an integrated task than solely a task used to boost socializing and cooperating skills.

Role-playing, though less considered in the four textbooks, is also proven to be beneficial to students in a learning environment (Alabsi, 2016; Encalada & Villafuerte, 2018). In a role-play task, students may have vicarious experience when they are immersed in performing, through which students have a deeper understanding about what they are learning. The use of role-playing technique also contributes to the development of other skills. For example, in version FLTR, students are asked to imagine how they should respond to their peers in a specific scenario, which indicates a creative mindset is fostered. However, the frequency of this sub-category is not high in the four textbooks. It is suggested that various kinds of interpersonal tasks should be designed to offer students more opportunities to apply a language in our real life, though which means teachers may need to put effort to make students more engaged.

4.1.3 Linguistic Task

Two categories, namely practicing and selective reading/listening are the most popular sub-task types in the set of linguistic task. In the four versions of textbooks, practice is presented in different forms such as filling blank, rewriting or completing sentences, circling proper words, correcting word forms, judging statements, answering different types of questions and the like. Those forms are commonly employed in many nationwide standard tests in China. It further indicates that educators of those editor groups purposefully involve testing elements into a textbook in order to help students get familiar with a real test. Concerning the frequency of selective reading/listening in the four textbooks (26.79%, 18.87%, 22.50%, and 14.53%), the designs of those textbooks seem to greatly meet the need of helping students get high scores in standard tests because in most regions in China, speaking skill is less or even not assessed when compared with reading and listening skill. In many regions, writing skill is also put less weight on, though seemingly more important than speaking in a test. Given the status quo in the field of language teaching in China, it is understandable that the two sub-categories are more frequently appearing in those textbooks.

However, a significant enhancement in some versions of textbooks is that the task type—conversational patterns—starts to take its place in the latest versions, occupying 1.89% in YL version, 6.88% in PE versions, and 4.07% in version FLTR. Because speaking skill is very important in the real world, a task encouraging students to master some linguistic patterns during speaking process has pedagogical implications for academic performance and assists learners to be more competent in the future (Sadiku, 2015). Thus, a reasonable number of well-designed conversational pattern tasks are necessary in a language textbook.

Summarizing is applied in three versions (4.72%, 1.88%, and 1.16%) except version SEP. To summarize a learning material, students have to find structural information and combine them into a sentence or paragraph that is coherent and pithy, meanwhile, leaving out unimportant or specific information (Pečjak & Pirc, 2018). Students have to visually or auditorily process each word, identify the meaning of it, evaluate the importance of the conveyed information, and ultimately translate the essential meaning into their own words in a more compact

way orally or in a written form. Thus, summarizing skill catalyzes the development of multiple language skills (Balaban, 2016; Plakans, Liao, & Wang, 2019). However, in version SEP, this task type is totally ignored. The summarizing learning strategy can probably be used at the end of a certain section to help students review what they've learned and teachers monitor how students comprehend a learning material as is done in version YL. In version FLTR, this learning tool is used to help students peruse each paragraph and figure out what the functions of each paragraph are. Hence, this learning strategy can be used in different ways to achieve various teaching goals.

Using context and skimming are two least considered sub categories: only version FLTR applies the two task types. In fact, both learning strategies have their niches in language learning. For example, in Scanlon and Anderson's (2020) study, a positive relationship between context-based strategy and the grasp of new words has been firmly established. As for the skimming task, an array of studies have validated the effectiveness of skimming in improving reading rate and comprehension (Dhillon, Herman, & Syafryadin, 2020; Fauzi, 2018; Yusuf, Q., Yusuf, Y. Q., Yusuf, B., & Nadya, A. 2017). Accordingly, it is believed that at least a moderate number of tasks of the two types should be considered in one textbook.

4.1.4 Affective Task

Personalizing task is used in all four textbooks (15.18%, 6.60%, 7.50%, and 15.70%). When students are doing this task, they are given an opportunity to share their personal ideas and link their background knowledge to what they've newly learned. Previous study has substantiated that personalizing task has positive effects on students' motivation, mental focus, and learning efficiency (Cordova & Lepper, 1996). Other studies have also found that when students are able to use their background knowledge in a language class, their academic performance of reading, listening, and other areas is greatly improved (Krekeler, 2006; Levine & Haus, 1985; Long, 2008). All four textbooks post questions about personal experience, feelings, and ideas under specific themes, to which a high-quality class is partly attributed.

With regard to the sub-task—self-evaluation, three versions take advantages of this strategy to help students gain academic achievement. Indeed, a cornucopia of researches have proven that a compound goal of gaining knowledge, upgrading professional skills, and developing learner autonomy can be achieved not only by letting students attend regular teacher-directed classes but also take self-evaluation (Jamrus & Razali, 2019; Morales & Mena, 2016; Suwanarak, 2018; Wiśniewska, 2016). Autonomous learning ability is likewise ascribed by scholars to reflecting task (Boonma & Swatevacharkul, 2020; Feng, 2015). However, it still has noticeable difference from self-evaluating task. Reflecting task requires students to further consider what can be the optimal leaning plan in the future learning process while self-evaluation helps students assess their current academic performance. Only two versions considered to use this strategy to promote students' self-regulated learning. Since the two tasks, though sharing some overlaps of their functions, serve for different goals, they should be included simultaneously. Admittedly, owing to the limitation of the length of a textbook, a trade-off of different task types should be made. A textbook should involve more task types, whereby benefits are brought to students from diverse aspects.

4.1.5 Creative Task

The four versions of textbooks use creative tasks to engage students into abundant learning activities in and out of class. Given that the editor groups organize tasks in their distinct forms and with different priorities, one adaption made based on Nunan's (1999) framework is that all creative tasks are generally categorized into a single minor associated group, except brainstorming that is classified separately.

Findings suggest clear-cut connections between creative activities and positive results of language learning such as the increase of students' motivation and participation in an English class, the promotion of comprehension, and retention of content materials (Gidoni & Rajuan, 2018; Karwowski et al., 2020; Kohnke, 2018). A position that the importance of creativity has even ascended to the centrality of a language class is held in previous studies (Constantinides, 2010; Richards & Cotterall, 2016). Through these studies, creativity ability showcases its importance in a successful language class.

All four versions of textbooks use creative tasks as a vehicle for establishing a climate where students are encouraged to participate in a wide assortment of activities with their imagination, curiosity, and other personal qualities that are crucial elements of language learning. In addition, the creative tasks are presented in different forms in these textbooks to achieve different goals. In version SEP, for example, students are asked to do some researches, as a result of which their scientific mindset is developed through data collecting, analyzing, and information leveraging. Some creative tasks in version YL boost students' cooperation skills and develop their strategic thinking and planning skills because a typical creative task in this version, for instance, requires

students to spot an environmental problem and find solutions to this problem in groups. While in version PE, one unique feature of the creative tasks is that students are given opportunities to learn in their communities and they are expected to be equipped with strong hands-on skills such as making a poster with vignettes or illustration. In version FLTR, one creative task requires students to do recommendation about a local artist. In this task, students are required to make a speech with learned linguistic patterns. This training reflects how students assimilate knowledge taught in the early segments of the unit and improves their speaking skills. Every textbook prioritizes different skills but the four textbooks also have overlaps in task designing. For example, they all highly value the ability of integrating information from diverse resources. These meaningful tasks expand opportunities to motivate students to actively engage in a language class and sufficient development of pedagogical conditions is expected to take place for their effective implementation in a real classroom setting.

4.2 Research Question 2: Difference in Task Types

The second research question explores the difference of occurrence and frequency of different task types, thereby examining whether the tasks of textbooks are designed with regional features or they share similar pedagogical philosophy nationwide. Pearson's Chi-square test is applied to test the relation between task types and the textbooks in two stages. In the first stage, the Chi-square is performed to provide a holistic view of the difference among textbooks. The Chi-square value of 26. 542, with an associated significance level less than 0.01 (Asymp. sig < 0.01), and with the degree of freedom 12 (df=12), suggests a statistically significant relationship among textbooks. This result clearly showcases that the four textbooks hold dissimilar views of the usage of task types. Furthermore, it indicates that educators of different regions in China may privilege different skills in a language class. Considering that educators in this field have diverse ideas, it can also be regarded as an opportunity for people to communicate and exchange their opinions and thoughts. Teachers are encouraged to compare different versions of textbooks available in the market to meet the needs of their perspective students (Alemi et al., 2021).

In the second stage, what attitudes toward the five specific task types are held is examined. Table 3 shows the ultimate results of Chi-square test of those task types. It turns out that educators share similar views of the usage of cognitive tasks. Based on the results in Table 3 and earlier discussion, it can be inferred that cognitive training is generally undervalued nationwide. It is strongly suggested that teachers and educators should help students foster their cognitive skills, one crucial factor at play in the future.

The result of Chi-square test demonstrates that there is slight difference among the four textbook versions with regard to linguistic task type. The forementioned discussion conveys a message that educators in China primarily privilege language training. However, since they hold different views about how to use other tasks, the proportion of this task type in a certain textbook is changing accordingly. In terms of interpersonal and affective task types, domestic educators have more different views. As is discussed before, version SEP, PE, and FLTR place interpersonal task at the second rank and version SEP, YL, and FLTR position affective tasks at the second or third place. Only version YL and PE put less emphasis on interpersonal task and affective task respectively. Therefore, it can be implied that most educators appreciate the benefits brought by the two task types.

How to use creative task type in a textbook is probably the most debatable issue among the five task types. The integration of creative tasks and a language class is a huge challenge in that a traditional language class in China involves a very limited number of creative tasks. Teachers are not familiar with the pedagogical approaches and the teaching techniques in this area. However, the use of new textbooks offers an opportunity for teachers to combine creative tasks into their language classes and explore new learning modes with students.

Table 3. Results of Chi-square test

Task Type	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig
Cognitive	1.651	3	> 0.50
Interpersonal	5.575	3	< 0.25
Linguistic	2.565	3	<0.05
Affective	4.650	3	< 0.25
Creative	12.101	3	< 0.01

5. Conclusion

This study has mainly analyzed how five task types are used in the latest versions of textbooks, what effects of those tasks are exerted on language learning, and whether there is any significant difference of the occurrence and frequency of those tasks among the four textbooks. Through the lens provided by the two research questions,

the linguistic task is generally considered the most important task type among all macro task types while attitudes toward the rest four task types are complicated. Educators from the four editor groups add weight to the value of different task types given that the proportion of the macro task types are not the same. On the micro level, educators also hold disparate ideas about how to apply sub-tasks into a textbook. As aforementioned, each task has its particular implication for language learning. However, concerns including whether the textbooks can help students pass standard tests exist in a whole educational context. Some task types are, therefore, less considered.

The results of this study may enlighten textbook users and designers from the following aspects. First, since each task functions uniquely, it is suggested to involve a wider range of types. An alternative solution is that teachers can take advantages of different textbook versions to get access to more forms of tasks and ideas from peers. Second, there is room left for teachers and educators to explore how to foster creative skills, cognitive skills, and other basic skills to meet needs in the 21st century and seek for new pedagogical methods. Third, mixed attitudes toward those task types indicate that educators from different regions should build a community where enough voices should be heard so that the quality of textbooks in the future will be improved. Additionally, finding in this study can be used to discern what extra learning materials can be added into a language class to help students become more competitive in a long term.

6. Limitation and Future Study

Even though this study has covered four authoritative English textbooks, there are other popular versions currently used in China. For example, textbooks published by Shanghai Foreign Language Press, Beijing Normal University Press, ShangDong Education Press, Chinese Science Press and other publishing houses are all commonly used teaching materials. In the future study, it is strongly suggested that other versions of textbooks can be compared and contrasted so that users of these textbooks may have a more holistic view about the advantages, disadvantages, and unique features of each textbook. Through a more systemic research, educators will be given a chance to explore more must-have features and take advantage of those features in the next textbook reform.

The textbook reform undertaken by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2019 involves significant changes in a variety of aspects such as the arrangement of target and indigenous cultural content, refined learning strategies, introduction of a more multidimensional knowledge structure and so forth. Moreover, the application of student-centered instructions becomes a salient feature in those new versions. Teachers, for example, are required to use more inductive instructions to stimulate the thinking of students in a language class. This study, however, has only concentrated on task issues. In the future, scholars should conduct research from a different perspective to assess how these new textbooks actually function in daily language learning.

One noticeable feature revealed in the English textbooks in this study is the combination of both domestic and international pedagogical methods. It indicates a change in terms of teaching philosophy. The two points discussed above rest on the idea of horizontal analysis. To understand how certain changes affect language learning over time, scholars may examine how textbooks have been re-edited and reformed through a historical lens. A limited number of research related to English textbook compiling and editing has heretofore been carried out to offer a comprehensive view about the history of English textbook development. This study does not apply a vertical analysis method, either. One suggestion for future study is that researchers should use vertical analysis by comparing textbooks used in different periods of time to investigate whether a change made in a textbook meets the needs of native language learners and whether elements greatly contributing to the present-day language education should be reconsidered in a textbook.

References

Abraham, A. P. (2015). Teaching and Learning to Write: Using a Task-Based Approach in an EFL Class. In Al-Mahrooqi, R., Thakur, V. S. & Roscoe, A. (Eds.), *Methodologies for Effective Writing Instruction in EFL and ESL Classrooms.* Penn: IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-6619-1.ch008

Alabsi, T. A. (2016). The Effectiveness of Role Play Strategy in Teaching Vocabulary. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 6*(2), 227-234. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0602.02

Alemi, M., Ensafi, A., & Rezanejad, A. (2021). Global Business Textbook Evaluation: Task Types in the Spotlight. *IARTEM E-journal, 13*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.21344/iartem.v13i1.826

Alharbi, A. (2015). A descriptive-evaluative study of a Saudi EFL textbook series. *Cogent Education, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1079946

Aryanti, S. (2019). Learning Elliptical Sentences Through Diagramming by the Eleventh Grade Students of Pembina Senior High School of Palembang. *Journal of English Study Programme, 2*(1), 55-69. https://doi.org/10.31851/esteem.v2i1.4816

Ayu, M., & Indrawati, R. (2018). EFL Textbook Evaluation: the Analysis of Tasks Presented in English Textbook. *TEKNOSASTIK: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra, 16*(1), 21-25. https://doi.org/10.33365/ts.v16i1.87

Bahrami, F., & Nosratzadeh, H. (2017). The Effectiveness of Note-Taking on Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature, 6*(7), 308-317. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.7p.308

Balaban, S. (2016). The Effect of Summarization as a Pre-Listening Technique at University Preparatory Classes. *American Journal of Educational Research, 4*(1), 126-133.

Boonma, N., & Swatevacharkul, R. (2020). The effect of autonomous learning process on learner autonomy of English public speaking students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 10*(1), 194-205. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v10i1.25037

Butler, Y. G., Kang, K. I., Kim, H. J., & Liu, Y. T. (2018). Tasks' appearing in primary school textbooks. *ELT Journal, 72*(3), 285-295. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx056

Chapelle, C. A. (2009). A Hidden Curriculum in Language Textbooks: Are Beginning Learners of French at U.S. Universities Taught About Canada? *The Modern Language Journal, 93*(2), 139-152. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00852.x

Chen, M. A., & Hwang, G. J. (2019). Effects of a concept mapping-based flipped learning approach on EFL students' English speaking performance, critical thinking awareness and speaking anxiety. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 51*(3), 817-834. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12887

Chularut, P., & DeBacker, T. K. (2004). The Influence of Concept Mapping on Achievement, Self-regulation, and Self-efficacy in students of English as a second language. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 29*(3), 248-263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2003.09.001

Constantinides, M. (2010). Creating creative teachers. In A. Maley & P. Peachey (Eds.), *Creativity in the English lan-guage classroom* (pp. 115-123). London, England: British Council.

Cordova, D. L., & Lepper, M. R. (1996). Intrinsic motivation and the process of learning: Beneficial effects of contextualization, personalization, and choice. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*(4), 715-730. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.88.4.715

Correa, C. B., Torres, P. G., Cueva, C. O., & Saritama, A. V. (2019). A Comparison between Deductive and Inductive Approaches for Teaching EFL Grammar to High School Students. *International Journal of Instruction, 12*(1), 225-236. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.12115a

Dabbagh, A., & Safaei, A. (2019). Comparative Textbook Evaluation: Representation of Learning Objectives in Locally and Internationally Published ELT Textbooks. *Issues in Language Teaching (ILT), 8*(1), 249-277. https://doi.org/10.22054/ilt.2020.48071.440

Dhillon, B., Herman, H., & Syafryadin, S. (2020). The Effect of Skimming Method to Improve Students' Ability in Reading Comprehension on Narrative Text. *Linguists: Journal Of Linguistics and Language Teaching, 6*(1), 77-88. https://doi.org/10.29300/ling.v6i1.2991

Elmiana, D. S. (2018). A Critical Analysis of Tasks in Senior High School EFL Textbooks in Indonesia. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 15*(2), 257-565. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2018.15.2.14.462

Encalada, M. A. R., & Villafuerte, J. S. (2018). The Influence of Implementing Role-play as an Educational Technique on EFL Speaking Development. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 8*(7), 726-732. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0807.02

Fauzi, I. (2018). The Effectiveness of Skimming and Scanning Strategies in Improving Comprehension and Reading Speed Rates to Students of English Study Programme. *Register Journal, 11*(1), 101-120. https://doi.org/10.18326/rgt.v11i1.101-120

Feng, T. (2015). Assessing Learner Autonomy and EFL Vocabulary Acquisition: A Case Study. *Beyond Words, 3*(1), 78-115. https://doi.org/10.33508/bw.v3i1.678

Ganji, M. (2009). Teacher-correction, Peer-correction and Self-correction: Their Impacts on Iranian Students' IELTS Essay Writing Performance. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 6*(1), 117-139.

Gidoni, Y., & Rajuan, M. (2018). The use of drawing tasks as a creative strategy for pupils in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. *Journal of Second Language Teaching and Research, 6*(1), 5-19.

Granda, G. K. A., & Ramirez-Avila, M. R. (2020). Classifying vocabulary in Google Sheets to improve word recognition and reading comprehension in EFL learners: an action research study. *AtoZ: novas práticas em informação e conhecimento, 9*(2), 24-31. https://doi.org/10.5380/atoz.v9i2.73526

Jamrus, M. H. M., & Razali, A. B. (2019). Using Self-Assessment as a Tool for English Language Learning. *English Language Teaching, 12*(11), 64-73. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n11p64

Jiang, Y. J. (2014). China English: Issues, Studies and Features. *Asian Englishes, 5*(2), 4-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2002.10801095

Juliana, J. (2018). The Comparative Impacts of Using Lexical Glossing and Inferencing Strategies on Students' Reading Comprehension. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 9*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.9n.1p.1

Karwowski, M., Jankowska, D. M., Brzeski, A., Czerwonka, M., Gajda, A., Lebuda, I., & Beghetto, R. A. (2020). Delving Into Creativity and Learning. In *Creative Learning in Digital and Virtual Environments.* U.K.: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003094630-2

Kohnke, L. (2018). Using comic strips to stimulate student creativity in language learning. *Tesol Journal, 10*(2), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.419

Krause, U., Béneker, T., & Tartwijk, J. V. (2021). Geography textbook tasks fostering thinking skills for the acquisition of powerful knowledge. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education, 31*(1), 69-83. https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2021.1885248

Krekeler, C. (2006). Language for special academic purposes (LSAP) testing: the effect of background knowledge revisited. *Language Testing, 23*(1), 99-130. https://doi.org/10.1191/0265532206lt323oa

Lam, A. (2003). English in education in China: policy changes and learners' experiences. *World Englishes, 21*(2), 245-256. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-971X.00245

Lee, H. C. (2013). Thinking Matters: Inferencing in ESL Reading Lessons. *TESOL Journal, 4*(4), 717-742. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.75

Levine, M. G., & Haus, G. J. (1985). The Effect Of Background Knowledge On The Reading Comprehension Of Second Language Learners. *Foreign Language Annals, 18*(5), 391-397. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1985.tb00971.x

Liu, P. L. (2016). Mobile English vocabulary learning based on concept-mapping strategy. *Language Learning & Technology, 20*(1), 128-140. Retrieved from https://llt.msu.edu/issues/october2016/liu.pdf

Long, D. R. (2008). What You Don't Know Can't Help You: An Exploratory Study of Background Knowledge and Second Language Listening Comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 12*(1), 65-80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100008743

Mao, Z. (2012). The Application of Task-based Language Teaching to English Reading Classroom. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2*(11), 2430-2438. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.11.2430-2438

Morales, H. S., & Mena, R. G. (2016). Student Self-Evaluation and Autonomy Development in EFL Learning. *Revista de Lenguas Modernas, 25*, 199-222. https://doi.org/10.15517/rlm.v0i25.27695

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston, MA: Heinle-Cengage Learning. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587962

Oura, G. K. (2001). Authentic task-based materials: Bringing the real world into the classroom. *Sophia Junior College Faculty Bulletin, 21*, 65-84.

Özçakmak, H. (2019). Impact of note taking during reading and during listening on comprehension. *Educational Research and Reviews, 14*(16), 580-589. https://doi.org/10.5897/ERR2019.3812

Pečjak, S., & Pirc, T. (2018). Developing Summarizing Skills in 4th Grade Students: Intervention Programme Effects. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 10*(5), 571-581. https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2018541306

Plakans, L., Liao, J. T., & Wang, F. (2019). "I should summarize this whole paragraph": Shared processes of reading and writing in iterative integrated assessment tasks. *Assessing Writing, 40*, 14-26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2019.03.003

Richards, J. C., & Cotterall, S. (2016). Exploring Creativity in Language Teaching. In R. H. Jones & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *Creativity in language teaching: Perspectives from research and practice* (pp. 97-113). New York, NY: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730936-7

Rozati, S. M. (2014). Language teaching and task based approach. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 4*(6), 1273-1278. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.6.1273-1278

Sadiku, L. M. (2015). The Importance of Four Skills Reading, Speaking, Writing, Listening in a Lesson Hour. *European Journal of Language and Literature, 1*(1), 29-31. https://doi.org/10.26417/ejls.v1i1.p29-31

Scanlon, D. M., & Anderson, K. L. (2020). Using Context as an Assist in Word Solving: The Contributions of 25 Years of Research on the Interactive Strategies Approach. *Reading Research Quarterly, 55*(S1), S19-S34. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.335

Suwanarak, K. (2018). Self-Evaluation of Thai Adult Learners in English Writing Practice. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 24*(2), 95-111. https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2018-2402-08

Vellenga, H. (2004). Learning Pragmatics from ESL & EFL Textbooks: How Likely? *TESL-EJ, 8*(2), 1-16.

Wiśniewska, H. (2017). Learner Autonomy: The Role of Educational Materials in Fostering Self-evaluation. In Pawlak, M., Mystkowska-Wiertelak, A., & Bielak, J. (Eds.), *Autonomy in Second Language Learning: Managing the Resources*. Second Language Learning and Teaching. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-07764-2_6

Wu, J. (2010). A Content Analysis of the Cultural Content in the EFL Textbooks. *Canadian Social Science, 6*(5), 137-144. https://doi.org/10.3968/j.css.1923669720100605.016

Xiong, T., & Qian, Y. M. (2012). Ideologies of English in a Chinese high school EFL textbook: a critical discourse analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 32*(1), 75-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2012.655239

Xu, Z. C. (2013). Globalization, culture and ELT materials: a focus on China. *Multilingual Education, 3*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1186/2191-5059-3-6

Yu, S. L., & Reynolds, B. L. (2004). Investigating Writing Tasks in English Textbooks for Chinese Secondary Students. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 15*(4), 900-1288. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2018.15.4.15.1114

Yusuf, Q., Yusuf, Y. Q., Yusuf, B., & Nadya, A. (2017). Skimming and Scanning Techniques to Assist EFL Students in Understanding English Reading Texts. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education |IRJE|, 1*(1), 43-57. https://doi.org/10.22437/irje.v1i1.4338

Zhang, X. Z. (2020). Evaluation of Suitability of a Listening Textbook for English Majors in Universities of China. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 11*(4), 87-94. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.11n.4p.87

Zhu, H. P., & O'Sullivan, H. (2020). Shhhh! Chinese students are studying quietly in the UK. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 59*(3), 275-284. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2020.1813603

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).