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An EFL Coursebook Evaluation through the Lens of Preparatory School Instructors

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the English File series as a coursebook material for university preparatory school students in an EFL context. The study gathered data through a triangulation of data collection procedures, comprising questionnaires and interviews with preparatory school instructors. Results revealed that the series was highly suitable for university students with the purpose of general English proficiency. The study also proposed some areas of improvement, such as the integration of contemporary topics, the delivery of grammar points and vocabulary exercises in more meaningful contexts, and the inclusion of extra reading and writing materials to meet the academic needs of preparatory school students. While the series made a significant effort to promote intercultural competence and became highly successful in doing so, the instructors reported a few cultural biases and stereotypes that might necessitate revision. All in all, the study provides comprehensive insights for stakeholders in higher education interested in enhancing the effectiveness and functionality of the coursebook material in practice.

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Introduction

The constructivist paradigm has highlighted the importance of recognizing that each student possesses their own unique cognitive, linguistic, and social/affective strengths, making it necessary to consider individual differences and needs while selecting or designing teaching materials (Brooks & Brooks, 2001). One way to potentially enhance foreign language learning outcomes is by shaping the learning environment in a manner that appears to meet students' needs. It could be argued that coursebooks may play a significant role in creating this environment and ultimately impacting these outcomes to a considerable degree. Therefore, deciding on a certain coursebook that aligns with the requirements of students and language teaching programs is of critical importance since the impact of such decisions have the potential to greatly influence student engagement and motivation levels, thus ultimately determining their overall performance in acquiring a foreign language (Tsiplakides, 2011).

Several scholars have expressed various views in connection with the use of coursebooks. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) acknowledged that using a suitable coursebook is essential for effective teaching and learning. Such materials are additionally considered by many to be a core of any ELT program and provide significant benefits to both teachers and students, playing a decisive role in shaping the nature of both teaching and learning (Cunningsworth, 1995; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Sheldon, 1988; Mukundan, 2012). In addition, Haycroft (1998) argues that students require coursebooks psychologically, as they may use them to monitor their growth and accomplishments. This is further supported by Razmjoo's (2007) findings, where learners who utilized coursebooks often felt more confident and accomplished when acquiring a new language. Therefore, it would not be wrong to draw the conclusion that selecting the right coursebook is essential for supporting teachers and students in the foreign language learning process.

The use of coursebooks in teaching English has proven to be beneficial for the stakeholders involved. Not only do they act as guides for teachers to plan their classes, but they also provide learners with a sense of direction and help them stay on track towards meeting learning objectives (Richards, 2001; Tomlinson, 2011). Ahmadi and Ahour (2012) also support the opinion that coursebooks are primary sources that make it easy to transfer knowledge and information to learners in a systematic and straightforward manner. What is more, as Tomlinson (2010) specified, these benefits are not limited to standardizing instruction, reducing preparation time for teachers, and facilitating lesson planning by administrators. In

fact, they also play a crucial role in preparing learners for examinations while offering adaptive instructions that cater to all students at a specific language level across different locations. In the light of the scholarly literature, it goes without saying that, in the presence of a well-prepared coursebook, it is likely to advance the quality of foreign language learning through structured content material and target-driven exercises.

As the headliner of the current study, the English File coursebook series is popularly utilized in teaching English at higher education institutions all across Turkey and has actually been used by the School of Foreign Languages at a state university in the Southeastern part of the country for more than four years. The researchers themselves have contacted several schools of foreign languages across the region and found out that the majority of them are actively using the English File Series. The present study aims to explore the perceptions of English language instructors towards the series, highlight the books' strengths and weaknesses, and offer recommendations to stakeholders to enhance the books' effectiveness in practice. Given that the coursebooks as language teaching materials have an important position in the EFL context, conducting an in-depth analysis of this particular material series will not only develop a profound understanding of its regional impact on English language teaching but also pave the way for enhancing pedagogical practices throughout the region.

Literature Review

While the introduction section marked coursebook use in EFL context as a factor to be reckoned with, the literature review section revolves around the research that investigates the place and prominence of coursebook evaluation. In the EFL coursebook market, there is a myriad of materials published by different publishing houses, each with their own unique appeal. This abundance can make it difficult for instructors to select just one that stands out amongst the rest. Therefore, evaluating these coursebooks prior to making a decision has become a necessary step in the process (Alemi & Sadehvandi, 2012). Sheldon (1988) asserts that coursebook evaluation provides stakeholders with the opportunity to select the most appropriate tool based on students' interests, abilities, and needs. Furthermore, by analyzing a coursebook's strengths and weaknesses, teachers can become familiar with its potential advantages and limitations.

A coursebook should be evaluated from various perspectives to determine its suitability for a particular group of students (Yapıcı, 2019). These criteria should embrace its design and layout, as well as the skills, exercises, and language style associated with its content. One of

the ways that could potentially be effective in evaluating a coursebook is to gather feedback from instructors who have used it with students (Zohrabi, 2011). This approach may provide valuable insights as, even if a coursebook seems good on paper, there is still a possibility that it may not entirely meet all requirements and expectations such as student needs or institutional goals.

According to Sheldon (1988), it is difficult to apply a uniform set of criteria to all teaching and learning settings without significant modifications. However, according to scholars in the field such as Brown (1997), and Cunningsworth (1995), Sheldon (1988), Williams (1983), it is widely accepted that checklists for evaluating coursebooks must consider particular aspects with regard to the layout, organization, and content. Additionally, it is agreed upon that evaluating a coursebook should include important criteria exploring subject matter methodology, objectives, and approaches.

Nevertheless, prominent coursebook analysts in the field of ELT, such as Williams (1983), Sheldon (1988), Brown (1997), and Cunningsworth (1995), agree that evaluation checklists should incorporate specific criteria regarding the physical characteristics of coursebooks, such as layout, organization, and content. They also concur that the evaluation process should encompass essential criteria assessing the coursebook's methodology, objectives, and approaches.

The prominent scholars in this field (Cunningsworth 1995; Ellis; 1997; Tomlinson 1998) commonly employ three categories of evaluation: pre-use, in-use, and post-use evaluations. Pre-use evaluation occurs before the implementation of a coursebook to anticipate any potential issues that may arise during its use. Meanwhile, in-use evaluation aims to identify strengths and weaknesses in real-time to enable teachers to adjust their teaching methods accordingly. Lastly, post-use evaluations provide an opportunity for retrospective reflection on the overall value of the material used over time by assessing a variety of properties.

Whilst evaluating coursebooks, it is essential to consider specific language functions, grammar structures, language learning skills, the relevance of linguistic components to the related socio-cultural context, and the norms around cultural and gender representation (Nunan, 1991). Evaluations should additionally focus on whether the language components, themes, and activities are appropriate for the students' backgrounds, needs, interests, and personalities, as well as those of the teacher and institution (Harmer, 2007; McDonough & Shaw, 1998).

The following three research questions were formulated to guide the coursebook evaluation study:

1. To what extent is the English File series suitable as a coursebook material for university preparatory school students in an EFL context?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the series in terms of promoting general English proficiency for these students?
3. What are the opinions of preparatory school instructors regarding the content, pedagogical goals, and methodological approaches of the series?

Methodology

Research Design and Instruments

This study utilized a 'convergent-parallel mixed-method approach' to gather comprehensive and detailed data on the coursebook being used (Creswell, 2014). That is, the mixed-methods post-use evaluation study drew insights through quantitative and qualitative data. Both questionnaires and interviews were given equal attention to ensure that the results could be compared, and an overall evaluation could be reached. By using "Methodological Triangulation" (Denzin, 1970), the study aimed to increase its validity and gain a comprehensive apprehension of the coursebook. The quantitative data was gathered using a questionnaire adapted from Litz (2005) with permission from the author. This checklist is considered one of the most cited and accepted tools for coursebook evaluation and assesses a coursebook under seven criteria: practical considerations, layout and design, activities, skills, language type, subject and content, and overall consensus. These criteria will also constitute the order and basis of the sub-sections in the discussion section.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather participants' opinions on topics that may not have been fully addressed in the questionnaire or that required further explanation. The interview protocol consisted of 9 pre-determined questions that focused on the same sections as the questionnaire, but follow-up questions were reflected depending on the course of the interview. The questions were designed by the researchers and pilot tested on several instructors to minimize any uncertainty about them.

Participants

A total of 47 English language instructors from the School of Foreign Languages at a state university in the southeastern region of Turkey participated in the survey to evaluate the coursebook they had been using for four years. The participants embodied 36 female and 11 male instructors with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 28 years. Over half of the participants used English File elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate books to teach English, with most of them repeatedly using the first three levels in their modules. Additionally, more than half of the participants used all the books mentioned. To gain in-depth data about the subject matter, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 volunteer participants. The duration of the interviews ranged from 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the length of the conversation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study was initiated after obtaining the ethical approval from the University's Social and Humanities Ethics Committee on 09.01.2023 with the reference number 283105. All participants volunteered to take part in the study and were assured that their views would remain anonymous. The quantitative data collection was conducted via Google Forms online questionnaire. The data were then inserted into Excel to calculate frequencies and percentages for each item. This is followed by the tabulation of the findings.

The interviews were audio recorded with the participants' knowledge, and the recordings were transcribed and printed out for analysis by the three researchers to ensure Investigator Triangulation (Denzin, 1970). The researchers individually considered the research questions and scrutinized the transcriptions inductively, which is followed by code formation and discussions to reach a consensus on the probable codes. Only the relevant and agreed statements were developed into codes for analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The parts in the questionnaire were presented as sub-headings to categorize and analyze the data collected from both instruments. Every sub-heading presents a table in which the quantitative data are illustrated with interpretations. The qualitative data are subsequently presented with related literature to clarify or elaborate on specific points.

Practical Considerations

When assessing the coursebook, it's crucial to take into account its external presentation, durability, accessibility, and cost (Litz, 2005). As Table 1 shows, the majority of the participants were of the opinion that the series was easily accessible to students at a reasonable price. More than half of the instructors also found the series to be a recent publication. It was repeatedly mentioned during the interviews that the books' cost was not extortionate, especially when compared to other books available in the market. As a matter of fact, its comparatively reasonable price was said to be one of the many reasons why this coursebook was selected. However, the evaluation conducted by Rahimi (2015) on the English File series revealed that teachers in a private language institution marked comparatively lower scores for the price of the series. One plausible explanation could be that while in one institution there were concerted efforts to provide students with good quality coursebooks available at the most reasonable price, this may not have been a priority or area of focus in the other study. This outcome serves as a reminder that contextual factors should be considered when analyzing coursebooks.

Table 1. *Practical Considerations*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. The price of the textbook is reasonable.	5	10.64%	26	55.32%	7	14.89%	8	17.02%	1	2.13%
2. The textbook is easily accessible.	8	17.02%	35	74.47%	3	6.38%	1	2.13%	0	0.00%
3. The textbook is a recent publication.	7	14.89%	22	46.81%	9	19.15%	9	19.15%	0	0.00%
4. A teacher's guide, workbook, and audio-tapes accompany the textbook.	27	57.45%	20	42.55%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
5. The author's views on language and methodology are comparable to mine.	9	19.15%	26	55.32%	9	19.15%	2	4.26%	1	2.13%

Table 1 also designates that every instructor confirmed that the coursebooks were provided with supplementary materials such as a teacher's guide, workbook, and audio tapes. Littlejohn (2011) emphasizes the role of complimentary materials that accompany course books as follows:

Publishers now need to offer so much extra material, much of it free of charge, if they are to keep ahead

of the competition. Whilst this plethora of material can have its advantages, one thing for sure is that it

now presents a very different picture for classroom time. (p. 180)

Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated positive perceptions towards the teacher's manual and the materials accompanying the series. The manual encompassed warm-up questions, supplemental activities, and cultural information to share with students, which offered comprehensive guidance, particularly to novice teachers. This finding was also echoed in Rahimi's (2015) study. However, it's worth noting that experienced teachers only relied on the manual during their initial encounter with the books and later disregarded it. One practical solution proposed by instructors is to merge the teacher's manual and the actual coursebook into one book, which would be more convenient for teachers. This solution could be beneficial, especially considering the inconvenience of carrying a thick manual book around.

As extracted from the motto 'English File gets you talking' and the promises on the cover of the coursebooks, the series claims to provide students with stimulating content and enhance their confidence to use the language in real-life situations. It also claims to encompass a balanced range of grammar structures, essential vocabulary, effective pronunciation techniques and fosters development of crucial communication skills in each unit. Notably, the quantitative data indicated that instructors hold views compatible with this methodology proposed by the authors of the series. The following sections will provide further insights into how the series achieves their promised methodology.

Layout and Design

The arrangement and sequence of the sections, the coherence between them, and the presence of visuals and illustrations are all factors that can directly impact the quality of teaching, learning, and motivation (Cunningsworth, 1995). The English File's layout and design were well-received by the majority of participants since it offered a clear, sequenced overview of what to do. Both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the coursebook was designed effectively and appropriately to facilitate content delivery and guide language learning. This can be evident in Table 2 below and observed in the following excerpt of a participant:

Even if you don't look at the teacher's manual, if you have a little knowledge of the instructions there, and if you have made some progress in your teaching experience, I think it is a book that flows very easily. (P8)

On the student side of the coin, this is further supported by the findings of Rahimi (2015), as the students could also gain a thorough understanding of language functions, structures and vocabulary items. With regard to their feedback, they perceived the organization of content in the English File series as logical, easy to follow and well-structured.

Table 2. *Layout and Design*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
6. The textbook includes a detailed overview of the functions, structures and vocabulary that will be taught in each unit.	8	17.02%	26	55.32%	6	12.77%	7	14.89%	0	0.00%
7. The layout and design is appropriate and clear.	9	19.15%	31	65.96%	5	10.64%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
8. The textbook is organised effectively.	8	17.02%	27	57.45%	8	17.02%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%
9. An adequate vocabulary list or glossary is included.	6	12.77%	28	59.57%	5	10.64%	7	14.89%	1	2.13%
10. Adequate review sections and exercises are included.	9	19.15%	29	61.70%	1	2.13%	8	17.02%	0	0.00%
11. An adequate set of evaluation quizzes or testing suggestions is included.	5	10.64%	23	48.94%	10	21.28%	8	17.02%	1	2.13%
12. The teacher's book contains guidance about how the textbook can be used to the utmost advantage.	11	23.40%	32	68.09%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
13. The materials objectives are apparent to both the teacher and student.	8	17.02%	34	72.34%	4	8.51%	1	2.13%	0	0.00%

Although the questionnaire did not elicit instructors' opinions on visuals, several participants specifically commented during the interviews on the attractiveness of the illustrations and the vibrant colors used in the books. The images were found to be relevant to the topics and integrated seamlessly into the series. Another participant referred to this point as follows: "I should say that I'm impressed with the visuals and the layout of the books. The visuals are catchy and attractive, and the layout is ideal, far from tiring the eyes." (P1) As a result, the books' layout was convenient for both students and instructors, as evidenced by the recurring data provided by the participants.

Activities

As Table 3 indicates, while not everyone agreed, more than half of the participants stated that the free and controlled exercises for fluent and accurate language production were evenly distributed throughout the series. There was also a general consensus that the activities were communicative in nature and primarily focused on promoting creative and independent responses in a meaningful context, as stated in the following excerpt:

> Our coursebook gives as many communicative activities as possible and those are mostly from the real context of native settings, so I think they are suitable for a language learner's communicative needs. I think they are well-designed and prepared accordingly. Their focus is on making the student produce as many sentences as possible. (P5)

Table 3. *Activities*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
14. The textbook provides a balance of activities (Ex. There is an equal distribution of free vs. controlled exercises and tasks that focus on both fluent and accurate production).	8	17.02%	22	46.81%	12	25.53%	5	10.64%	0	0.00%
15. The activities encourage sufficient communicative and meaningful practice.	12	25.53%	25	53.19%	8	17.02%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
16. The activities incorporate individual, pair and group work.	13	27.66%	28	59.57%	4	8.51%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
17. The grammar points and vocabulary items are introduced in motivating and realistic contexts.	8	17.02%	25	53.19%	12	25.53%	1	2.13%	1	2.13%
18. The activities promote creative, original and independent responses.	6	12.77%	22	46.81%	14	29.79%	5	10.64%	0	0.00%
19. The tasks are effective for the internalisation of newly introduced language.	7	14.89%	27	57.45%	11	23.40%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
20. The textbook's activities can be modified or supplemented easily.	5	10.64%	31	65.96%	11	23.40%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

According to the quantitative data, the tasks were also found to be effective for internalising the input. The data from the interviews provided insights into how the series actually realizes this goal. As reported, the tasks primarily raised students' linguistic awareness and piqued their interest in the content with intriguing warm-up questions and visual prompts. The inductive approach to grammar teaching was reported to be one of the most efficient ways of delivering subject matter. Rather than explicitly introducing grammar at the start of units (which the books refer to as 'files'), grammar is implicitly embraced in the topics. The page

where explicit grammar is presented is usually followed by preliminary activities to assist students in discovering grammar structures on their own.

In addition to promoting a discovery learning approach, as both sets of data revealed, the flexibility of the materials allowed instructors to structure activities as individual, pair-work, group-work, and whole-class activities. The materials were reported to be flexibly adapted to meet the task-oriented requirements of students. This is further elaborated in the following excerpt:

> You know, it (the coursebook) is using a communicative approach. So, that's nice. I think that you can tweak them (the activities) around so it's quite flexible. From this point of view, you can choose on how to teach whichever skills you are teaching. (P7)

Each set of two units is followed by review pages that provide grammar structures, key vocabulary, a short reading text, and a series of street interviews. Those review pages received positive feedback and were deemed well-organized during the interviews. The quantitative data, on the other hand, displayed that almost half of them were unsure if the books provided adequate exercises or quizzes to monitor student development. Nevertheless, some participants utilized workbooks and extra materials to address this issue. One participant suggested during the interviews the idea of incorporating easy-to-conduct games on those pages to recycle newly learned content in a fun way, which could be considered as a way to enrich the scope of activities. Several others used additional grammar activities to consolidate newly learned structures.

At regular intervals between the 'files', there exists a section where students are exposed to practical English through the events of an English and American couple named Rob and Jenny. This section aims to teach everyday English using a functional approach. Much as the section was not specifically directed in the questionnaire, the qualitative data referred to those short episodes of videos in terms of their appropriateness for the young adults. As stated, particularly the subsequent episodes in the upper-level books included such topics as romantic relationships and friendship, which would attract that specific age group. It was also highlighted that there is an effort in the series to eliminate some prejudices or stereotypes that people have and come across in daily life. Although the instructors in the study of Dimici et al. (2018) interpreted the Rob and Jenny story as an example of cultural stereotyping highlighting American and British culture, one of the instructors in this study exemplified the case of

debunking a stereotype by mentioning a taxi driver in New York returning a lost mobile phone. The whole footage, however, does not go beyond the materials that are made apparently for teaching purposes and does not have the feature of being an authentic material, which was defined by another participant as 'almost authentic'.

Learner autonomy and self-access

Autonomous language learning can be hindered by rigidity in course materials, a phenomenon referred to as 'the stringencies of coursebooks,' by Lennon (2012, p.9), which can limit student creativity and autonomy. To mitigate this issue and allow for greater independence in the language learning process, additional materials may prove beneficial. The series provides an online self-access platform that enables students to practice newly learned content online. The questionnaire had no designated items for the use of self-access or digital tools related to the coursebooks. Although both sets of data elicited an overall positive feedback about the workbook and extra materials, only one participant specified during the interviews that the series was lacking in terms of integrating digital technologies into learning, apart from the self-access platform, which cannot go beyond an approach of computer-assisted learning. She suggested adding more digital components, such as blogs and forums, to enhance self-directed learning and enable interaction and communication with students from diverse geographical locations. This finding goes hand in hand with statements of Işık (2013) who asserts that coursebooks as traditional materials remain highly favored in English language teaching when combined with interactive materials.

Skills

As table 4 reflects below, although almost a quarter of the participants disagreed that the four skills were given equal importance, the quantitative data revealed a high number of positive feedback on the integration and natural flow of the skills in the 'files.' Various sub-skills were also found to be integrated in the series. The quantitative data on language learning skills provided some insights; however, it did not offer a comprehensive understanding of individual skills.

Table 4. *Skills*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
21. The materials include and focus on the skills that I/my students need to practice.	7	14.89%	31	65.96%	5	10.64%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%
22. The materials provide an appropriate balance of the four language skills.	6	12.77%	24	51.06%	7	14.89%	10	21.28%	0	0.00%
23. The textbook pays attention to sub-skills - i.e. listening for gist, note-taking, skimming for information, etc.	5	10.64%	30	63.83%	9	19.15%	3	6.38%	0	0.00%
24. The textbook highlights and practices natural pronunciation (i.e.- stress and intonation).	19	40.43%	24	51.06%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
25. The practice of individual skills is integrated into the practice of other skills.	8	17.02	27	57.45	9	19.15	3	6.38	0	0.00%

Through the collection and examination of qualitative data, it was possible to gain greater depth regarding these particular areas of focus, which will be discussed under related skills below.

Speaking and Listening

The delivery of speaking and listening skills received favorable reactions during the interviews. The commentaries revolved around how prompts are used to encourage students to contribute and engage in the activities. Although most of the speaking prompts were well-received, some were found to be ineffective. This could be due to a variety of reasons, as stated by the participants. Initially, the topics might not capture the students' interest and motivation to participate. Alternatively, some students might be hesitant to speak about certain topics due to cultural taboos, traditions, or social restrictions. As the most recurring reason, it might be that some students struggle to express their opinions on certain topics, even in their native language.

The length, content, and diversity of accents in the listening tracks were also found appropriate for students' levels. One participant made the following remark:

> English File is famous for its pronunciation and communication activities, in my opinion. We know that
>
> our students need to be able to survive when they go abroad or when they meet foreigners, so in this
>
> sense, I think the coursebook meets their needs. It frequently gives examples and exercises of fillers and
>
> some informal / formal expressions to be used when one does not know what to say exactly. (P2)

The File's pronunciation activities aim to teach the phonological segments of English (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental phonemes (stress, pitch, intonation) by utilizing the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a standardized symbol system of phonetic notation. The instructors found the pronunciation activities to be highly beneficial and entertaining. One instructor even stated that they had never seen any other coursebook that places such a special emphasis on pronunciation and presents it better than the English File. Another instructor reported that this approach to teaching pronunciation is particularly useful for students who plan to study in the English Language Teaching (ELT) department, where Phonetics and Phonology is taught as a course:

> Another thing is the focus on pronunciation, which I love because maybe this is the only book I've seen in my life with plenty of focus on pronunciation. They (pronunciation activities) help to raise awareness. At least, they (students) can have a lot of ideas about different pronunciations. This is even good for the teachers because we might have some problems with pronunciation. The details can sometimes be very good for teachers as well. (P7)

As indicated in the excerpt, such activities not only teach students pronunciation, but also raise awareness for teachers and provide opportunities for them to improve themselves.

Reading

The instructors generally found the reading texts to be interesting and well-coordinated with the other skills activities, and they appreciated the questions that followed the texts, which were considered suitable for teaching general English. However, it was discovered that the reading texts fell short of the testing expectations of the institution. The exams at the institution assessed the reading skill in greater detail with more questions, whereas the questions in the books were more superficial and lacked depth. Additionally, the lack of additional reading worksheets provided with the books was mentioned as a drawback, even though extra communication, grammar, and vocabulary worksheets were available. Some participants expressed difficulty in finding reading texts at an appropriate level and had to rely on external resources to compensate. Nevertheless, it was noted by a participant that this situation could be interpreted as an inconsistency between the expectations of the institution and the coursebook, rather than a deficiency or flaw in the series itself:

> When you think about our needs and our objectives as a school, they (reading texts) are inadequate. They are not enough but if you take it as a coursebook individually, maybe it's okay. It all depends on our objectives. As a prep school, for instance, what do we expect from a student at the end of a module? What level of reading comprehension do we expect from them? I think it all depends on this, but if I take the coursebook individually, it's okay. (P4)

Writing

The writing sections of the coursebook typically cover authentic situations that students may encounter in their daily lives, which is a feature that gained approval from several instructors during the interviews. However, the methodology of teaching writing was reported to be unsystematic and not fully integrated with other sections in certain 'files', if not all. A participant argued that the writing skill felt like an annex of the remaining skills, as if it was isolated from the whole.

Another issue mentioned was that the institution expects students to improve their academic writing skills in discrete types of essays. Only a few objectives of the curriculum and coursebook overlap in this matter, so it was reported during the interviews that additional materials were used to close this gap. For this reason, among the four main skills, writing was repeatedly referred to as insufficient. Several instructors remarked that the mismatch between the academic expectations of the institution and those of the coursebook in terms of writing was a problem: "Specifications for writing skill can be suitable for CEFR, but for our need, definitely not enough because we need to teach them organized paragraphs." (P12) As reiterated for the reading skill, this is not considered as a deficiency in the series but a mismatch between the expectations of a higher education institution and those of a coursebook series.

Language Type

Authentic materials are a valuable supplement to language content and provide a possible way to make subject matter easy to remember (Linder, 1999). Therefore, the decision to include such materials and the extent to which they are utilized in coursebooks can greatly impact the effectiveness of language instruction. As the majority of instructors pointed out in Table 5, the language materials in the series tend to be authentic and resemble real-life English. Based on the qualitative data, it is common to spot literary and graphical adaptations in the series from various sources. One instructor noted that plenty of authentic content was collected and tailored to students' needs, and integrated into the 'files'. According to him, it is not unusual

to find an extract from a British TV show or a real murder mystery turned into an all-inclusive reading, listening, and speaking activity. The examples given ranged from the tenacious struggles of a well-known singer whose guitar was broken by an airline company to the events that take place behind the camera of an important film by a famous director. One of the participants also affirmed that he looked up the sources from which these activities were taken and enjoyed using the original versions as additional materials to generate interest among students on occasion.

Table 5. *Language Type*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
26. The language used in the textbook is authentic - i.e. like real-life English.	12	25.53%	26	55.32%	7	14.89%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
27. The language used is at the right level for my students' current English ability.	7	14.89%	35	74.47%	4	8.51%	1	2.13%	0	0.00%
28. The progression of grammar points and vocabulary items is appropriate.	5	10.64%	34	72.34%	5	10.64%	2	4.26%	1	0.00%
29. The grammar points are presented with brief and easy examples and explanations.	10	21.28%	32	68.09%	3	6.38%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
30. The language functions exemplify English that I/my students will be likely to use.	8	17.02%	31	65.96%	6	12.77%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
31. The language represents a diverse range of registers and accents.	5	10.64%	26	55.32%	9	19.15%	7	14.89%	0	0.00%

With reference to Table 5, it is evident that the language functions presented in the books are relevant and useful for their needs. Additionally, while not as highly favored, more than half of the participants noted that the books embodied a diversity of accents and registers. The majority of participants also had a positive view of the delivery of grammar and vocabulary points. The participants found the progression of grammar and vocabulary points in the coursebook to be suitable, as they were presented with clear examples and explanations. Nevertheless, the interviews elicited some discontent over the presentation of the grammar and vocabulary exercises.

It is substantial to note that completing controlled practice exercises does not necessarily indicate full mastery of the grammar concepts (Willis, 1996). Simply scoring well on rote learning activities may not indicate the ability to apply the grammar in different scenarios. The series attempts to address this by using an inductive approach, where students are required to identify patterns or rules from given examples that lead to a separate grammar page. Following these exercises, there are usually prompts that encourage students to apply

what they have learned. A commentary recommended including additional rewriting activities that would allow students to construct their own sentences instead of solely focusing on rote learning. One participant also emphasized the need for providing a realistic context, particularly for difficult grammar points:

> The activities leading into grammar are great. I love it. I love it because they make the students notice and then, you know, find the rules. I absolutely love it. But when you go to the controlled practice part, most of the sentences are out of context. … For more difficult grammar topics, you have just a sentence. Well, you can say that in so many different ways, they're out of real life context. (P6)

As mentioned by one of the instructors, the English File utilizes an unconventional approach by consolidating vocabulary and grammar content in separate colored pages located towards the end of the books. The page numbers are strategically placed throughout the books to guide users on when to refer to them. However, the interviews produced varying opinions on this delivery method. Some participants supported the opinion that the colored pages gave the impression of being less important than the main pages due to their placement at the back of the book. On the other hand, some instructors saw this approach as a way to constitute a dynamic classroom atmosphere and generate student interest. We can conclude that the effects of such practice on students will actually vary according to the classroom culture and it is difficult to make a definite judgment about the effectiveness of such delivery with current data.

As mentioned above, the inadequacy of grammar exercises prevented some students from internalizing newly learned structures. Some participants recognized that when linguistic structures are not entirely consolidated, students who progress to higher levels may end up with low grammar competence:

> I feel like that they (grammar exercises) are not challenging enough. When I think about our exams, the exams are difficult. But when the students do the exercises in the class, they don't have a lot of difficulty so it's difficult to understand which student is better than the other one by just looking at the results. So, maybe we need some extra grammar parts. (P9)

As can be understood from this excerpt, The grammar activities consisted of quick and easy grammar drills, which failed to display whether the students had actually learned the target structure or not.

Although the majority of the participants agreed in the interviews that an adequate vocabulary list with activities is included towards the end of the book, some participants referred to the importance of integrating them into the main pages. One of them mentioned the necessity of presenting target vocabulary as a pre-reading activity:

> As I said, the target vocabulary for reading texts can be determined and given before the reading activity as warm-up exercises. Otherwise, there will be no consensus in-between different instructors teaching to different classrooms on which words are important or should be taught. (P6)

The participant further specified that the institution has a large number of A1 level students who have a poor English background and start learning English from scratch. Therefore, providing a list of vocabulary before and after a reading text and increasing the number of vocabulary exercises to practice them would eventually assist students to consolidate the target vocabulary in a more systematic way.

Subject and Content

Litz (2005) remarked that one of the most prominent criteria when evaluating a book is to examine whether there are topics that might attract students' attention and interest. According to Table 6, the coursebook's content generally met the students' needs and was presented in a realistic context. The materials were mostly found to be diverse, engaging, and interesting, covering a range of challenging topics related to the objectives of each file. The commentaries in the interviews indicated that the topics were appropriate for young adults and were relatable to their daily lives, providing a glimpse of not only English-speaking countries but also various non-native settings:

> I think the English File is a satisfactory book in terms of topic and content because they are all relevant topics and they are topics from modern life so students, as far as I observe, are not getting bored in terms of its topic and content. The topics are interesting and up-to-date as much as possible, and the content goes well with nonnative school contexts such as ours. (P1)

Table 6. *Subject and Content*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
32. The subject and content of the textbook is relevant to my students' needs.	7	14.89%	27	57.45%	10	21.28%	3	6.38%	0	0.00%
33. The subject and content of the textbook is generally realistic.	10	21.28%	34	72.34%	3	6.38%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
34. The subject and content of the textbook is interesting, challenging and motivating.	4	8.51%	26	55.32%	15	29.79%	3	6.38%	0	0.00%
35. There is sufficient variety in the subject and content of the textbook.	7	14.89%	27	57.45%	9	19.15%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%
36. The materials are not culturally biased and they do not portray any negative stereotypes.	9	19.15%	34	72.34%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

As noted, both quantitative and qualitative data maintained that the series was recently published and offered a good variety of topics. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that some topics that are relevant to students' lives could be included. Specifically, three participants emphasized the need for more topics related to contemporary issues and interests such as technology, coding, and artificial intelligence, as listed below:

I find that some of the topics in the content are outdated. They should be engaging and they should make the students a little bit more motivated in the lessons. Some of them are childish. They may be interesting to me, seriously, but I don't see that the students are super enthusiastic. Our students would be more interested in technological issues. I don't know, a new means of transport, NASA. You know, like coding for example, things that are actual. … Electric cars, that's the most common you know. So, these are things and they are not new by the way. The electric car has been around for a few years now, so it should have been (included) before the 4th edition was released. (P11)

I think it's a little more lacking in the use of technology. The book will come in handy when technology-related topics are increased, current changes occur, and the book renews itself. (P12)

Especially in terms of scientific developments, technological developments in each new version, I expect the publishing house to include the new developments in the field of science and technology. Because we all know that our students are following technology sometimes better than the instructors. (P4)

An investigation of cultural components

As with the findings of Taş (2010), the participants of this study were also aware that culture and language are intertwined, and the coursebooks need to aim to integrate both target and different cultures into content. The last item of the part 'subject and content' examined the instructors' views on cultural bias and stereotypes. Results showed that the majority of respondents agreed on the culturally and linguistically diverse nature of content that was free of negative stereotypes. Taş (2010) also collected positive qualitative data on an earlier edition of the same series, where all of the participants agreed that the series included various aspects of the target culture that would foster cultural awareness. There were positive commentaries on the parts of the target culture in relation with student motivation:

> They are related to current issues and they're not political or religious (in a stereotypical way) or they are not about controversial issues. … For example, there was a chapter about the Queen's royal life, which is very popular because of the TV series. Other than that, people learn about them so they become interested in their life and the students know the royal family and their manners. (P4)

It is not surprising that British culture is dominantly reflected throughout the series when we consider the fact that it was prepared by an England-based publishing house (Dimici et al., 2018), but the series also constantly integrates and values various cultures, as indicated by many participants. They shared the idea that cultural elements were distributed in an acceptably balanced way, with people from distinct nationalities featured in the visuals. Additionally, the series did not try to impose British and American cultures unilaterally. Participants believed that intercultural competence is a vital skill for this student profile to acquire, and they found the series sufficient in this respect.

Interestingly enough, the activities comprising two different cities in Turkey were frequently mentioned in our qualitative data. Indeed, sparing two different pages to two of the middle-sized cities in Turkey seemed to yield positive reactions from the instructors. Similar intercultural examples were frequently observed throughout the series: "I think the books are quite good because sometimes they include some Turkish culture for the writing part. They include a paragraph about Kuşadası or Kayseri so the students are quite familiar with what's happening." (P6)

The general consensus from the qualitative data was that the series aims to be as inclusive of other cultures as possible. Dimici et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive analysis

of multiculturalism in the English File series and reached similar positive conclusions as we did. When the series was evaluated by the researchers and participants in terms of multiculturalism, they discovered that dimensions such as gender roles and ethnicity/race were frequently included in both audio-visual materials and written texts.

Considering that the target audience of this book is composed of individuals who will major in their fields in English and potentially seek employment opportunities in international environments, the frequent integration of various accents and cultural values into the books was well received by several instructors. As reported by one of them, the series recognizes that people now live in a global village and has a texture that enriches and draws attention to a variety of subjects, rather than solely promoting British and American culture. The following excerpt exemplifies one of those positive views:

> I think they do depict culture from different parts of the world. The listening is varied, the accents are
> different, so that's quite good. And it doesn't just talk about England, but it talks about other countries in
> the world as well. (P3)

Although the coursebook aims to represent various cultures, some participants raised concerns about the perpetuation of stereotypes. A few negative extracts that may lead to cultural prejudices were noted by some participants. One teacher specified that using Africa as the sole example for charity work could reinforce negative stereotypes and overlook other countries in need. This could lead to African students feeling stigmatized in the classroom. Another participant echoed this sentiment and emphasized the magnitude of avoiding cultural biases and false representation of cultures in the materials. One of the participants commented on this matter as follows: " I suggest the writers or the editors be more aware of stereotypes. In their video story series, they should avoid presenting some ethnicities to be either prejudiced or oppositional." (P6) Even though such examples were hardly iterated during the interviews, it would be advisable to take the occasion to convey cultural components in a way that does not perpetuate stereotypes and promotes intercultural understanding and respect.

While Dimici et al. (2018) mostly expressed a favorable viewpoint toward the series, they also revealed some reservations regarding the books' representation of social diversity. In particular, they noted that dimensions related to disability, political orientation and social class appeared infrequently in the coursebooks. Furthermore, it was observed that sexual orientation remained completely unaddressed throughout all materials provided for this curriculum. We

suggest considering the study of Dimici et al. (2018) and that of Fakazlı & Bayram (2021) at hand to examine various cultural dimensions of the series in greater detail.

Overall Opinion

As Table 7 indicates, the majority of participants found the series to be suitable for the general English needs of their students and the language learning objectives of the institution. The qualitative data also indicated that the coursebook is well-suited for those who wish to attain a general English proficiency. Participants felt that it met their students' needs and the objectives of the language program. Likewise, the findings of Rahimi (2015) discovered that the teachers in a private language institution were content with the adequacy of the series in teaching general English as they recognized its significance in meeting their students' requirements.

Table 7. *Overall Opinion*

Items	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
37. The textbook is appropriate for the language-learning aims of my institution.	9	19.15%	24	51.06%	10	21.28%	4	8.51%	0	0.00%
38. The textbook is suitable for the language-learning needs of my students.	12	25.53%	21	44.68%	12	25.53%	2	4.26%	0	0.00%
39. The textbook raises my (students') interest in further English language study.	7	14.89%	21	44.68%	13	27.66%	6	12.77%	0	0.00%
40. I would choose to study/teach this textbook again.	13	27.66%	22	46.81%	8	17.02%	3	6.38%	1	2.13%

Both sets of data showed that the series would increase students' interest in furthering their English language studies. However, several participants reiterated during the interviews that the series would not be sufficient, especially for reading and writing skills of students who would major in their fields through English-medium instruction (EMI). The interviews also included comments that the vocabulary content of the books might be inadequate for prospective EMI students. This may explain why almost a quarter of the participants of the questionnaire stood neutral in this matter.

It should be noted that the instructors' need to supplement with additional materials did not stem from any deficiency in the series but rather from the expectations of the institution regarding the students' prospective EMI studies. The instructors were well aware that it would be impossible to find a coursebook that would cover not only the students' general English

needs but also their field-specific English needs. This finding complies with Sheldon's (1998) statement that there would not be a perfect coursebook that would fit in all conditions and meet every requirement single-handedly. Integrating bits of field-specific and technical English lessons periodically could be a functional technique to alleviate the students' linguistic shocks in EMI programs, as suggested by one of the instructors.

Responses to the last item in the questionnaire reflected that the majority of the participants were willing to continue using the same coursebook in the following year(s) with a slightly updated edition. However, some of the comments in the interviews indicated a possible preference for a replacement. The motivation behind a possible change was usually to try out a new material or simply avoiding the weariness that arises from routine:

> Since I want to be renewed as a teacher, after a while, maybe we can switch to another book by the same publishing house, but I love this book. I have no negative thoughts about the books. As I said, the books can be updated in line with current changes in terms of topics. Since I feel that I need to change as a teacher, it is useful to change the books as well. (P8)

Some instructors, on the other hand, stated that using the same book year after year helped them gain a different perspective on the activities and feel more flexible and confident about the flow of the books. Such experience with the material was said to facilitate the readiness to make adaptations in the form of content delivery, if required.

Another prominent point that emerged from the commentaries was the significance of conducting a needs analysis before selecting a coursebook. The idea was that without thoroughly determining what students lack and what they require, it would be difficult for the coursebook alone to make up for the inadequacies in the ELT classrooms. Several participants mentioned some performance-expectation gap instances where students make very basic mistakes that they would make in lower levels when instructors expect them to master academic writing. As put forward by a participant, one effective way to benefit from the series to its full potential could be by conducting a comprehensive needs analysis for the students and adapting the material accordingly.

Conclusion

Although learning a foreign language requires more than just a coursebook, a good coursebook can provide a practical guide and systematic blueprint for content delivery in an

EFL context (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). In this regard, the English File series has attracted considerable attention in higher education institutions, particularly among preparatory schools teaching English. Therefore, evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of this book in a preparatory school setting was considered by the researchers of this study to be at the forefront of educational research in this particular context.

This study employed a triangulation of data collection procedures to elicit the opinions of instructors. The majority of the participants made largely positive comments about the content of the series and the pedagogical and methodological goals it aimed to achieve. The results suggest that the English File is suitable for university students studying in preparatory classes to attain general English proficiency. Results of this research revealed that the series covers topics that attract students' attention, employs current teaching techniques that prioritize communication and interaction, integrates the four main skills as much as possible, and utilizes illustrations and graphics to capture students' attention. In the light of the opinions of the lecturers working in a higher education institution who have been using this coursebook series actively for 4 years, it has been concluded that the series can be used in preparatory schools, provided that additional activities for writing skills and words specific to students' own fields are included at certain intervals.

Concerning the negative aspects, one recurring argument highlighted by the instructors was the lack of contemporary topics, particularly related to technology and digitalization. Many instructors emphasized the importance of incorporating current and relevant subjects to capture the students' interest. They also suggested integrating grammar points and vocabulary exercises in more meaningful contexts to encourage the students to apply what they learn in various situations. Additionally, they addressed the necessity to provide supplementary reading and writing materials along with the communication, grammar and vocabulary worksheets that are already given. Finally, while the books made a significant effort to promote intercultural competence and were mostly successful, some cultural biases and stereotypes that require revision were noted by the instructors.

The points that may require editing or modification were presented in line with the opinions of the lecturers based on their experiences. The motivation behind this study was to increase the effectiveness of the learning environments in which the English File series is used as coursebook material. It is thought that conducting further studies investigating the opinions of students and teachers in the immediate environment will make it easier to understand the

effectiveness and functionality of the series in the region. It would be advantageous for all stakeholders if the publishing house carefully considered the outcomes of the current case study and equivalent research. It is hoped that in future editions, the opinions and suggestions put forward by the lecturers who have directly experienced the books will be taken into consideration, and the necessary steps will be taken to make the books more functional.

This study, like many others, is not without its limitations. To begin with, not all schools that employ the English File coursebook can be included in the study's generalization. The study's sample is restricted to EFL instructors at a university in the southeastern part of Turkey during the 2022–2023 academic years. Secondly, only 47 EFL instructors were given the questionnaires, and 12 of them volunteered to participate in the interviews. The results may have been applied to a larger set of participants as well as instructors from other institutions

There are also some recommendations for additional investigation and study. The English File series can be rated and examined for a variety of factors, including psycholinguistics or pragmatics of language use. In addition, teacher-student opinions about this book series can be associated and the consistency of these opinions with each other can be cross-checked. Lastly, additional post-use-evaluation research could be done on a large scale with various samples for various coursebook series.

The Conflict of Interest Statement

In line with the statement of Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), we hereby declare that we had no conflicting interests regarding any parties of this study.

Contributions of authors

Author A: Data collection, methodology, data analysis, bibliography

Author B: Literature Review, data analysis, bibliography

Author C: Literature Review, data analysis, bibliography

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The Research and Publication Ethics Statement

Data collection for this study was initiated after obtaining the ethical approval from the University's Social and Humanities Ethics Committee on 09.01.2023 with the reference number 283105.

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