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# On the digital hybrid publishing model of English reference books for primary and secondary schools—A case study of foreign language teaching and research press

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**Abstract:** English reference books occupy a large proportion in the basic educational books market, and the innovative publishing model is worth exploring. Another valuable question is the way to apply digital hybrid publishing—a new publishing model—in English reference books. In this article, the above problems are analyzed by taking the digital teaching reference products of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as examples.

**Keywords:** English reference book; hybrid publishing

English, as one of the most widely used languages in the world, has become an important tool for international communication, and scientific and cultural exchanges. Thus, it is of great significance to teenagers' development to set up English courses in compulsory education. English is an important subject in basic education of primary and secondary schools, so English reference books account for a large proportion in the books market. The forms of teaching reference products for primary and secondary schools are diversified in the digital age, which not only meets the needs of users for digital learning, but also promotes the development of digital education. Exploring and analyzing the digital hybrid publishing model is the most effective way to understand the publishing situation and trend of English reference books under the digital background, and at the same time, provides a reference for the digitalization of education publishing.

## 1. Limitations of traditional paper English reference books

In the *English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education*, the overall goals of English curriculum consist of the following five aspects, namely language skills, language knowledge, emotional attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness, which require students to form a basic comprehensive language application ability. Along with the continuous reform of teaching materials, the content of English teaching materials is basically in the order of listening, speaking, reading and writing, which pays more attention to students' language experience rather than the traditional teaching focus of grammar knowledge. The direction of English examination also has turned from a simple reappearance of knowledge points to the assessment of students' comprehensive language skills.

The reform of English textbooks and examinations indicates that English education in China has changed from "paper English" to "practical English". However, the traditional paper English reference books have great limitations in the promoting of students' comprehensive language application ability [1]. Although

there are many kinds of reference books, the homogenization phenomenon is serious that many books are just low-level repetition in style and content, without any innovation. Most English reference books still follow the dated writing mode in the past, that is, they present the knowledge points in textbooks in detail. While students' scores are improved obviously, the real ability to use language has not been exercised. Such kinds of reference books, characterized by cramming knowledge, ignore students' autonomy and enlightening learning, which is emphasized in current education. As students are very passive in receiving knowledge, it is difficult to achieve ideal learning results.

## **2. Digital hybrid publishing**

The rapid development of digital technology not only changes people's reading habits greatly, but also innovates the form of books. Digital publishing is a new publishing model, emphasizing the mobilization and digitalization of content, and the digitalization of production mode, operation management, operation procedure, communication carrier, reading consumption and learning form. Thanks to the innate characteristics of network, the continuous development of network technology provides digital publishing with great advantages over traditional publishing, and the industry with a high growth rate.

Hybrid publishing, as an important development direction of digital publishing, has obtained extensive attention from publishing circles. Since June, 2007, China has launched the "Project of National Digital Hybrid Publishing System", focusing on the research and development of new digital hybrid publishing technologies with uniform standards. Digital hybrid publishing refers to a full-process, digital and automatic on-demand publishing model taking structured content processing and management as the core and supporting multiple products and services. The "hybrid" in digital hybrid publishing has multiple meanings, namely, the hybrid of different publishing forms, different media, different publishing business processes, etc. Its essence is "one piece of content, structured processing, hierarchical expression, all-media publishing, and on-demand service", which can realize multiple application of resources. Under the influence of digital technology, the form of educational publishing products has turned to be electronic and networked, and its publishing model has also changed from paper carrier to multimedia cooperative publishing. English, as a language subject, has a great potential to be combined with multimedia.

## **3. Analysis of the hybrid publishing model of FLTRP**

Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP), a leading domestic and internationally renowned university publishing house, founded by Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1979, is a comprehensive educational publishing house featuring foreign language publishing and covering all disciplines publishing, Chinese language publishing, scientific book publishing and children's book publishing. More than 30% of the English teaching textbooks and reference books for China's primary and secondary schools in the market are the FLTRP editions. It can be said that FLTRP is a veritable "leader in English educational books industry" in China [2]. Based on foreign language education and combined with digital

education services and digital publishing, FLTRP has published a variety of hybrid teaching reference products with rich levels.

### **3.1. Value-added service model of paper books**

Traditional paper reference books can only provide readers with one-way and standardized reading services because of their limited capacity and fixed layout, and cannot meet the deep-seated needs of users such as personalization, intelligence and dynamic interaction. On the contrary, “hybrid publishing” can make full use of the advantages of new media technology, combine digital technology with English resources, so as to achieve complementarity, integration and innovation of resources, and help students learn language intuitively, efficiently and independently. FLTRP adds teaching videos and audio into paper teaching reference books, enabling students to learn anytime and anywhere, make use of fragmented time and improve learning efficiency. which meets students’ individualized learning needs. At the same time, two-dimensional codes are added in a large number of paper English reference books. As they buy paper books, students obtain value-added services simultaneously, such as explanation videos by teachers, examination papers over the years and analysis of difficult problems related to this part of the content by scanning the two-dimensional codes with their mobile phones. The value-added services improve the market competitiveness of products to a certain extent.

### **3.2. Database publishing model**

The contents of different versions of English textbooks are universal. Hybrid publishing can re-integrate the accumulated exercises according to the textbooks, syllabus and user needs into database products to meet the various individual needs of schools, teachers and students. Due to the publishing model of traditional paper teaching reference books, it is difficult to reuse the exercise contents except paper publishing and e-books of the same version. However, the database publishing model can accumulate the contents published every time by means of structured splitting, attribute labeling and classified management, so that the teaching reference contents can play the maximum role in the continuous accumulation.

The basic English test question bank system developed in 2010 by the Basic English Education Publishing—a branch of FLTRP can provide the most perfect solution for English teachers in all sections of basic education in China. The system is characterized by a large number of questions, rich question types and convenient operation, obtaining high evaluation. The system has the functions of generating, checking and managing questions, forming test papers, printing, online testing, generating reports and so on. The test papers can be generated as Word files, and listening audio can be downloaded at any time, which not only facilitates tests on students by teachers, but also helps students to conduct self-test. The question bank system regularly collects questions from English teachers all over the country to adapt to the continuous development of basic English education and ensure the sustainable development of the system.

### **3.3. E-book publishing model**

With the popularization of electronic reading terminals such as smart phones, e-readers and tablet computers, more and more people have adopted the digital reading mode. At present, FLTRP publishes all its books in both paper and electronic versions simultaneously. The conversion of book content from paper to digital format can not only reduce the inventory, but also facilitate the preservation, and meet the readers' demand for electronic teaching reference books.

Based on the database, the English reference books under "hybrid publishing" by FLTRP has developed an open e-book production platform, on which users can select the required English content and quickly generate targeted e-books through templates. These e-books can not only enable readers to customize the content, cover, format, etc., but also allow them to add some personalized information, so that readers can customize the required e-books. This open customization mode not only produce e-books meeting readers' individual needs, but also attach more value-added functions to the e-books through the content relevance formed by "hybrid publishing".

### **3.4. Internet publishing model**

Up to now, Internet has shown great commercial value and influence with clear business model, and can provide reference for digital publishing of teaching reference books with a large number of mature cases. The "hybrid publishing" of teaching reference books for primary and secondary schools enables the Internet educational applications to have a content base, and to provide services such as teaching, practice and evaluation; at the same time, the "hybrid publishing" can also expand the application extension and realize the profit of Internet publishing through multiple channels.

The "New Standard English Website" of FLTRP integrates the high-quality educational publishing resources and expert resources accumulated by FLTRP in the past 30 years, and opens various English learning zones for teachers and students for free. In addition, there are valuable modules such as online teaching materials, question bank system, teacher training platform and reading and writing courses to meet the needs of various users [3]. The NES online text- book, its most remarkable product, is completely matched with the English textbooks of the new curriculum standard. It integrates a large number of multimedia materials such as videos, animations and pictures related to textbooks, and is equipped with a high-tech voice evaluation system, which can realize the functions of online follow-up, dialogue and text recitation. Moreover, the NES online textbook is designed with a homework system, and can provide online communication services, support online answering questions, and track and record students' dynamic learning state throughout the whole process.

### **3.5. Learning terminal publishing model**

The learning terminal publishing model refers to integrating contents into learning terminals, focusing on the core competitiveness of combining contents with terminal applications, and emphasizing the interactivity, richness and diversity of contents. Some examples are talking pens and learning machines.

FLTRP produced a self-developed “VIATON” talking pen in 2006, matched with FLTRP English textbooks for primary and secondary schools. Adopting the international cutting-edge optical recognition technology and advanced digital voice technology, “VIATON” talking pens have eight functions, namely instant reading, comparison after reading, translation, recording, looking up words, interactive games, MP3 playing and USB storage. More than 1,000 kinds of books can be recognized and read, and the sound files are recorded by experts at home and abroad. The talking pens can correct students’ mispronunciations and create a standard language environment for them.

In addition, FLTRP and IFLYTEK Co., Ltd. jointly developed Amy, the first English learning aid toy in China, which can sing and tell stories. On the basis of the new English curriculum standard, it stimulates children’s interest in learning English with a series of stories and various games. The contents in Amy keep up with the progress of class- room teaching, and provide children with a brand-new and interactive English learning experience through word inter- action and natural and real oral dialogue exercises.

As the leader of publishing of English reference books, FLTRP sets an example and leads the trend of hybrid publishing, which is worth studying. The five hybrid publishing models mentioned above are just for attracting more discussion and research. “Hybrid publishing” enables the contents in traditional books to be deeply studied, and more and better application models will definitely be found in practice. In addition to teaching reference books, other types of books can also combine their traditional publishing advantages to look for suitable development directions from various aspects.

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