



On the Current Situation of the Selection of PEP Junior English Textbook Illustrations

Lu Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Shaoxing University, Shaoxing, China

Email: 774873620@qq.com

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Abstract

As an important teaching resource, English textbooks are a carrier for improving students' English quality. Illustrations are an important part of English textbooks. With their vivid and interesting characteristics, illustrations deeply attract students' attention. Good illustrations can enhance students' interest in learning, promote students' understanding, and ultimately achieve the effect of improving students' learning. Therefore, attention must be paid to the selection of textbook illustrations. This article will take the PEP version of the junior high school English textbook *Go for it* as an example. First, understand the current situation of the selection of illustrations in the textbook, and think about the problems in the selection of illustrations, and then put forward corresponding suggestions for the problems, which is aimed to maximize the value of textbook illustrations.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Junior High School English, Illustration, Textbook (People's Education Press)

1. Introduction

The *New English Curriculum Standards* (2011) puts forward: "The overall goal of the compulsory education stage English course is to enable students to form a preliminary comprehensive language ability through learning." The entire basic education stage of English courses is set to nine according to the ability level. The corresponding grading goals for the junior high school stage are three to five. And in the goals of different levels, corresponding requirements are put forward for the ability of students to obtain information through pictures. This

shows that illustrations play an important role in junior high school English teaching.

The *English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School* (2020 Revision) adds “watching” as a language skill that is as important as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This also provides a direction for the teaching of junior high school English, and illustrations can be used as “seeing” objects that can improve students’ “seeing” skills, so the illustrations in the textbooks are particularly important.

With the continuous development of science and technology, illustrations have gone through a process of change from little to much, from black to colourful, and from crude to elaborate. The number of illustrations, content, and form of illustrations for junior high school English textbooks have been greatly improved. [1] However, it is undeniable that some illustrations still have some problems to a certain extent. Therefore, this article will research the selection of PEP junior English textbooks illustrations. Try to find the problems in it, then propose strategies for improvement, in the hope that the illustrations of the textbook can be effectively used.

2. Studies on Illustrations in Textbooks

Since the 1960s, illustrations have been regarded as the object of teaching and research and have been continuously valued by researchers and educators. In addition, in the “image age”, perceptual learning has become an important way and content for people to learn.

The research of illustration by foreign researchers started earlier than that of Chinese researchers. Through empirical research and comparative research and other research methods, they have achieved fruitful results in the research of illustration functions and types, which have great reference value and guiding role for Chinese scholars to study illustrations. The study of Levie and Lentz shows that when using illustrated textbooks, the teaching effect is significantly better than using textbooks without illustrations. [2] Elmian’s research shows that images can increase learners’ participation and strengthen the language learning process. [3] The illustrations in textbooks can effectively realize the dissemination and aesthetic needs of different cultures due to their image and intuitive characteristics. They are of great significance in promoting learners’ learning. However, some textbooks illustrations still have the following problems: First of all, Saadanil and Sheikhzade investigated the books used by children aged 3 to 5 years old in Iran and found that the textbook illustrations they painted did not meet the age psychological characteristics of the learners due to ignoring the age of the learners. And the localization of the content of the illustrations is ignored; secondly, the illustrations in the textbooks still have obvious racial discrimination. Finally, due to the rough illustration production process, the illustrations in the textbooks are unscientific. This leads to the problem of unscientific illustrations in textbooks. [4]

Before and after the founding of the People's Republic of our country, our country's first generation of textbook compilation experts pointed out: illustrations are an important part of textbooks, and excellent illustrations that fit the texts can stimulate learners' interest in learning, enhance learners' understanding of texts. In the 1970s and 1980s, Chinese researchers continued to pay attention to the value of illustrations in teaching. The study of illustrations in textbooks became a hot spot for scholars and teachers. In addition, with the new curriculum reform, the teaching conditions in our country have continued to improve, making multimedia teaching possible. As an important object of visual learning, illustrations have become the content of attention of visual learning researchers. At present, research experiments on the information provided in the illustrations in textbooks point out that the subjects who learn the texts with illustrations get twice as much information as the subjects who learn the textual texts. In terms of the types of illustrations, according to the degree of abstraction of the illustrations, illustrations can be divided into physical images, depictions and comics. [5]

Through the literature review method, Fang found that domestic research on illustrations in English textbooks mostly involves the comparison of illustrations, design of illustrations, use of illustrations, strategy of illustrations, function of illustrations, effect of illustrations, and problems of illustrations. [6] The research on the use of illustrations accounts for more than half of the proportion, while the research on the problems of illustrations is the least. Regarding the use of illustrations in teaching, the illustrations have the following problems: 1) the simplification of the content of the illustrations; 2) the monotony of the form of the illustrations; and 3) the immobilization of the functions of the illustrations. [5] There are various forms of classification of the illustrations, including four types of English in junior high school, namely decorative, descriptive, organisational and explanatory. But there are the following problems with the illustrations: 1) the illustrations are lagging behind and do not conform to the trend of the times; 2) the thematic direction of the illustrations is not clear, and the objectives of the tasks are confusing; 3) the contents of the illustrations are not sufficiently open to take into account the differences between students; 4) the proportion of caricature is too high, and the physical illustrations are not enough; 5) the overall arrangement is too scattered, interfering with students' development. [7] In primary school English textbooks, Li also pointed out that illustrations have many problems, such as inconsistency of the characters in the textbook illustrations, and common sense errors in the textbook illustrations. [8] Also, the characters' clothes are always the same and do not match with the time of the text, and the content of the illustrations is not logical before and after. [1]

Judging from the above domestic and foreign documents, many researchers have discussed the value of illustration and its teaching. In the "illustration era" where multimedia teaching continues to develop, cultivating students' visual learning ability and improving citizens' visual literacy has become an important issue of concern for teaching in the new era. The research on illustration and illustration teaching is of great significance for improving the quality of classroom

teaching and improving teaching efficiency. At the same time, it is pointed out that the illustrations need to be used correctly, otherwise it will lead to negative effects.

3. The Basic Situation of PEP Junior English Textbook Illustrations

3.1. The Number of Illustrations in the Textbook

There are 5 volumes of English textbooks for junior high school of the People's Education Press. The number of illustrations in the 5 volumes is shown in **Table 1** below:

From the above **Table 1**, it can be found that there are a large number of illustrations in the English textbooks for junior high schools. There are 1018 pieces in total. There are about 17.55 pieces per unit and 2.55 pieces per page. The largest number of illustrations is the second volume of the seventh grade, as many as 235, and the least is 8. There are also 146 pictures in the second grade. This shows that illustrations are an indispensable part of English textbooks.

By viewing the above table horizontally, it can also be found that the number of illustrations in the upper grades is much lower than that in the lower grades. The total number of illustrations in the seventh grade is 466, while the total number of illustrations in the eighth grade is 351 and the total number of illustrations in the ninth grade is 201. For example, the number of illustrations in the seventh grade Unit 7 *It's raining* is 30, but in the ninth grade Unit 4 *Could you please tell me where the restrooms are?* The number of middle illustrations is only 7. It can be seen that as the grade increases, the number of illustrations is gradually decreasing. This is consistent with the physical and mental development of students. [9] For the seventh grade students, they are in a transitional stage, their attention development is still immature, and their thinking ability is poor, so they need to rely on intuitive and vivid illustrations to attract their attention and promote their understanding. With the increase of age, students' understanding and thinking skills continue to develop, and they gradually transition from image thinking to abstract thinking ability. There is no longer a need for specific images, so the number of illustrations gradually decreases.

However, there are also some problems. The overall number of English textbooks is still small, the proportion of images in the layout is relatively low, and there are many decorative pictures in the textbooks, which are not directly

Table 1. The total number of illustrations in PEP textbook.

Illustrations	Grade seven (1)	Grade seven (2)	Grade eight (1)	Grade eight (2)	Grade nine	Total
Total number of illustrations	231	235	205	146	201	1018
Illustrations per unit	19.25	19.58	20.50	14.60	14.35	17.55
Illustrations per page	4.28	3.26	2.56	1.82	1.79	2.55

related to the learning content. The main purpose is to increase the aesthetics and intuitiveness of the textbook layout, but there are fewer images that are really meaningful, can promote understanding and serve as learning content.

3.2. Types of Illustrations in the Textbook

According to the degree of abstraction of the illustrations, it can be divided into four types: photos, cartoons, stick figures and tables. [10] The photos are very intuitive, and can create a real situation for students' learning, make students feel immersive, and improve students' interest and enthusiasm in learning. With its humorous characteristics, cartoon pictures can arouse students' interest, are close to students' hobbies, and can shorten the distance with students. **Table 2** can clearly present data information and article structure, which is conducive to students' understanding and mastery of learning content.

It can be seen from the above table that cartoons have become the most popular illustrations due to their intuitive image characteristics, because they can deeply attract students' interest, and students' interest is exactly the successful English learning emphasized by the *New English Curriculum Standards*. Viewing this table horizontally, it can also be found that the number of photos is increasing, because with the increase of age, students' interest in cartoons has decreased, and their interest in illustrations that are closer to their lives has increased.

Through analysis, it can be found that there are fewer types of illustrations, and the types of cartoons account for half of all illustrations. In fact, there are many illustrations that can be used in textbooks, such as drawings, maps, flowcharts, schematics, mind maps, etc., so the types of illustrations in textbooks are relatively single.

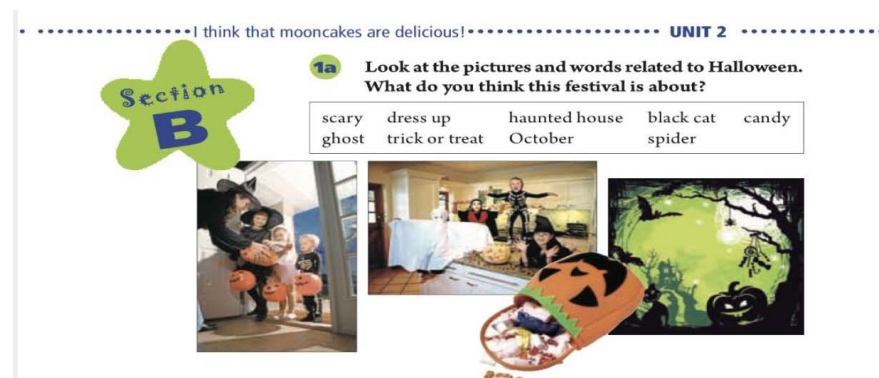
3.3. The content of the Illustrations in the Textbook

The illustrations in the textbooks of the lower grades are simple and interesting, while the illustrations in the textbooks of the upper grades are more abstract and have profound meaning, which can often arouse students' further thinking. Therefore, the number of illustrations in the textbooks of the upper grades is less than that of the lower grades, and most of the illustrations play the role of explanation and promote students' understanding. As shown in **Figure 1**, in the ninth grade Unit 2 *I think that mooncakes are delicious*, in Section B 1a, there are four illustrations related to the Halloween event. Then the 1a activity requires students to guess the holiday represented by the given pictures and words. Therefore, these illustrations provide a basis for students' guesses and promote their understanding of Halloween.

The relationship between pictures and texts has always been an important subject of textbook research and one of the criteria for evaluating the quality of textbooks. The matching and appropriateness of images and texts, and the organization and arrangement of illustrations with different functions according to teaching

Table 2. The number of different types of illustrations.

Types	Grade seven (1)	Grade seven (2)	Grade eight (1)	Grade eight (2)	Grade nine	Total
Photos	22	37	48	42	64	213
Cartoon	144	126	94	61	68	493
Stick figure	22	28	5	0	1	56
Charts	43	44	58	43	68	256
Total	231	235	205	146	201	1018

**Figure 1.** I think that mooncakes are delicious.

needs are important contents that need to be considered in the design of teaching materials. [11] However, there is no lack of improper configuration of pictures and texts in the textbooks. The text presented in some illustrations does not match the background, as shown in **Figure 2**. [7] In the seventh grade volume Starter Unit 1 3c, practice the greeting dialogue. The background of the illustration is the library. In the illustrated dialog box, two students are greeting each other. In actual situations, the library should keep quiet and talk as little as possible.

In addition, there is the problem of lagging illustrations. With the rapid development of science and technology, people not only pursue the beauty of illustrations, but also require them to stay close to life and keep up with the times. However, some illustrations in the textbook are far behind the pace of the times, as shown in **Figure 3**. [7] The example of family pictures in Unit 2 *This is my sister* in the seventh grade volume is mostly black and white background pictures. Then in the life of junior high school students now, the era of black and white background pictures is far away for them.

What's more, the illustration also has the problem of unclear subject orientation, and the task goal is chaotic, [7] as shown in **Figure 4**. In Unit 5 *Do you have a soccer ball*, the dialogue presented in the illustration is "Do you have a ping-pang ball? Yes, I do." The purpose is to import the unit sentence pattern, and some objects in the picture are also marked with letters to match with the word practice on the left. An illustration contains two tasks, which will make the picture messy and the proportions not coordinated.

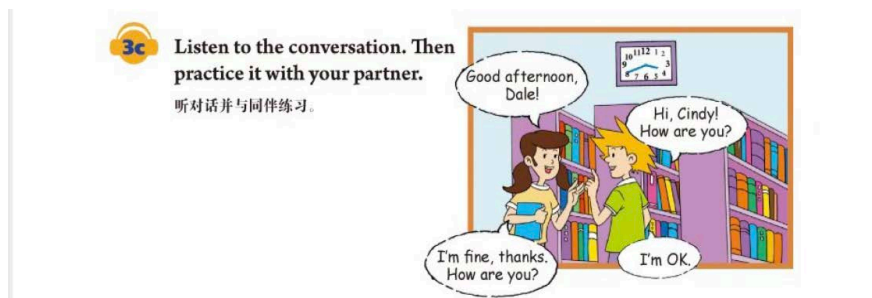


Figure 2. Starter Unit 1 3c.



Figure 3. This is my sister. Section A 3c.

UNIT 5

Section
A

Do you have a soccer ball?

1a

Match the words with the things in the picture.
将单词与图中物品配对。

1. tennis ball a
2. ping-pong bat _____
3. soccer ball _____
4. volleyball _____
5. basketball _____
6. baseball bat _____

Language Goal: Talk about ownership
语言目标: 谈论物品所属关系

Figure 4. Do you have a soccer ball? Section A 1a.

3.4. The Design of Illustrations in the Textbook

In terms of illustration design, the colors of the seventh grade illustrations are brighter and the pictures are more lifelike than the higher grade. This is also consistent with the law of cognitive development of junior high school students, the transition from thinking in images to abstract thinking.

However, illustrations generally have problems such as single color, low brightness and low saturation. The runway in the playground, the carpets and book-

shelves in the library, the desks and decorative paintings in the office, the floor, the walls and the roof of the gymnasium are almost all red, which may make students feel irritable. The dim color and small color difference may make the picture unattractive. Illustration size and layout are also issues that need attention. Too small image size reduces the clarity and impact of the image; the rigidity of the illustration layout design is reflected in the fact that the image is always located in the upper right or lower right corner of the page, and too simple typesetting causes students visual fatigue.

4. Enlightenment from the Selection of PEP Junior English Textbook Illustrations

4.1. Balance the Number of Illustrations

In view of the large number of decorative illustrations in the textbooks, the textbooks can use decorative pictures according to the amount and difficulty of learning. If the content of learning is more difficult, the use of decorative illustrations should be reduced, and the pictures that promote understanding should be increased to reduce the burden on students. And understanding pictures can effectively promote students' thinking, active exploration, analysis and integration of illustrations, and use of knowledge to solve problems, so they can cultivate students' high-level cognitive abilities.

4.2. Rich Illustration Types

Different picture types have different characteristics and advantages, and have different promotion effects on learning. Cartoon images are vivid and can attract students' attention; real photos can make students have an immersive experience; charts can simplify abstract relationships and are conducive to students' understanding. Students' cognitive development needs illustrations with different functions to work together, so try to enrich the types of illustrations to meet the needs of students' cognitive development.

4.3. Improve the Content of the Illustrations

For the problem of improper configuration of graphics and text, we can balance it according to different types of illustrations. For example, decorative illustrations should form an independent and equal relationship with the text, and illustrations that promote students' understanding should form a complementary relationship with the text. In addition, the illustrations should also be consistent with the times, and select some new things. The choice of illustrations in textbooks must be close to life. If the illustrations are only some traditional things, then it deviates from the requirements of the new curriculum. If students see all those traditional things, their interest in learning will be greatly reduced. Therefore, the content of the illustrations should pay attention to the selection of some new things. The illustrations also need to point to a clear theme and conform to the theme of this unit, so as to promote students' understanding, and attention should

be paid to avoid putting too many tasks on one illustration, which not only causes the problem of inappropriate proportions of illustrations, but also brings learning to students burden.

4.4. Ensure the Quality of Illustrations

The illustration design should fully consider the visual and psychological feelings it brings to the students, and should be stimulating. So we can use some illustrations that are colorful, high-definition large-size, flexible and diverse layouts, and are close to students' lives. For the images introduced into the textbooks, attention should be paid to the problem of not changing the size at will, so as to avoid the problem of proportion imbalance and image distortion. The layout of the illustrations can be used for reference to some magazines and new media to innovate and place the illustrations in different positions on the textbook page.

5. Conclusion

In short, illustrations play an important role in English learning. They are an important teaching resource for teachers and an important learning aid for students. With the development of science and technology, textbook illustrations are constantly updated and changed. However, through the analysis of the current situation of the selection of textbook illustrations, there are still some problems that still exist. But if we can balance the number of illustrations according to the difficulty of the text, choose the appropriate type of number of illustrations; enrich the types of illustrations to meet the needs of students' cognitive development; improve the quality of the content of the illustrations to keep up with the trend of the times; ensure the quality of the illustrations, and pay attention to the size of the pictures, typography and other issues. The value of illustrations may be more fully displayed.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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