Article

Research on the Design of Moral Education Resources in Junior High School English Textbooks from a Constructivist Perspective: A Comparative Analysis of the New and Old Editions of Seventh Grade Textbooks

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Abstract: Since the 2024 edition of the "Compulsory Education Textbook: English", published by the People's Education Press, revised according to the new curriculum standards, was put into use in the compulsory education stage, issues such as how to connect the old and new textbooks and the differences in resources between the old and new textbooks have been widely discussed and debated. Based on constructivist theory, this paper examines the design of moral education resources in the 2024 and 2012 editions of the People's Education Press seventh-grade English textbooks. Furthermore, by comparing texts, this study analyzes the differences in moral education resource design between the old and new textbooks, with the goal of enhancing teaching effectiveness and providing valuable support for innovative instruction, student character development, and textbook improvement.

Keywords: constructivist theory; moral education resources; comparative analysis; new and old textbooks

1. Introduction

The "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Compulsory Education Standards") points out that to implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talent and to develop quality education, we should prioritize moral education, enhance intellectual education, strengthen physical and aesthetic education, and implement labor education. As the core carrier of English teaching and the main source of language input for students, English textbooks contain a large number of moral education texts [1]. The "Compulsory Education Textbook: English" (hereinafter referred to as the old textbook), edited by the People's Education Press, was officially implemented in 2012. In 2024, a newly revised version, based on the updated curriculum standards, was published and scheduled for use starting in September of the same year. The comparative study of moral education texts in old and new textbooks can not only clearly analyze the requirements of the national education orientation but also provide a key pathway to enhance teaching effectiveness. By analyzing the distribution of moral education elements, their presentation methods, and the changes in cultural stances, it offers important support for teachers' innovative teaching, students' character development, and textbook optimization.

Syifa et al. conducted a comparative study on the language complexity of new and old junior high school English textbooks using the People's Education Edition seventh-grade English new textbook as an example [2]. They found that compared to the old textbook, the new People's Education Edition junior high school English textbook has a higher

overall lexical complexity, especially with a significant increase in the total vocabulary and the number of different words, but the overall vocabulary complexity is lower than that of the old textbook. The overall syntactic complexity is higher, the sentence units are longer, and the indicators for phrase structure and coordination are generally higher. The language complexity indicators in the new textbook units generally follow the same trend as those in the old textbook, showing a slight but stable increase. However, some units exhibit sharp fluctuations in the number of different words. Through a literature review, we found that no scholars have compared the similarities and differences in moral education text resources between the new and old textbooks.

Constructivist theory provides a systematic framework for English teaching reform, emphasizing the cultivation of students' language abilities and critical thinking skills through situational contexts, collaborative learning, and active knowledge construction. Through literature research, we have found that many scholars have already applied constructivist theory to English teaching, such as Elbes, who studied high school English writing teaching from the perspective of constructivist learning theory; Birhan explored the practice model of hybrid English writing instruction from the perspective of new constructivist theory; Laaloua, taking the teaching of the animated series "Peppa Pig" as an example, conducting research on the application of constructivist learning theory in junior high school English teaching under the new curriculum standards; etc. [3-5]. However, we have found that few scholars have explored the integration of constructivist theory into the design of moral education resources in English textbooks [6].

Therefore, aiming to provide support and data for the innovation of junior high school English teaching, curriculum reform, and textbook optimization, we classify the moral education text resources in the new (2024 edition) and old (2012 edition) People's Education Press textbooks for seventh grade according to the three major thematic categories in the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 edition)" (Person and Self, Person and Society, Person and Nature). We further investigate the following questions:

1) How is constructivist theory reflected in the design of moral education resources in textbooks?
2) What are the similarities and differences in the design of moral education resources in the new and old textbooks, as interpreted through the lens of constructivist theory?

2. Research Method and Procedures

2.1. Data Collection

Through online searches and internet education platforms, we collected a total of 12 PDF copies of the new and old editions of the People's Education Press English textbooks for seventh grade, both volumes. Considering that electronic versions obtained from different sources may vary in clarity or have missing pages, we purchased the required versions from reliable online platforms to ensure quality. We organized into two groups to compare the collected PDFs based on clarity and completeness. After individual evaluations and group discussions, we ultimately decided to use the 2022 edition of the New People's Education 7th-grade electronic textbooks (both volumes) and the 2012 edition of the Old People's Education 7th-grade electronic textbooks (both volumes) purchased on Xianyu as the main content of this study. The new seventh-grade textbooks comprise 268 pages and 18 units in total, including 138 pages and 10 units (3 Starter Units) in the first semester, and 130 pages and 8 units in the second semester [7,8]. The old seventh-grade first semester e-book has a total of 138 pages and 12 units (including 3 Starter Units), and the old seventh-grade second semester e-book has a total of 152 pages and 12 units, making a total of 290 pages and 24 units for the old seventh-grade textbooks (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Pages and Units in the Old and New Textbooks.

New Textbooks (Electronic Version)	Pages (PDF)	Units	Old Textbooks (Electronic Version)	Pages (PDF)	Units
First Semester E-Book	138	10 (3 Starter Units)	First Semester E-Book	138	12 (3 Starter Units)
Second Semester E-Book	130	8	Second Semester E-Book	152	12
Sum	268	18	Sum	290	24

2.2. Analytical Framework

Vygotsky's constructivist theory can be divided into three categories: Social Constructivism, Sociocultural Perspective, and Neo-Vygotskian Constructivism. Social Constructivism posits that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and cultural transmission, emphasizing the roles of language, collaboration, and the Zone of Proximal Development. For example, learners can surpass their ability to solve problems independently under the guidance of adults or more capable peers; The Sociocultural Perspective emphasizes the shaping of individual cognitive development by the sociocultural historical background, believing that psychological functions originate from social activities and later become individual abilities through internalization. For example, cultural tools (such as language and symbols) are mediators of cognitive development; The Neo-Vygotskian Constructivism further expands on Vygotsky's theory, focusing on the mediating roles of teachers, learners, and technology in educational practice, and emphasizing the creation of cultural contexts to promote learning. This study applies the three major constructivist theories mentioned above as an analytical lens to examine the collected electronic textbooks, exploring how constructivist theories are reflected in the design of moral education resources in the textbooks.

First, we employed the Dual Review and Discussion Method. We divided the research team into two groups and classified the moral education text resources in the new 2024 edition and the old 2012 edition of the People's Education Press seventh-grade textbooks based on the three major thematic categories in the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" (Human and Self, Human and Society, Human and Nature). We then jointly reviewed and finalized the classification categories, which helped us better understand the types of moral education resources.

Then, according to Vygotsky's three types of constructivism, we analyzed how moral education was designed in the old and new textbooks. We will divide into two groups to independently analyze and record the constructivist types of moral education activities in each unit. Subsequently, we compared and analyzed the conclusions drawn by each group, and then collectively discussed and verified the final classification of constructivist types. This helped us further examine how moral education is integrated into these textbooks.

Next, by calculating the ratio (percentage) of the total number of units containing various moral education resource design types to the total number of units in the textbook, we can reflect the proportion of moral education design in the old and new textbooks and the similarities and differences in moral education design between the old and new textbooks under constructivist theory.

In summary, through the types of moral education resources in units, the manifestation of constructivist theory in the design of moral education resources in textbooks, and the similarities and differences in moral education design between new and old textbooks under constructivist theory, we can clearly perceive the differences between the updated textbooks and the original ones. This provides important data support for teachers' innovative teaching, students' character development, and textbook optimization.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Classification of Unit Themes in New and Old Textbooks

Through the Dual Review and Discussion Method, we divided the team into two groups and used the three major thematic categories from the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" as classification criteria (Person and Self, Person and Society, Person and Nature) to independently classify the moral education text resources in the new (2024 Edition) and old (2012 Edition) textbooks of the People's Education Press for seventh grade. After independent analysis by each group, we found that the classification results for the units in the new and old textbooks differed by 18% in terms of assigned thematic categories. Subsequently, we consulted professors in the relevant fields and held joint discussions to finalize the classification of the new and old textbook units' themes (Table 2 & 3).

Table 2. Classification of Unit Themes in New Textbooks.

Theme/Book and Units	First Semester E-Book	Second Semester E-Book	Sum (Units)
Human and Self	Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 6, Unit 7	Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 8	8
Human and Society	Unit 1, Unit 5	Unit 2, Unit 5, Unit 7	5
Human and Nature	NONE	Unit 1, Unit 6,	2

Table 3. Classification of Unit Themes in Old Textbooks.

Theme/Book and Units	First Semester E-Book	Second Semester E-Book	Sum (Units)
Human and Self	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 6, Unit 7, Unit 8, Unit 9	Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 6, Unit 9, Unit 10, Unit 12	14
Human and Society	Unit 5	Unit 1, Unit 4, Unit 8, Unit 11	5
Human and Nature	NONE	Unit 5, Unit 7	2

As shown in Table 2, the study found that the new seventh-grade first-semester textbook units only have the themes of Human and Self and Human and Society, with 5 units themed Human and Self and 2 units themed Human and Society; the new seventh-grade second-semester textbook has three unit themes: Human and Self, Human and Society, and Human and Nature, with 3 units themed Human and Self and Human and Society, and 2 units themed Human and Nature. Overall, in the new seventh-grade textbooks, 8 units are themed around Human and Self, 5 units around Human and Society, and only 2 units around Human and Nature.

Notably, the new textbooks contain the most moral education resources under the theme "Human and Self", which include polite greetings, personal health, and physical exercise — topics particularly suitable for middle school students who are in early adolescence. It provides moral education resources for the cultivation of their good personal moral habits, benefiting their future development.

As shown in Table 3, the study found that the unit themes in the old seventh-grade first semester textbooks only include Human and Self and Human and Society. Among them, 8 units have Human and Self as the unit theme, and 1 unit has Human and Society as the unit theme. The old seventh-grade second semester textbooks have three unit themes: Human and Self, Human and Society, and Human and Nature. Among them, 6 units have Human and Self as the unit theme, 4 units have Human and Society as the unit theme, and 2 units have Human and Nature as the unit theme. Overall, in the old seventh-grade textbooks, 14 units are themed around Human and Self, 5 units around Human and Society, and 2 units around Human and Nature.

Compared to the new textbook's unit theme distribution, the old textbook shows a broadly similar pattern, with the main difference being a higher number of units focused on "Human and Self" and a greater overall number of units. The only significant difference is that the number of thematic units on "Human and Self" is greater, and the total number of units is also higher. This data reflects that the new textbooks have reduced the total

learning load to alleviate the academic burden on students, in line with recent educational reforms.

3.2. The Embodiment of Constructivist Theory in the Design of Moral Education Resources in Textbooks

According to Vygotsky's three types of constructivist theory, we analyzed how moral education is designed in new and old textbooks [7]. We divided into two groups to independently analyze and record the constructivist types of moral education activities designed for each unit. Through comparison, we found that the consistency rate between the two sets of analyses was only 89%. Subsequently, we collectively compared and analyzed the conclusions drawn from each group, and engaged in joint discussion to verify and finalize the conclusions, the results indicate that the integration of constructivist theory into moral education resource design can be categorized into four major types: Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design, Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design, Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design, and Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design (Table 4).

Table 4. Types of Moral Education Resources.

Text-books	Semester	Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design	Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design	Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design	Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design
New Text-books	First Semester	Starter Unit 1, Starter Unit 2, Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7	Starter Unit 1, Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7	Unit 1, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7
	Second Semester	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7, Unit 8	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7, Unit 8	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 8	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7
Old Text-books	First Semester	Starter Unit 1, Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7, Unit 8, Unit 9	Starter Unit 1, Unit 1, Unit 3, Unit 6, Unit 8	Unit 2, Unit 6, Unit 8, Unit 9	Unit 6
	Second Semester	Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7, Unit 8, Unit 9, Unit 10, Unit 11, Unit 12	Unit 4, Unit 9, Unit 12	Unit 5, Unit 6, Unit 7, Unit 8	Unit 1, Unit 2

3.2.1. Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design

Constructivism emphasizes that learning should occur in real or simulated contexts. Textbooks promote the active construction of moral knowledge by creating situational activities. For example, Arroba points out that contextualized teaching design allows students to actively explore texts in real situations, enhancing learning outcomes [9]. Furthermore, textbooks construct real problem situations through numerous cases closely related to students' lives, guiding them to actively think about humanistic factors such as moral responsibility and cultural heritage [10]. In both the new and old editions of the People's Education Press seventh-grade textbooks, we can clearly see that whether it is the new or old textbooks, almost every unit's introduction and dialogue have been designed with situational moral education [11].

3.2.2. Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design

Social constructivism emphasizes the role of social interaction in meaning-making, and textbooks promote the deepening of moral cognition by designing collaborative tasks. Lestari explicitly proposed in his academic paper "Constructivist Teaching Models, Methods, and Designs" that the constructivist teaching model includes elements of "collaboration" and "conversation" [10]. The design of collaborative moral education activities requires textbooks to include collaborative activities such as group discussions and role-playing. Students develop solutions through teamwork and cultivate moral judgment abilities through classroom debates and collaborative inquiry activities. It was found that the new textbooks included a higher proportion of collaborative moral education activities, such as group theme discussions and role-playing activities [12]. In contrast, the old textbooks have fewer collaborative moral education activities, with only a few units featuring such designs.

3.2.3. Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design

Constructivism emphasizes meaningful learning through authentic tasks through authentic tasks, and the textbook integrates moral cognition and practice through project-based learning. In the new textbook, each unit's Section B "Project" section presents character education activities embedded within real-world tasks. For example, the theme of the "Project" section in the first unit of the seventh-grade first semester is "Make your own personal profile". This section uses real tasks to help students understand their personal profiles, implementing self-awareness education in character education. Unlike the new textbooks, the old edition lacks a dedicated section for real-world task design, with only a few units incorporating such elements implicitly. Only a few units involve the design of moral education resources driven by real tasks [13].

3.2.4. Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design

Constructivism emphasizes that evaluation should serve the learning process, and textbooks support dynamic adjustments through evaluation tools. With the continuous improvement of national education levels, English teaching in the compulsory education stage now needs to constantly integrate a diversified evaluation system to promote teaching and student learning through evaluation. In the new textbooks, it can be observed that, the last section of each unit contains a self-evaluation feedback form, aimed at providing students with diversified evaluation and feedback resources for moral education based on the unit theme. Students can engage in self-awareness and self-reflection through the content of the table to promote their moral development under the unit theme [14].

3.3. *The Similarities and Differences in the Design of Moral Education Resources in New and Old Textbooks*

After analyzing the four major types of constructivist theory in the design of moral education resources in textbooks (contextualized moral education resource design, collaborative moral education activity design, authentic task-driven moral education resource design, and diversified evaluation feedback moral education resource design), we examined whether each unit of the new and old textbooks includes these four types of major moral education resource designs and organized the findings into a table (Table 4). The ratio (percentage) was then calculated of the total number of units containing each type of moral education resource design to the total number of units in the textbook. This percentage enables a clearer comparison the proportion of the four major types in the application of moral education design in both old and new textbooks, thus revealing both the overall emphasis on moral education and the structural differences in resource design between the two textbook editions and the similarities and differences in moral education design under constructivist theory [15,16].

As shown in Table 5, for the Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design, the application of this design method in the new and old textbooks accounted for approximately the same proportion. In the first semester of Grade 7, 90% of the units in the new textbook included this design, and the coverage rate in the second semester of Grade 7 even reached 100%. Meanwhile, the proportion of this design in the old textbook for the first semester of Grade 7 was 83.33%, and the coverage rate for the second semester of Grade 7 also reached 100%. Based on these data, it can be inferred that the contextualized moral education resource design to achieve the effect of moral education theme in each unit.

Table 5. Proportion of the Four Major Types of Moral Education Resource Design.

		Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design	Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design	Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design	Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design
New Textbooks	First Semester	9 units (90%)	8 units (80%)	6 units (60%)	7 units (70%)
	Second Semester	8 units (100%)	8 units (100%)	7 units (87.5%)	7 units (87.5%)
Old Textbooks	First Semester	10 units (83.33%)	5 units (41.67%)	4 units (33.33%)	1 unit (8.33%)
	Second Semester	12 units (100%)	3 units (25%)	4 units (33.33%)	2 units (16.67%)

Secondly, for the Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design, there is a significant difference in the application of this design method between the new and old textbooks. In the upper and lower halves of the seventh grade new textbooks, the proportion of using collaborative moral education activity design reached 80% and 100% respectively, while in the upper and lower halves of the seventh grade old textbooks, the proportions were only 41.67% and 25% respectively. The use of collaborative moral education activity design in the upper half of the new textbooks was almost twice that of the old textbooks, while in the lower half it was nearly four times higher. We can clearly see that in the new textbooks, there are more design activities such as group activities and role-playing. We hope that students can master knowledge and feel the moral education theme of the unit through interaction.

Furthermore, for the Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design, there are significant differences in the application of this design method between the new and old textbooks. In the first semester of the new textbook for seventh grade, this design method was applied to 6 units, accounting for 60% of the total units. In the second semester, it was applied to 7 units, accounting for 87.5% of the total units. In contrast, the old textbooks had only 4 units in both the first and second grades, accounting for 33.33% of the total. The "Project" section in Section B of the new textbook is absent in the old textbook. This section mostly consists of real-task-driven moral education resources, requiring students to actually complete an activity related to the theme of the unit, in order to promote students' application of the knowledge they have learned and to enable them to experience and apply moral education knowledge in real life.

Finally, the gap between the new and old textbooks is the greatest in terms of the Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design. In the upper and lower halves of Grade 7, there are 7 units each with such activities designed, accounting for 70% and 87.5% respectively. In contrast, only 1 and 2 units in the upper and lower volumes of the old textbooks use such moral education resource designs, accounting for only 8.33% and 16.67%. Therefore, the design of the new textbooks pays more attention to providing diversified evaluation and feedback for students. Through self-evaluation and

self-reflection by students, the goal of moral education is achieved. However, the old textbooks obviously lack this design and cannot meet the current teaching requirements and purposes.

Overall, there is almost no difference between the old and new textbooks in the application of Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design, both adhering to the principle of moral education and cultural input through situational contexts. However, compared to the old textbooks, the new ones are more extensive in the application of Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design, Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design, and Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design, emphasizing moral education for students through collaboration, authentic task-driven approaches, and diversified evaluation.

4. Conclusion

Based on a constructivist perspective, using the three major thematic categories of "Human and Self", "Human and Society" and "Human and Nature" from the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" as classification criteria, we classify the moral education text resources in the new 7th-grade textbooks (2024 edition) and the old 7th-grade textbooks (2012 edition). Furthermore, the study delves into how constructivist theory is reflected in the design of moral education resources in textbooks and the similarities and differences in the design of moral education resources in new and old textbooks, aiming to provide assistance and data support for innovation in junior high school English teaching, curriculum reform, and textbook optimization.

In order to address the aforementioned issues, we adopted the Dual Review and Discussion Method, first conducting independent group analyses, followed by verification and validation to determine their validity. Based on the constructivist theoretical perspective, through text analysis, we found that the embodiment of constructivist theory in the design of moral education resources in textbooks mainly falls into the following four categories: Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design, Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design, Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design, and Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design.

At the same time, we compare the total number of units for each type of moral education resource design with the total number of units in the textbook (percentage). By examining the proportions of the four major types of moral education design, we can reveal the similarities and differences in moral education under constructivist theory between the old and new textbooks. We found that there is almost no difference in the application of Contextualized Moral Education Resource Design between the old and new textbooks. However, in the aspects of Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design, Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design, and Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design, the new textbooks have a significantly higher usage rate and broader coverage. The old textbooks lack sufficient incorporation of Collaborative Moral Education Activity Design, Authentic Task-Driven Moral Education Resource Design, and Diversified Evaluation and Feedback Moral Education Resource Design, and therefore can no longer meet the current teaching and moral education needs for seventh-grade English.

This paper focuses solely on the 2024 new edition and the 2012 old edition of the People's Education Press seventh-grade textbooks as research materials. It explores the similarities and differences in the use of moral education resources from a constructivist perspective. The update of textbooks holds great significance for the compulsory education system, student learning, teacher instruction, and teaching reform and innovation. Comparative studies of textbook updates for other grades can be included in future research. We anticipate additional findings from everyone's research on this topic.

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