An Evaluation of the 9th Grade Local and the International English Course Books in Terms of Aims and Methodology[1]

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Abstract:

English coursebooks play a fundamental role in EFL settings such as Turkey since they shape teachers' decisions about in what order to teach and how as well as what to teach to learners (McGrath, 2006). This highlights the importance of coursebook selection which needs to be made after a systematic analysis and evaluation. For this reason, this study evaluates 9th grade local and international English coursebooks that are used in Anatolian and other public high schools in Turkey. The evaluation is carried out using a checklist method in order to achieve more objective and reliable evaluation of those coursebooks (McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson, 2003). Using this checklist, teachers who are the prime users of those coursebooks are asked to evaluate them in terms of (a) aims and objectives and (b) methodology and activities. The results are discussed by considering teacher and student needs. Then, a comparison is made between the local and the international course book evaluations.

Keywords: Course-book evaluation, aims and objectives, methodology, activities.

In English language education, coursebooks are an important resource for (1) presenting language components, (2) activities, (3) stimulating ideas, (4) self-directed learning, and in some of the contexts, they are used as a syllabus and a support for less experienced teachers (Cunningsworth, 1995). English coursebooks are even more crucial in EFL settings such as Turkey since they shape teachers' decisions about in what order to teach and how as well as what to teach to learners (McGrath, 2006). In addition, teachers' attitudes to coursebooks are found to be quite positive as they describe their images of these books as "a textbook is like oil in cooking" and "a coursebook is a map", (McGrath, 2006, p. 174). It is found that the majority of English learners at Turkish high schools uses only textbooks in class as the main material and do not have many opportunities to use English as a communication tool outside the classroom (Hatipoğlu & Can, 2010). Non-native teachers, in particular, over-rely on a single textbook (Medgyes, 2001). Therefore, coursebooks if not designed in a way to help language learners achieve communicative competence which is the ultimate goal in language education and in a way to guide teachers to attain their goal can turn into stumbling blocks for both teachers and learners. This highlights the importance of coursebook selection which needs to be made after a systematic analysis and evaluation.

Coursebook evaluation is a crucial process that can have a direct effect on the teaching procedure. Coursebook evaluation can be carried out to help a publisher or an institution to make decisions, to help ourselves in developing and selecting textbooks, to find out if the book being used meets the needs of the students and to carry out a research project (Tomlinson, 2003). It is important to find out if there is a match between the textbook and the curriculum, between the textbook and the students, between the textbook and the teachers (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This evaluation process can allow the teachers and others who select coursebooks to decide whether to use the coursebook or not and whether it is partially suitable and can be used through adaptation.

Literature Review

There are several studies in which English coursebooks used in English classrooms are evaluated from various perspectives. There are some studies which make an overall evaluation of the English coursebooks (e.g. Al-Yousef, 2007; Özdemir, 2007; Tekir & Arikan, 2007) and some which evaluate English coursebooks in terms of specific language components and skills such as vocabulary, speech acts and cultural elements (e.g. Campillo, 2008; Çakır, 2010; Delen & Tavil, 2010; Nemati, 2009). In the context of Turkey, to the best knowledge of the researchers, studies on the overall English coursebook evaluation is limited to primary education (e.g. Tekir & Arikan, 2007; Özdemir, 2007; Çakır, 2010). With respect

to the purpose of this study, there seems to be no research that focuses on the evaluation of 9th grade English coursebooks used in Turkish high schools. Most importantly, local and international coursebooks, both of which are used in Turkish EFL classes, do not seem to be compared in the literature.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

a. Is there any difference between the preferences of foreign language teachers with special reference to the use of foreign English coursebooks and local English coursebooks in terms of aims and objectives?

b. Is there any difference between the preferences of foreign language teachers with special reference to the use of foreign English coursebooks and local English coursebooks in terms of methods and activities?

Method

English teachers who are the prime users of coursebooks are asked to evaluate the specified coursebooks. Fifteen English teachers from five different high schools in Ankara participated in the study. They all teach English to 9th grade students. As for their gender, one of them is male while others are female and their age ranges from 31 to 55 years. More than half of the teachers (53.3%) have language teaching experience from 11 to 20 years and some (40%) have language teaching experience for more than 20 years. Furthermore, four of the teachers hold a masters degree.

As for the instrument used for teachers to evaluate the coursebooks that they use, a comprehensive checklist is designed in terms of (a) aims and objectives and (b) methodology and activities with reference to some available checklists (Al-Yousef, 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Cunningsworth, 1995; Harmer, 1991; McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson, 2003). Important and relevant items from the available checklists are combined and other items related to the learning and teaching context and items that are found significant are added. A scale ranging from 1(Never) to 3 (Always) is used. Checklists are given to English language teachers in 9th Grade and are asked to fill in the checklists both for the local and the international coursebooks that they use in terms of (a) aims and objectives and (b) methodology and activities. Therefore, rather than following an impressionistic method that involves subjective and impressionistic evaluation, the checklist method is employed in order to achieve more objective and principled evaluation of the coursebooks as Tomlinson (2003) states that "making an evaluation criterion-referenced can reduce subjectivity and can certainly help to make an evaluation more principled, rigorous, systematic and reliable" (p. 23). Lastly, SPSS

20.0 as a statistical program is used in analyzing the questionnaires and descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) is carried out.

The reliability level for both local coursebooks and foreign ones are found high enough to conduct the current study as is given below in Table 1.

Table 1

Overall Reliability Levels

Section	Foreign English Coursebooks Cronbach's Alpha	Local English Coursebooks Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
General	.937	.915	54
Aims & Objectives	.820	.799	10
Methodology & Activities	.919	.913	44

Results and Discussion

The local and foreign coursebooks that are used by the participants in this study are given in Table 2 and Table 3 below.

Table 2

Foreign English Coursebooks (FEC)	N
Real Life	6
New Headway	1
New Streetwise	2
Hotline	2
Enterprise	1
Up Beat	2
Solutions	2
New English File	3
Upstream	1

Table 3

Local English Coursebooks (LEC)	N
New Bridge to Success	7
Breeze	4
None (Not using any local book)	7

Research Question 1: Is there any difference between the preferences of foreign language teachers with special reference to the use of foreign English coursebooks and local English coursebooks in terms of aims and objectives?

A careful analysis of Table 4 simply indicates that the preference of foreign English coursebooks (FEC) (m=2.55) is higher than that of local English coursebooks (LEC) (m=2.05) with special reference to aims and objectives in those books.

Table 4: Overall Mean Scores regarding the Preference of Foreign English Coursebooks and Local English Coursebooks in Terms of Aims and Objectives

	FEC	LEC
	Total Mean	Total Mean
Aims & Objectives	2.55	2.05

Relying on the following findings given in Table 5 below we can assert LEC lack the probable learning preference (m=1.88). Entry/exit language levels are not precisely defined for example by reference to international standards or by reference to local or country-specific examination requirement (m=1.63). The participants also reported that the objectives almost do not meet and suit the needs of the learners (m=1.88).

Table 5: Mean Scores regarding the Preference of Foreign English Coursebooks and Local English Coursebooks in Terms of Specific Issues for Aims and Objectives.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES	FEC	LEC
	Mean	Mean
Are the objectives clearly stated in the students' book?	2.77	2.25
Do the aims of the book correspond closely with the aims of the teaching program?	2.38	2.00
Are you given information about the Needs Analysis or classroom piloting that was undertaken?	2.54	2.00
Is there a clear specification of the target age range?	2.77	2.25
Is there a clear specification of the culture?	2.69	2.50
Is there a clear specification of the assumed background?	2.54	2.25
Is there a clear specification of the probable learning preferences?	2.62	1.88
Are entry/exit language levels precisely defined.e.g. by reference to international standards or by reference to local or country-specific examination requirements?	2.23	1.63
Do the objectives meet the needs of the learners?	2.38	1.88
Do the objectives suit the level of the learners?	2.54	1.88

Research Question 2. Is there any difference between the preferences of foreign language teachers with special reference to the use of foreign English coursebooks and local English coursebooks in terms of methods and activities?

It is reported in Table 6 that the preference of foreign English coursebooks (FEC) (m=2.38) is higher than that of local English corsebooks (LEC) (m=1.71) with special reference to methods and activities in those books.

Table 6: Overall Mean Scores regarding the Preference of Foreign English Coursebooks and Local English Coursebooks in Terms of Methods and Activities

	FEC	LEC
	Total Mean	Total Mean
Methodology & Activities	2.38	1.71

We have obtained not only an interesting but also a striking finding in the study in which the participants implied the insufficiency of LEC in such issues as encouraging students to use language creatively (m=1.75), personalising activities (m=1.75), the coursebook being process-oriented (m=1.88), the coursebooks giving a sense of progress (m=1.75), the material being student-centred (m=1.75), the development of cognitive and problem-solving skills through exercises in the coursebook (m=1.50), the design of the activities for group-work (m=1.75), involving learners intellectually (m=1,75) and emotionally (m=1.63), using personal voice (1.50), including imaging (m=1,75), kinaesthetic (1.25), inner voice (m=1,38) activities, and out-of class works (m=1,88), the balance between inductive and deductive approaches (m=1.75), giving suggestions for practical ideas (m=1.88), using coursebook as a reference for revision (m=1.63), the material inspiring students to produce their own works (m=1.38), the material being suitable for differing learning styles (m=1.38), the sequence and grading being from known to unknown (m=1.75), easy to difficult (m=1.88), variety in the type of activities (m=1.88), allowance for on-going evaluation (m=1.88), providing ready-made achievement tests (m=1.13), the balance between accuracy and fluency (m=1.38), presenting study techniques (m=1.38), encouraging learner autonomy (m=1.25), meaningful exercises as well as mechanical ones (m=1.25), clear instructions (m=1.63), offering alternative ways of extending learning activities (m=1.38), encouraging learners to guess, predict and discover (m=1.88), development of creative and critical thinking skills (m=1.63), and the balance between analytical and experiential mode of learning (m=1.50).

Table 7
Mean Scores regarding the Preference of Foreign English Coursebooks and Local English Coursebooks in Terms of Specific Issues for Methods and Activities.

	FEC	LEC
METHODOLOGY & ACTIVITIES	Mean	Mean
Does the coursebook make its guiding principles clear?	2,85	2,00
Are learners encouraged to use language creatively?	2,69	1,75
Are any learning activities personalized?	2,15	1,75
Is the coursebook process-oriented?	2,31	1,88
Is the coursebook product-oriented?	2,23	2,25
Does the coursebook give a sense of progress?	2,62	1,75
Does the coursebook supply students with the purpose of each activity?	2,46	2,00

Is the material student-centered?	2,46	1,75
Are cognitive and problem solving skills of the learners developed through exercises in coursebook?	2,46	1,50
Are there activities specifically designed for individual work?	2,38	2,00
Are there activities specifically designed for group work?	2,31	1,75
Are there activities specifically designed for pair work?	2,23	2,00
Are there tasks that engage learners?	2,38	2,00
Does the coursebook enable learners to make connections with their lives, interests, views, attitudes and feelings?	2,31	2,13
Does it involve learners intellectually?	2,38	1,75
Does it involve learners emotionally?	2,31	1,63
Does it use personal voice?	2,31	1,50
Does it include imaging activities?	2,08	1,75
Does it include kinaesthetic activities?	1,92	1,25
Does it include inner voice activities?	2,08	1,38
Does it have self-check parts?	2,23	2,00
Does it include out-of-class works?	2,23	1,88
Is inductive approach balanced with deductive one?	2,38	1,75
Does the coursebook give suggestions for practical ideas?	2,54	1,88
Is there enough revision for units?	2,85	2,25
Is it possible to use the coursebook as a reference for revision?	2,15	1,63
Does the material inspire students to produce their own works?	2,15	1,38
Is the material suitable for different learning styles?	2,15	1,38
Is the sequence and grading from known to unknown	2,69	1,75
Is the sequence and grading from easy to difficult	2,62	1,88
Is the sequence and grading from concrete to abstract	2,62	2,00
Is the sequence and grading from general to specific	2,62	2,00
Is there variety in the type of activities?	2,69	1,88
Is allowance made for on-going evaluation?	2,23	1,50
Are ready-made achievement tests provided for the coursebook?	2,54	1,13
Is there a balance between accuracy and fluency?	2,31	1,38
Does the coursebook present study techniques?	2,38	1,38
Does the coursebook encourage learner autonomy?	2,31	1,25
Does the coursebook contain meaningful exercises as well as mechanical ones?	2,38	1,25
Are the instructions for the activities clear?	2,69	1,63
Does the coursebook offer alternatives or ways of extending learning activities?	2,23	1,38
Do the materials encourage learners to guess, predict, and discover?	2,54	1,88
Do the materials allow for the development of creative and critical thinking skills?	2,31	1,63
Is there a sufficient balance between analytical and experiential modes of learning?	2,15	1,50

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers evaluated foreign English coursebooks to be better and more sufficient in terms of methodology/activities and slightly better for aims/objectives. Although the foreign and local coursebooks seem to be close to each other in terms of aims and objectives, they seem to be quite different in terms of methodology and activities with the former being better than the latter in meeting the needs with regard to aims and methodology. Therefore, a need arises to improve local coursebooks in terms of aims and methodology. Additionally, there needs to be a match between teachers' expectations and the coursebooks particularly in the case of local English coursebooks. There should be collaboration between researchers, coursebooks writers, administrators, teachers and students. This study can serve as a guideline for the stakeholders in writing coursebooks. Teachers and administrators can make use of the findings of this study in selecting coursebooks and in evaluating the quality of coursebooks in terms of aims and methodology which constitute the bedrock of language education. More specifically, local English coursebook designers and authors should form objectives in order to meet the needs and the foreign language proficiency level of students by taking into account their background and learning preferences. The coursebooks should be designed in terms of not only product-oriented approach but also process-oriented ones. Besides, they should include such problem solving and group work activities as to encourage students to use language creatively and at the same time these activities should appeal to different learning styles, strategies both intellectually and emotionally. There should be a systematic sequence and grading in these course books. In terms of assessment, they should include on-going evaluation by means of different types of tests such as quizzes, midterms, achievement, etc. given in certain intervals during their studies each term. The activities should be designed in such a way that they help students develop their communicative competence, leading to become autonomous learners. In doing this there should be a sound balance between analytical and experiential modes of learning.

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