Retrospective Evaluation of an EFL Coursebook for Users at Independent Colleges

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Abstract. Coursebooks have always been one of the basis and content-providers in teaching. Advanced English (hereinafter AE) teaching stands a significant stage in that it guides students from the focus on language forms to the deepening of subject matters in language learning, thus the evaluation of the coursebook is of great significance. This study explored the users' satisfaction towards CECL4 based on needs analysis through questionnaires and interviews. 137 students and 3 teachers from an Independent College in Southwestern China were randomly selected as the subjects. The results revealed that both teachers and students generally thought that CECL4 was slightly above average as an AE coursebook. Suggestions were made by both teachers and students, referring that more topics of value orientation and classics appreciation should be strengthened in the coursebook. The result is of great significance for the coursebook compilation for users at Independent Colleges.

Keywords: Coursebook Evaluation; Needs Analysis; Independent Colleges

1   Introduction

English language teaching material plays a significant role in English language learning. It bridges the teaching syllabus and the teaching reality. It forms the basis for the organization of teaching activities in the classroom and the main source where students get language knowledge and practices. According to Goldstein, "75 percent of a student's classroom time and 90 percent of homework time is spent with textbook materials". Therefore, selecting the right book for teachers and students means everything to language learning.

Coursebook evaluation has long been a research topic. Previous researches evaluated coursebooks for Non-English majors [1], Business English Majors [2], yet there were few studies on the evaluation of coursebooks for English Majors, especially for those at Independent Colleges.

Therefore, this study explores the users' evaluation of CECL 4-an in-use coursebook for English majors at an Independent College in Southwestern China under the framework of needs analysis. In the past decades, needs analysis has been proved effective in bettering Curriculum design [3], enhancing English teaching [4-5], exploring English teaching mode [6]. The employment of needs analysis can better reveal the

needs of students at Independent Colleges and hence prepare them academically, ultimately providing insights into the compilation of books for them.

Based on needs analysis, this study investigates the users' satisfaction toward CECL 4, focusing on the needs of English majors at Independent Colleges concerning AE Coursebook, the users' evaluation of CECL 4, and suggestions as to the development of AE coursebook for Independent Colleges.

The significance of the present study is two-folded. Theoretically, the scope of needs analysis will be expanded. In practice, for one thing, a decision could be made as to the suitability of CECL4 for English majors at Independent Colleges; for another, the needs analysis obtained from the study paves way for the selection of appropriate coursebooks. Moreover, the research results could give constructive suggestions for coursebook compilation for Independent Colleges.

To sum up, this article explores the effectiveness of CECL 4. Specifically, the following three questions will be explored:

1. What are the needs of English majors at Independent Colleges concerning AE Coursebooks?

2. What do teachers and students think of CECL4?

3. What suggestions could be made as to the development of AE coursebooks for Independent Colleges?

The following part is about the literature review of coursebook evaluation.

2   Review of Literature

Coursebook evaluation has been systematically studied for almost five decades. In the 1980s, many evaluation models were developed [7-9]. The 1990s witnessed the progress and breakthrough on the basis of the achievements in the 1980s, Cunningsworth's [10] new work was a case in point. At the turn of 21st century, the above-mentioned models were interpreted and introduced to China [11-12]. These introductions and interpretations opened a door to what had been achieved in course- book evaluation in the west and guided the relating studies in China. In the meanwhile, many suggestions have been made to better the evaluation process, feasibility of computer-assisted test of the re-currence of vocabulary and structures as prescribed by the syllabus [11], the two-level approach to the evaluation [13], the establishment of a coursebook corpus [1] and the development of guidelines for coursebook compilation and evaluation that suit the Chinese context [14-15].

The recent decade has witnessed the growing popularity of coursebook effectiveness evaluation [16], evaluation of specific elements like formations of stereotypes in English language textbooks [17], cultural content [18-19]. Previous studies on coursebook effectiveness focused on students who had specially designed coursebooks, yet little attention has been paid to users at Independent Colleges in China, who have relatively low English proficiency yet no access to specially designed coursebooks. This paper will address this issue by revealing their needs, the effectiveness of the in-use coursebook and suggestions as to the compilation of coursebooks for them.

3   Research Methodology

3.1   Subjects

Research subjects in this study consist of the major users of CECL4-students and teachers and their essential information is presented as follows.

137 students of third-year English majors selected at random from an Independent College in Southwestern China participated in this research. In addition to the students, 3 in-service teachers were interviewed concerning the use of CECL4. Among the three teachers, two were lecturers with Master's Degree and had more than 10 years of teaching experience; one was an associate professor with more than 15 years of teaching experience. All of the three teachers had been involved in the teaching of AE Course for at least 8 years. Their comments on the use of the textbook could give valuable insights into the evaluation.

3.2   Instruments and Data Collection

Questionnaires.

Two questionnaires were involved in the present study. One was designed based on Hutchinson and Waters' needs analysis to get the specific target needs (Table 1) and learning needs (Table 2) of the students. The other one was adapted from the evaluation criteria by Cunningsworth. The evaluation questionnaire consisted of thirty-five questions falling into 4 categories: the content, the ability cultivation, the layout and the skills and one open-ended question about the achievement after one-year's learning. The Likert Scale was adopted for the evaluation, with 5 meaning strongly agree and 1 meaning strongly disagree.

The items of both questionnaires were written in Chinese to avoid the possible misunderstanding due to the subjects' different levels of English proficiency.

Nine students were invited to be pretested and interviewed to measure the time used and to see whether there were confusing statements. After modifications were made, thirty-three students were invited to do a pilot test to evaluate the reliability of the thirty-five items on the evaluation questionnaire. The data were collected and analyzed with the aid of SPSS 19.0. The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.919, meaning the evaluation questionnaire was reliable enough.

After the reliability of the evaluation questionnaire was measured, 150 questionnaires were distributed with the aid of teachers in charge of a training program for student teachers in the end of June, 2021, shortly after they finished the AE course, when they still had fresh memories of the coursebook being evaluated. 148 questionnaires were returned, with a collection rate of 98.7%, among which 137 were valid. After the data were typed into SPSS 19.0 and processed, KMO and Bartlett's Test revealed that Kaiser-Meryer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy reached 0.866, indicating it was a valid evaluation questionnaire.

Interviews.

The interviews were conducted after the distribution of the students' questionnaires. Two interviews with two teachers were conducted face-to-face separately, and the information was recorded and carefully transcribed. The third teacher was interviewed through email. The interview questions focused on the suitability of CECL 4, challenges faced and possible improvement. The interviews were recorded and informed consents were obtained.

All the data gained from the questionnaires and information drawn from the interviews will be analyzed in the next part.

4   Findings

This part reports the analysis of the subjects' needs, the effectiveness of CECL4 from the perspective of both the students and teachers.

4.1   Needs Analysis

Needs analysis consists of target needs and learning needs. The following is an analysis of the target needs of students at Independent Colleges according to the questionnaire.

Table 1. The Target Needs

Questions	Top 2 Options	Percent
Q1: motivations for learning English	1. Practical uses in future jobs	60.4%
	2. Personal interest	31.7%
Q2: the desirable jobs	1. English teaching	67.9%
	2. Foreign trade	51.1%
Q3: the target communicators	1.Non-native speakers of English	75.5%
	2. Native speakers of English	24.5%
Q4: the English proficiency of the target communicators	1. Average-level	51.8%
	2. Student-level	43.9%
Q5: the objectives of learning AE	1. Fluent verbal English	73.4%
	2.To be capable of daily communication	64.0%
Q6: the most important English skills in future jobs	1. Speaking	94.2%
	2. Listening	66.9%

(Note: Data from the Needs Analysis Questionnaire)

Gardner and Lambert [20] classified motivation into two categories, instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. An instrumentally motivated person learns a language for practical reasons whereas a person who holds an integrative motivation learns a language out of personal interest in the target culture. Cai [21] revealed that English majors held stronger instrumental motivation toward English learning. It was confirmed by the present study. Statistics from Table 1 showed that 60.4% of the

subjects learned English for practical uses in their future jobs and 31.7% learned it out of personal interest.

Table 1 showed that 67.9% of the subjects favored English teaching as their prospective profession and foreign trade with 51.1% came second. The result was just as expected as the students surveyed were concentrating on either Business English or English education. In this case, their needs in coursebook concerning this question would be the topics and knowledge covering English teaching and trade.

It also revealed that the majority of subjects occupying 75.5% would use English in domestic context and English would be used with a glaringly 95.7% of the people whose English proficiency is about average or below average. It indicates that the subjects don't have to approach the native speakers.

The top two objectives that the subjects wanted to achieve in AE learning were the possibilities of being able to communicate with others fluently (73.4%), to conduct daily communication (64.0%). It means that the students surveyed have rated the development of their speaking skill as the top priority. Accordingly, coursebooks laying more emphasis on speaking are likely to be favored.

When asked what would be the top three important skills in their future jobs, students put speaking (94.2%) and listening (66.9%) as the top two, the same as the objectives they wanted to achieve in AE learning. Basically, they want an all-round development in English learning, with listening and speaking carrying more weight.

The analysis above constitutes the principal components of the subjects' target needs. To sum up, in the teaching and trading field, the subjects expect to have a solid foundation of fundamental English skills and better communicative ability.

Since this is an investigation into the satisfaction toward CECL4, the part of learning needs mainly concerns the subjects' needs in coursebook compilation.

Table 2. The Learning Needs

Questions	Top 3 Options	Percent
Q7: the favored exercise types	1. Situational activities	56.2%
	2. Role play	52.6%
	3. Discussions	43.1%
Q8: the favored topics	1. Movies	79.9%
	2. Travel	64.7%
	3. Entertainment	59.7%
Q9: the preferred sources of AE materials	1.Newspapers, magazines & books in English-speaking countries	74.8%
	2.Domestic English newspapers, magazines and books	56.3%
	3. English classics	42.2%
Q10: concerns in coursebook compilation	1. Interestingness	67.6%
	2. Authenticity	61.2%
	3. Up-datedness	58.3%
Q11: the desirable supplementary materials	1. Extra readings	60.1%
	2. Workbook	57.2%
	3. Visuals	56.5%

(Note: Data from the Needs Analysis Questionnaire)

Question 7 indicates the selection of the subjects' preferred exercises. Among the 11 given choices, situational activities (56.2%) and role plays (52.6%) took the first and second place, with discussions (43.1%) following closely, indicating the subjects like oral activities more than written exercises, team work more than individual study.

Question 8 is about the topics that the subjects hope to be covered in the adopted coursebook. The statistics showed that the subjects liked the topics of movie (79.9%), travel (64.7%), and entertainment (59.7%) to be included in the coursebook as the top three desirable topics.

Question 9 is a survey of the sources of learning materials in coursebooks. Magazines and newspapers, books in English-speaking countries (74.8%) ranked the first, followed by domestic English magazines and newspapers, books (56.3%). English classics by famous writers (42.2%) took the third place. The survey indicates that despite the limited English proficiency of students from Independent Colleges, they still favor authentic and idiomatic English most.

The results of Question 10 showed that the top two concerns in coursebook compilation from the subjects' perspective would be the interestingness (67.6%) and authenticity of materials (61.2%), with the up-datedness (58.3%) taking the third place. As has been noted by Cunningsworth [10], the content does not have to be heavy and intellectual in order to be worthwhile. Interesting topics instead of heavy ones make the time and effort involved in language learning not only worthwhile but also meaningful. He [10] also elaborated on the importance of activities to be authentic or realistic at the very least. Authentic activities create authentic responses that motivate, inform, challenge learners, enriching experiences and expanding awareness.

In short, the subjects favored authentic, interesting, updated and light-hearted language learning materials. They were better to lay more emphasis on listening and speaking at the same time to involve them collectively.

4.2   The Students' Satisfaction toward CECL4

To get the first-hand opinion of CECL4, its major users-students were surveyed. The analysis will be conducted from four aspects, satisfaction of the content, ability cultivation, the layout and the basic skill development.

Table 3. Satisfaction towards CECL4

Items	Number	Questions	Average
Content	12	Q1-12	3.15
Ability cultivation	7	Q13-19	3.27
Layout	3	Q20-22	3.18
Listening	4	Q23-26	3.05
Speaking	3	Q27-29	3.23
Reading	4	Q30-33	3.31
Writing	2	Q34-35	3.18
Overall	/		3.20

(Note: Data from the Evaluation Questionnaire)

Table 3 revealed that students were most satisfied with the reading of CECL4, followed by ability cultivation and speaking. They were least satisfied with the listening of CECL4. It can be inferred from the table that the students rate CECL4 as above-average but not so satisfactory and the satisfaction rates do not vary significantly. Overall, CECL 4 passes the average (3.20/5) as an AE coursebook for students at Independent Colleges.

4.3   The Teachers' Satisfaction Towards CECEL4

This part reports the results of interviews with the three teachers teaching the course from the perspectives of suitability, difficulties encountered, the improvement to be made.

The Suitability.

Students from Independent Colleges have a relatively low English proficiency; CECL4 originally written for second-year students can be the best choice when there are no AE coursebooks specially designed for them as there is much flexibility on the part of teachers in the use of it. Overall, it is at an appropriate level.

Two teachers interviewed thought that the book had been a success in deepening students' understanding of society and life through a wide coverage of topics. It was also commonly acknowledged by the three teachers that the wide coverage of topics in CECL4 was conducive to broadening the students' horizons and expanding their experiences. The topics were broad enough to branch out into many subtopics for teachers and students to explore, paving the way for the cultivation of divergent thinking. Moreover, it was quite instrumental in the cultivation of logical and independent thinking as there were many open-ended questions and specially designed questions for students to pool thoughts.

Challenges Encountered.

According to the teachers, students had seriously inadequate background information. There were no presentations of background information, no vocabulary lists, no supplementary exercises concerning basic knowledge like vocabulary exercises, translation to lay a solid foundation.

Another shared opinion was the lack of structure modeling. Some of the reading texts were extracts from books or newspapers and magazines, which were superior in information but inferior in structure. Furthermore, students are Chinese and the background information they share also play a crucial role, so the articles taken from China Daily were cognitively unchallenging. So it was their general impression that language material from English-speaking countries was more suitable as it exceled in idiomatic uses and load of culture.

Additionally, the book was inadequate in cultivating students' ability of classics analysis and appreciation. It was also the teachers' hope that more effort should be

made to include articles about values and outlook to exert influence on students to be better shaped in their grow-up.

The Improvement to Be Made.

The three teachers deemed that the teacher's book was no more than a key provider. Even as a key provider, it was ineffective since many of the questions were open-ended and could be approached from different perspectives.

To let the teacher's book exert its due influence, there should be more background information, channels to access information, extension of knowledge. There should also be more coverage of the design of interaction activities.

Additionally, supplementary readings like articles taken from BBC, CNN are also necessary. Since there were few exercises in the student's book, in the teaching of it, many exercises were designed by themselves, adding the teaching work load. Hopefully, there should be a workbook to go with the student's book for consolidation for students at Independent Colleges are still weak in the fundamentals.

The above analysis of the interviews with the teachers indicates that the teachers were generally satisfied with CECL4, deeming it as a suitable AE coursebook for English majors at Independent Colleges. CECL4 distinguished itself with its wide coverage of practical topics and extensive inclusion of tasks for the cultivation of divergent and logical thinking. The coverage of different issues close to life helped deepen the learners' understanding of life. Besides, its emphasis on listening, speaking and reading also made it appealing to the subjects who were mostly instrumentally motivated. In this sense, CECL4 was quite effective in realizing most of the goals set in the National Teaching Guidelines. Yet, the teachers did complain about the inconveniences caused by the lack of background information and supplementary materials.

5   Discussion

This part is a discussion based on the analysis above, specifying the needs of the subjects in an attempt to show how well what has been covered in CECL 4 matches the needs of the subjects.

5.1   Needs of the Subjects

According to the needs analysis, the subjects learned English either for better job opportunities and better work performances or out of personal interest; altogether they made 92.1% of all the subjects. As for the target communicators, 75.5% of the subjects would work with non-native speaker, thus English would be used mainly in domestic context. As far as the objectives are concerned, 73.4% hoped to be capable of fluent verbal communication; 64.0% desired to be able to conduct daily communication. It does not take much to find that the subjects hoped to be sufficiently cultivated in speaking. In favorite topic selection, the five most frequently selected topics were movie, travel, entertainment, music and culture. Thus they favored those laying more emphasis on listening and speaking with light-hearted topics. Additionally, language

material needed to be interesting, authentic and updated, as can be seen in Table 2. In terms of tasks, situational activities, role plays, and discussions ranked the top three concerns whereas brief question and answer, writing and blank filling were the least expected exercises, indicating that the subjects like speaking and group work better than written and individual work.

5.2   The Match between the Subjects' Needs and CECL4

CECL4, the coursebook currently in use meets the needs of the subjects in the following aspects.

Firstly, CECL4 was compiled by taking the view as its basis that language is communication, to learn a language is to learn communication. In practice, the focus on communicative competence makes it a best choice for the subjects whose particular goals are developing listening and speaking skills, meeting the subjects' needs for more practices in listening and speaking as reflected in Table 1, which is why the students rated the speaking part of CECL4 as the top three (Table 3). Besides, the tasks of the four skills are interconnected, providing more opportunities for the recurrence of language points and practices. It is also worth mentioning that most of the tasks require learners to work together to work out a solution or take on different roles by going on for more than one round of practice, fulfilling the subjects' needs for group work inside and outside classroom practices as reflected in Table 2.

Secondly, CECL4 has a wide range of topics, covering language, entertainment, science and technology, ancient civilizations, social problems, politics, economy and culture. Although needs analysis shows the students only favored light-hearted topics, the wide topic coverage is a must in AE learning. The wide coverage of topics of CECL4 is a great help in broadening the learners' horizons and conducive to expanding their awareness and cultivating divergent thinking, as specified in the National Teaching Guidelines for English Majors at universities and colleges. Moreover, the majority of the materials were taken from newspapers, magazines or books by native speakers, meeting the students' need of material authenticity.

Additionally, designed in an era of frequent cultural exchanges, CECL4 characterizes itself with a great deal of cultural exposure. This makes it possible for students to experience, analyze and contrast cultures of other countries with that of their own, better preparing them to be global communicators with intercultural awareness [18]. It is of particular use in fostering cultural awareness and promoting cross-cultural communication, which is of amounting importance in the information age. This can be seen from the open-ended question on the evaluation questionnaire, where the subjects rate culture as the one where they make the greatest progress after one-year's learning.

In spite of the strengths displayed by CECL4 in meeting the subjects' demand, it has its weaknesses. Firstly, the coursebook package proves ineffective in both teaching and learning. According to Table 2, the subjects desire to have supplementary readings in each teaching unit to have more background knowledge for self-access after class. The interviews with teachers reveal that they hope that more background knowledge or channels to access such information would be introduced in the teacher's book. Additionally, a workbook and a vocabulary list are also desirable for the subjects. Thirdly, as

has been noted by one teacher interviewed, most of the reading texts are introductory and informative ones. Not so many help foster in the students the morally sound values and outlook on the world and life, which is the key and guarantee of ideology cultivation [22]. In this sense, a coursebook with coverage of related material will create opportunities for them to explore more and exert considerable influence on them, better shaping and equipping them for future jobs. In addition, though the result of needs analysis shows that the subjects did not take classic appreciation as one of their objectives in AE learning, it is specified as one of the requirements in the National Teaching Guidelines for English Majors at universities and colleges. CECL4 lack classics necessary to cultivate the ability of style analysis and literature appreciation. As has been admitted by Luo [23] and Wang [24], AE course should aim at improving the integrated skills of English with more emphasis on reading, rhetoric and writing as specified by the National Teaching Guidelines for English majors at universities and colleges, so there should be certain coverage of classics in CECL4.

6   Conclusion

Coursebook evaluation not only allows teachers to ponder upon the teaching reality and the theories behind coursebook compilation, but also reflect on their roles in teaching, making the most of the teaching materials [12]. The present study was conducted to see the users' satisfaction toward CECL4 for English majors as AE coursebook in Independent Colleges. The paper focused on the evaluation of CECL4 which was done by analyzing the needs of the subjects, their satisfaction toward CECL4 and teachers' attitude toward it. Two questionnaires concerning the subjects' needs and satisfaction toward CECL4 after use and interviews with three teachers were the major research instruments.

Statistical results showed that the third-year English majors in Independent Colleges generally learned English for practical purposes and had great needs in the development of listening and speaking skills. They favored coursebooks covering interesting topics like movies, music, travel etc. with light-hearted articles close to life. Group oral activities were liked better than individual written work.

Statistical analysis and interviews with the teachers indicated that despite the weaknesses of CECL4, the students surveyed and the teachers interviewed generally felt positive toward CECL4, deeming it suitable for them as AE coursebook when there was no specially designed coursebook for them. Yet there was still a lot of room for improvement. Firstly, classics by famous writers should be added to cultivate learners' ability of style analysis and language appreciation to meet the requirements specified in the National Teaching Guidelines for English majors at universities and colleges; secondly, material of background knowledge should be supplemented; thirdly, passages carrying more value orientation weight should be added to make it more integrative.

Currently, there are no specially designed coursebooks for users at Independent Colleges. The research result reveals their needs and makes it possible for users' voice

to be heard, thus providing insights into the compilation of coursebooks suitable for them.

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