TITLE: Ingilizce Ders Kitabindaki Okuma Materyallerinin Etkililiginin Arastirilmasi: Türkiye`den bir

Örnek

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Investigating the Effectiveness of the Reading Materials in an English Language Coursebook: A Case from Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the reading materials in Speakout coursebook used as an instructional material for learners at the intermediate level of proficiency in a language preparatory program in Turkey. Specifically, the reading materials were evaluated in terms of text appropriateness, purpose of the materials, learner needs and vocabulary development. The participants of this study were 60 EFL instructors working at a foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul. Data were collected from a questionnaire, reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols. The findings revealed that the reading materials were effective in relation to length, level of the texts along with authenticity and introduction of target culture; However, certain modifications with regard to topics, genre, visuals, strategies, activities and word recycle were required to be addressed more closely. The findings of this study provide some pedagogical implications to be taken into consideration related to course book evaluation in language classrooms

Key Words: *coursebook evaluation, reading materials, EFL instructors' perceptions, English as a foreign language (EFL).*

İngilizce Ders Kitabındaki Okuma Materyallerinin Etkililiğinin Araştırılması: Türkiye'den bir Örnek

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin yabancı dil hazırlık programlarında, orta seviyede ingilizce yeterliliğine sahip öğrenciler için eğitim materyali olarak kullanılan Speakout ders kitabındaki okuma materyallerinin etkililiğini incelemektir. Okuma materyalleri özellikle metinlerin seviyeye uygunluk düzeyi, amaçları, öğrenci gereksinimleri ve kelime gelişimi açısından ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmaya İstanbul'da özel bir üniversitede çalışmakta olan, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğreten 60 öğretim üyesi katılmıştır ve veriler bu kişilere uygulanan anketler, yansıtıcı metinler ve sesli düşünme tekniği ile toplanmıştır. Bulgular okuma materyallerinin uzunluğu, seviyesi, gerçekliğe uygunluğu ve erek kültürün tanıtımı açısından etkili olduğunu ancak hala konu, çeşit, görseller, okuma stratejileri, aktiviteler ve kelime tanıma ile ilgili bazı değişikliklere değinilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamıştır. Çalışma ayrıca ders kitabı değerlendirmesinde dikkate alınması gereken bazı pedagojik öneriler sunmaktadır

Anahtar Kelimeler: *ders kitabı değerlendirmesi, okuma materyalleri, öğretim üyelerinin görüşlerıı, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi.*

Reading is basically defined as an interaction between the reader and the text requiring a rich background and adequate knowledge of language (Grabe, 2002). The traditional definition of reading comprehension results in the teaching of reading through "separately defined" comprehension skills, and could be called as "skills model." (Sheridan, 1981). Skills, separately taught in a logical and sequential order, is thought to result in the improved comprehension of textual material. The traditional skills model view of reading is a bottom up or data driven processing model. In this view of reading, letters are perceived in a left to right sequence until a word is perceived as a whole, meaning is obtained and related to other words in the sentence, thus activating the dominant schema and its particular concepts. Similarly, Carrell (1998) defines this process as extracting information from the text and deal with letters and words in a relatively complete and systematic way in order to aid comprehension.

According to psycholinguistic model, the reading process is related to predicting meaning based on the reader's knowledge of oral language syntax, semantics, and phonological cues. In other words, based on the reader's store of information about how language works from his knowledge of oral language, a

reader already knows something about how words are ordered and what kinds of meaning words possess in certain contexts. The early psycholinguistic model is primarily a top down or conceptually driven model where the emphasis is on prediction of meaning. More specifically, there is an interaction between the reader and the text and it involves the reader in activating their world knowledge by referring to past experiences, expectations and intuitions to reach an overall idea about the text.

A more recent theory of reading comprehension is called "schema theory" defined by Adams and Collins (1979) as the interaction between what is in the text and how that information is shaped and stored by the reader. The underlying assumption is that meaning does not lie solely in the print itself, but interacts with the cognitive structure or schemata already present in the reader's mind. This schemata represents the framework for understanding new information. According to Rummelhart and Ortony (1977), schemata represents universal concepts which are stored in memory: the particular concept is not stored by remembering the isolated event in its totality down to its most basic components, but by identifying those aspects of the event related to other concepts already stored. We make connections between the information in the text and what we already know. So, a schema represents generalized knowledge about a sequence of events and, having its parts and sequenced events.

Schema theory has new emphasis on various parts of the teaching process, particularly the importance of utilizing pre-existing knowledge and experience of the reader, setting purposes for reading, and asking appropriate questions before and after reading. In the light of the schema theory, it is important to motivate reader by building interest as well as assessing the knowledge and experience before having the student read. After that, students need to activate their background knowledge or experience to understand what they are reading as well as how to use it. Students also need to become aware of their personal attitudes and beliefs which can shape their interpretation of a text, giving it a meaning unlike that which the author intended.

In addition to reading theories, there are some important strategies to help students enhance their reading comprehension and increase their reading ability as well. Cunningham and Allington (1994) offered the following five key strategies that readers need to use; using background knowledge, predicting, self-monitoring and self-correcting, identifying main ideas and summarizing, making inferences and questioning. Keeping these strategies in mind, students are able to become better at monitoring their comprehension, review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know.

Previous Research Studies on using Reading Materials in EFL Classrooms

A number of research studies focused on the effectiveness of reading materials in many aspects (Rahman, 2007; Arikan, 2008; Ali, 2010; Zohrabi, 2011; Rahimi and Ebrahimi, 2013; Ipek, 2014). Rahman (2007), for example, conducted an empirical study to examine the present situation of teaching reading skills of English, the problems students encountered during reading an English text and the learners' proficiency level of reading skills along with the reading syllabus and materials used at the intermediate level. The methods for investigation included questionnaire survey, interview, classroom observation, reading tests and evaluation of syllabus, materials and tests currently used in the country. The results showed that students had problems in most of the sub-skills of reading, and it also showed that the approaches to teaching and learning reading skills were still backdated. Lastly, the observation showed that the syllabus, materials and tests were not bad, but these emphasized only on the lower order skills; the higher skills were totally neglected.

Furthermore, Arıkan (2008) aimed to find out the nature of the topics of reading passages in ELT coursebooks. For data collection purposes, a total number of 15 ELT coursebooks were examined by using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The findings showed a discrepancy between the topics claimed to be in the reading passages and the actual existence of the topics when the reading passages were read. More specifically, this study revealed that some topics such as relationships, love, work life, education, and values did not appear in the coursebooks in reading passages. This was thought to be significantly important because violence, crime, and the supernatural appeared as popular topics in these coursebooks. From the perspective of a humanitarian and critical stance, it can be said that students should be exposed to such concepts or realities like love and values rather than

violence and crime for the good of society and to abolish crime and violence in the world. Furthermore, although coursebooks writers did not declare that they write on topics commerce and trade, it became obvious that these topics were used in the reading passages studied.

In another study, Ali (2010) attempted to evaluate the reading texts and exercises in *English for Palestine-Grade 9* in order to find out whether reading texts and exercises matched the suggested criteria. In this regard, the researcher used two tools to collect the needed data: a content analysis card and a structured interview. The results showed that the reading texts employed a wide variety of topics as well as values and good manners. However, no authentic reading texts were found and extensive reading was not included. Regarding vocabulary, in all the reading texts, colors were used to highlight new vocabulary and the number of new vocabulary was suitable for 9th graders. Almost all the visuals were relevant, attractive, colorful and clear. With respect to the reading exercises, all the instructions were clear, a great variety in questions was found but, same types of questions were repeated. By contrast, there were no exercises that require students to infer the author's attitude, distinguish between fact and opinion, recognize pronoun references, find meanings of new vocabulary in contexts, and relate the text to their personal experience.

Zohrabi (2011) aimed to evaluate the coursebook *"Reading English in Action"* for the English for General Purposes (EGP) course at the University off Tabriz, Iran. In this research the data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and feedback from classroom use. Based on the results, there was more focus on student boredom in reading results and it was suggested that they require more interactive and communicative use of language. In this way, students would be more motivated to pay attention and treat the EGP course more seriously and enthusiastically. Besides, drawings, figures and images could be included so as to increase student interest and stimulate them for more intimate learning.

A similar study by Rahimi and Ebrahimi (2013) investigated the effects of adopting a critical reading approach via a CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) framework and changing the content of reading materials on the some Iranian EFL students' perceptions of their reading comprehension classroom environment. Through a one-group pre- and post- test design, the *What is Happening in this Class? (WIHIC)* questionnaire was distributed twice among 41 Iranian EFL students, the first time after a five-session-long regular non-critical reading comprehension class and the other time after a five-session-long reading comprehension class featured by more involving passages and informed by a CDA framework. The results showed a significant difference between the participants' perceptions of each dimension of their reading comprehension classroom before and after introducing the CDA techniques and changing the content of the reading materials. The change in teaching approach via the CDA framework and the change into more involving content led to a reading comprehension classroom environment that was perceived by students as more efficient and facilitative of learning.

Finally, Ipek (2014) attempted to investigate whether the content of reading course contributes to the general or world knowledge of students. The data were collected through open-ended questions about the topics in the reading books used in the reading lesson and 48 EFL students at an English Language Preparatory School took part in this study. According to the results, the participating students already had some general knowledge on certain topics before taking the reading course and most of the topics in the book contributed to students' general knowledge. Although not every topic in the reading book may add to all of the students' world knowledge, it still seems that the topics covered contribute to the world knowledge of the majority of students.

It can be concluded from the above literature reviews that evaluation of the reading skill has gained utmost attention in research. However, in the aforementioned studies, coursebooks foster production over process providing little or no contextual information about the reading selections. In addition, many EFL instructors agree that some coursebooks do not provide learners with effective reading materials and this inevitably results in poor level of reading proficiency. Since some reading materials heavily depend on answering comprehension questions and understanding word meaning, students are rarely encouraged to process the information through an intellectual engagement, analysis and interpretation of the text. Thus, reading is regarded as a passive and dull activity which fails to meet the needs of the students.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the overviews on evaluation of reading materials in language classrooms, the present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of reading materials used in the *Speakout* coursebook which is designed and developed as an instructional material for EFL learners enrolled in language preparatory programs. The findings of the concrete and in-depth analysis of reading materials in the coursebook will serve as a guide for EFL instructors and help language learners to improve their reading skill. In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of the EFL instructors towards the effectiveness of the reading materials used in the *Speakout* coursebook?
2. What are the major strengths and weaknesses of the reading materials in the coursebook?
3. What modifications can be suggested for the reading materials based on the reflections of the EFL instructors on their classroom practices?

Method

Context of the Study

The present study was conducted at an English preparatory school of a foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul, Turkey. In this program students are assessed in a proficiency exam at the beginning of each academic year and taking their scores into consideration they are placed in four proficiency levels of English *Breakthrough, Waystage, Threshold and Vantage* defined by the Common European Framework (CEFR). Each level lasts for 8 weeks, known as *module,* all the skills are taught in an integrated way depending heavily on S*peakout* coursebook series. The students are assessed through four quizzes (40%), two portfolio assignments (20%) and a final exam (40%) which will form their total score. When their combined average in the exams is a minimum 60 (out of 100), the students reach the required level. After completing the required levels, the students have right to start the undergraduate program in their prospective departments.

Participants

The data for this study was gathered from 163 English language instructors (92 female and 71 male) working at a preparatory program of a foundation (non-profit, private) university in Istanbul, Turkey. Their age range was 25-60 with 5-20 years of teaching experience. Almost all of the instructors had teaching experience at a private university and taught reading skills at different levels. As for their qualifications, they were all graduates of related fields in English Language Teaching.

Data Collection Instruments

The data for this study were gathered through a questionnaire, reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols. The following section describes each instrument in detail.

Questionnaire

In this study, Uslu's (2003) questionnaire which attempted to evaluate *'Reading Textbook'* used at the intermediate level classrooms was adapted. In the process of adaptation, reading-related items were used, while the items related to teacher's book and logistical characteristics of the book (easily available / affordable price) were excluded so as to keep the participants focused on the reading materials only.

The questionnaire started with demographic information asking for the age, gender, educational background, and teaching background of the participants. The second part consisted of four sub-categories. The first sub-category included four items in order to find out the appropriateness of the reading texts (in terms of length-level, topic, genre, racist-sexist elements); the second one included six items to investigate the purpose of the materials (activities, strategies, culture, authenticity, instructions), while the third sub-category included two items to examine the needs of learners (learning styles and visuals). Finally, three items in the last category attempted to evaluate vocabulary development (word-recognition exercises, recycle and frequency of the words). In total fifteen items were presented on a four-point Likert-scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Before the questionnaire was administered to the participants, it was piloted with randomly selected *67*

preparatory program instructors. The *Cronbach Alpha* reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .85 which indicated a high internal consistency of the items (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Reflective Essay

A reflective essay attempts to bring different perspectives into focus by shedding light on the affective impact on the pragmatic intervention (Glaser, 2014). In order to gain valuable insight into the nature of reading materials of the *Speakout* coursebook, *48 EFL instructors* were asked to reflect critically on the reading activities in terms of text appropriateness, the purpose, learner needs, vocabulary development along with positive and negative aspects of the content.

Stimulated Recall Protocol

Stimulated recall also known as retrospective think-aloud protocol is a research method that allows the analysis of cognitive processes through encouraging participants to recall their concurrent thinking during an event when prompted by a video sequence or some other form of visual stimulus (Turnbull, 2002). Stimulated recall permits video and audio recordings of the participant in action, which is later showed to use as a prompt, participants are asked to reflect on, and then recordings are made by researchers as part of their observational recording which are used in the interview process.

In this study, the video-recordings of *48 EFL instructors* were used in conjunction with related interview questions to help recall the technological practice undertaken. During the recall sessions, the researcher and each participant watched the video together. The researcher paused the video frequently and asked open-ended questions with an attempt to make the instructors reflect on their classroom practices. All sessions were recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

In this study, the data were gathered and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the quantitative part, data gathered by means of questionnaire were calculated through SPSS (Statistical package for the Social Sciences) 20.0 to report the general perceptions of the participants about the effectiveness of the reading materials in the existing coursebook.

Moreover, the quantitative data were supported by qualitative analysis of reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols through content analysis. The data qualitative analysis process began with deductive analysis to come up with the codes of the pre-set categories included in the questionnaire. These codes were gathered under two concepts of strengths, based on the positive comments about the reading materials and weaknesses, focusing on the negative viewpoints shared by the participating instructors. In order to identify the degree of inter-rater reliability, the categories were checked by two experts in the field of foreign language education. It appeared that the raters achieved 82% agreement on the mentioned categories.

Finally, for stimulated recall protocols, the data were coded by hand due to the small number of participants. In the first place, the recorded stimulated recall protocols were transcribed and then the similarities and differences in words, phrases and concepts were underlined. Then, the underlined sections in each participant's stimulated recall protocol transcriptions were searched for emerging themes and the themes were coded and categorized to be interpreted. Lastly, the frequency count was estimated for each question and reported quantitatively.

Results

This part of the study reports the results related to the perceptions of EFL instructors towards the effectiveness of reading materials in the *Speakout* coursebook. The evaluation process was carried out at micro level mainly focusing on text appropriateness, reading purposes, learner needs and vocabulary development. The obtained findings are presented in terms of each research question below.

The perceptions of the EFL instructors about the effectiveness of the reading materials in the Speakout coursebook

Considering the first research question the data were obtained through a questionnaire, reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols. The following part provides both quantitative and qualitative results regarding each pre-set categories.

Text Appropriateness

As for the first pre-set category, the instructors were asked to evaluate the *Text Appropriateness* of the reading materials; the frequency and percentages are depicted below:

Table 1. Frequency and valid percent of items related to text appropriateness

	Items	SD	D	A	SA
1.	The length and level of reading texts is appropriate for intermediate students.	1 1.7	18 30.5	38 64.4	3 5.1
2.	The topics of reading texts are interesting to students.	6 10.2	33 55.9	21 35.6	- -
3.	There is a variety of reading genres (e.g., articles, letters, manuals, advertisements, scientific reports, stories, jokes, poems, songs, riddles, crossword puzzles) included in the coursebook.	8 13.6	29 49.2	20 33.9	3 5.1
4.	The reading texts are free of racist and sexist elements.	1 1.7	2 3.4	37 62.7	20 33.9

Note: SD: Strongly Disagree   D: Disagree A: Agree SA: Strongly Agree.

As indicated in the table above, more than half of the instructors (69.5%) stated that the length and level of reading texts was appropriate for intermediate students and almost all of them (96.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that the texts were free of racist and sexist elements.

In addition, for the analysis of the qualitative data, parallel findings were gathered from the reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols. The excerpts below displayed that the students were contented with the length and level of the reading materials and could understand the gist of the texts quite easily:

> […] The texts are appropriate for our students in terms of length and level of difficulty. The content, grammar forms, target vocabulary etc. meet their needs (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The length and difficulty level of the reading texts were appropriate for intermediate learners. With no regard to comprehension questions or some vocabulary exercises, the students could understand the main idea of the text without difficulty. (Instructor, Stimulated Recall data, 12th April, 2016).

On the other hand, 66.1% of the instructors disagreed that the topics of reading texts were interesting to students (62.8%) emphasizing that there was not a variety of reading genres (articles, letters, manuals, advertisements, scientific reports, stories, jokes, poems, songs, riddles, crossword puzzles)

included in the coursebook. Similar comments were also found in the content analysis of the reflective papers and stimulated recall protocols:

> […] The topics of reading materials are not chosen according to learner's interests. Majority of them are related to business life which is not very interesting for young learners (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The topic was quite interesting. Indeed, it was not interesting enough to provide students with curiosity to engage them in reading. It could be more related to their age and interest (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

Purpose of the Materials

Considering the pre-set category on the purpose of the materials, the results of the questionnaire showed that 47% of the instructors believed that the reading texts were authentic, reflected cultural elements and real-life language use. In addition, the majority of them (91.5%) acknowledged that reading instructions were clear and precise for students along with their agreement that the aforementioned instructions were carried out through three stages: pre-reading, while reading, and post reading (79.6%) as shown below:

Table 2. Frequency and valid percent of items related to the purpose of materials

	Items	SD	D	A	SA
5.	Students find reading- related activities meaningful and useful.	6 / 10.2	37 / 62.7	17 / 28.8	- / -
6.	The materials teach a variety of reading strategies (e.g., predicting, skimming, scanning, summarizing, understanding the main idea, guessing meaning from context).	7 / 11.9	29 / 49.2	22 / 37.3	2 / 3.4
7.	The reading texts are authentic, reflect cultural elements and promote real- life language use.	0 / 0	13 / 22.0	37 / 62.7	10 / 17.0
8.	The reading materials oblige students to read for different purposes (e.g., read for finding information, read to learn information, read to evaluate)	4 / 6.8	26 / 44.2	27 / 45.8	3 / 5.1
9.	Reading instructions are clear and precise for students.	- / -	6 / 10.2	42 / 71.2	12 / 20.3
10.	Reading instructions are carried out through three stages: Pre-reading, while reading, and post reading.	1 / 1.7	12 / 20.3	37 / 62.7	10 / 16.9

Note: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree.

Parallel to the questionnaire results, the qualitative analysis of the reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols revealed that the reading texts were effective in terms of authenticity, since they introduced the target culture and promoted general language use in real life. As indicated in the following excerpts, instructions were also found to be clear, short and went step-by step making the reading process easier:

> […] The DVD sections, podcasts and the function sections of the coursebook are useful; they develop general language use in real life and learn cultural elements (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The instructions related to the reading texts are clear, short, and they go step by step which makes the reading process easier for the students (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The reading text gave my learners a bigger picture of western teenage behaviors and manners as well as their parents' reactions towards them (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

> […] The instructions were clear enough for students to understand. The students didn't ask for further clarification (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

Nevertheless, 72.9% of the instructors stated that students did not find related activities meaningful or useful; and more than half of the instructors (61.1%) disagreed that the materials teach a variety of reading strategies such as predicting, skimming, scanning, summarizing, understanding the main idea, guessing meaning from context, which were also highlighted in the following remarks:

> […] Some tasks are meaningless. For example, there are only three open ended questions and one of them is asking about the students' opinion and has nothing to do with the text. Reading such a text for only barely related two questions is not an efficient and useful activity (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The texts are not designed to improve reading strategies such as, skimming and scanning. For example, students are not expected to make inferences after they finish reading (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The texts do not mainly focus on improving students' reading strategies. The students are mostly asked to summarize what they read. There is no focus on skimming, scanning, making inferences etc. (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

> […] The students skimmed for the main idea, scanned to find out details (true/false part) and guessed meaning from the context and matched them to the definitions given. They worked on their social, memorization and cognitive strategies; on the other hand, affective and metacognitive strategies were not focused on much (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

Surprisingly, half of the instructors agreed (50%) and the other half disagreed (50%) on the item which stated that the reading materials obliged students to read for different purposes such as reading for searching information, reading to learn information and reading to evaluate. However, this issue became much more evident in the qualitative data which indicated that the materials were limited in terms of reading purposes and there was a noticeable lack of providing variety of activities. Some of the participants made the following comments in this regard:

> […] Reading exercises should be more diverse than just True / False questions (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] Before reading the texts, students are usually asked to answer open-ended questions and this is quite clichéd. More variety is needed (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

[…] The students read to find information about the problems that they face with their parents (*Life on Planet Teen*). The texts are mostly prepared to introduce either grammar or vocabulary but from the contexts it is challenging for students to make such inferences (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

Learner Needs

In attempt to find out the learner needs, the responses of the participating instructors revealed that more than half of them (67.8%) believed that neither the reading activities were structured to respond to students' different learning styles nor they were enough to provide attractive visuals to motivate students to read (57.7% of the instructors strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with the mentioned item). Briefly, as is indicated in *Table 4* below, the instructors felt that the reading materials in the coursebook were inadequate to meet the needs of the learners.

Table 3. Frequency and valid percent of items related to learner needs

	Items	SD	D	A	SA
11	The reading activities are structured to respond to students' different learning styles (e.g., visuals for visual students, listening materials for auditory students, and role plays for kinesthetic students).	8 13.6	32 54.2	18 30.5	2 3.4
12	The reading activities provide attractive visuals to motivate students.	6 8.5	29 49.2	24 40.7	2 3.4

Note: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree.

Apart from the quantitative analysis, qualitative data obtained from reflective essays and stimulated recall protocols revealed overlapping findings. As indicated in the following assertions the reading materials failed to meet the need of the students since they did not address the students with different learning styles, intelligences or interests and provided poor visuals with the learners:

[…] The texts do not provide auditory or kinesthetic learners with the necessary supporting materials or exercises. There are few visual materials, but they are not attractive and do not prompt students to read the texts (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

[…] To address the whole; the activities need to be enriched for students having different learning styles, intelligences and interests (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

[…] The visuals just provided them a depressive teenager model; they did not help with the understanding of any concepts or they did not infer any keywords or main idea by making use of visuals (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

[…] The background of the text was black. The color looked pessimistic, made it difficult to read and take notes on the text. The picture did not give many clues about the content. I prepared PPT to make the text more colorful and attractive (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

Vocabulary Development

As for the evaluation about how the reading materials contributed to the vocabulary development of the learners, the results indicated that almost all of the instructors (93%) stated that they included word recognition exercises. On the contrary, more than half of them (56%) disagreed that new vocabulary

recurred and was recycled in subsequent reading texts within units. Furthermore, many of them (71%) also noted that the vocabulary items were not graded from common to rare *(Table 5)*.

Table 5. Frequency and valid percent of items related to vocabulary development

	Items	SD	D	A	SA
13	The reading materials include word recognition exercises.	3 5.1	11 18.6	42 71.2	14 6.8
14	The vocabulary items are graded from common to rare.	6 8.5	37 61.0	16 25.6	4 6.8
15	New vocabulary reoccurs and is recycled in subsequent reading texts within units.	9 15.3	25 42.4	23 39.0	3 5.1

Note: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree.

Moreover, considering the repetition and recycle of vocabulary items, the following reviews confirmed that the new words were neither repeated nor recycled in the following texts or exercises, thus the students could not make use of the new vocabulary items due to lack of exposure:

> […] New words taught to the students are not repeated nor practiced enough. Once they learn new vocabulary, they have to use it in a context such as in a sentence or a story; however, none of these are provided in the book (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The reading texts are not effective in word recognition because new vocabulary items are usually presented separately from the reading texts. They are not repeated enough, so the students can't remember them easily as they are not exposed to these words as they should be in the following units (Instructor, Reflective Essay data, 29th March, 2016).

> […] The worst thing about texts is that they do not contain the words students grasped in the previous units; due to lack of repetition. They tend to memorize the words by heart-out of context- by no means of listing the bold words in the texts (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

> […] Learning vocabulary is far from matching new words to the definitions; repetition doesn't take place at all. (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th April, 2016).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Reading Materials in the Speakout Coursebook

For the second research question with regard to the major strengths and weaknesses of the reading materials in the coursebook, the data were obtained from reflective essays. The results demonstrated parallelism in accordance with the questionnaire results. The figure below lists the summary of strengths and weaknesses of the reading materials taking the four criteria into consideration; text appropriateness, purpose of materials, learner needs and vocabulary development.
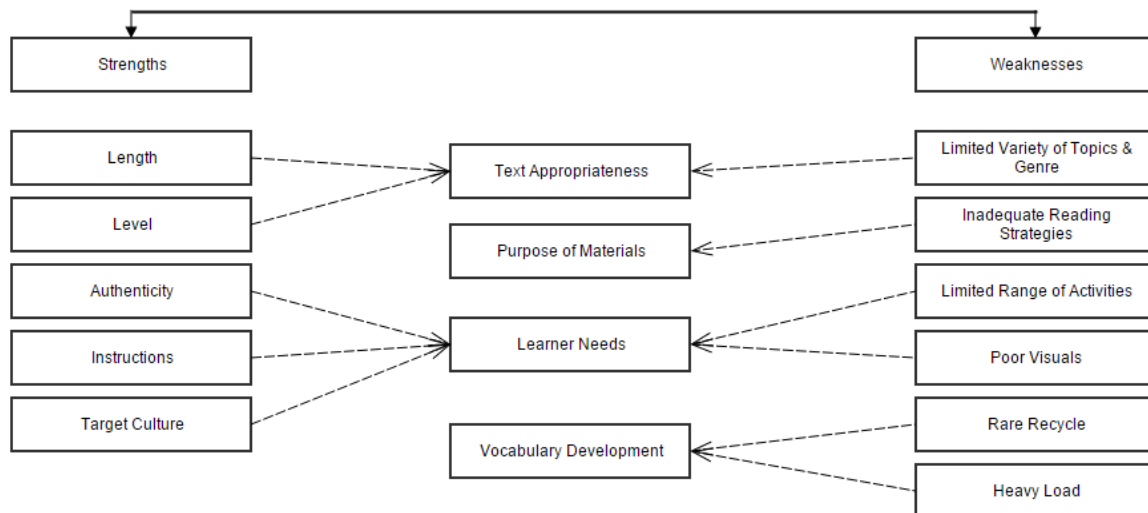
Figure 1. Strengths and weaknesses of the reading materials

Considering text appropriateness in the coursebook, the findings revealed that the major strength was the length and level of the reading texts. More specifically, all (100%) the instructors claimed that length and level are appropriate for intermediate students and this aids reading comprehension to a great extent. As for topics, the instructors seemed to have negative attitudes and overwhelmingly stated that some reading materials do not appeal to learners' interests at all. The texts are not engaging enough or related to the students' lives. In addition, more than half of the instructors (60%) claimed that most of the reading texts are presented in the form of articles, and they are merely written to introduce some grammatical features or vocabulary items. Thus, students are reluctant to read and contribute to the reading activities. According to some other instructors (20%), the students need exposure to different genres such as autobiographies, fables, poetry, folktales or fairy tales in order to have the chance to communicate with the writer and enjoy the reading process. The instructors also commented that a wide variety of topics and genres would be really useful to maintain student interest and motivation.

Secondly, considering the purpose of materials many of the instructors (86%) stated that the reading activities were practical in terms of introducing the target culture, which was regarded as one of the leading purposes. Moreover, the texts were noticeably authentic especially in DVD sections and the given instructions were clear and easy to follow. On the other hand, the reading materials were found to be inadequate to teach some specific reading strategies such as elaboration, inferences, critical thinking and bridging. The instructors (53%) concluded that students merely skimmed or scanned the text to be able to answer the comprehension questions or the text was used as a tool to introduce a grammatical item.

Parallel to the results of the questionnaire, all the instructors (100%) believed that the reading materials fell short of meeting students' needs. To exemplify, they did not provide the students with wide variety of activities to ensure engagement. The follow-up reading activities were quite repetitive and mostly limited to True/False and open-ended questions, which resulted in boredom. Furthermore, for better comprehension, students needed to make use of visuals. From the point of some instructors (40%), since visual content drove engagement it should not be isolated from the text, yet in the book the visuals were not attractive and they often failed to prompt students to read the text.

Finally, another weak feature of the reading materials is considered to be teaching vocabulary. All the reading materials in the coursebook aim to contribute vocabulary development, they introduce specific vocabulary items in each text and provide exercises in the form of matching synonyms, guess the meaning etc. However, almost all of the instructors (80%) stated that the reading materials do not fully meet the need of expanding students' vocabulary knowledge. The vocabulary load is very intense in the texts and rarely recycled. The students are expected to learn the words, phrasal words and idioms through the texts by just reading and this does not help acquisition.

In brief, the data obtained from the reflective essays seem to verify the questionnaire results in many aspects. In terms of text appropriateness, the major strengths of the reading materials were found to be length and level of the texts; however the findings revealed that the topics and genre need to be improved to better serve the needs of the students. As for the purpose, the results indicated that the instructions are clear, texts are authentic and some of the texts especially in DVD sections play an important role in introducing the target culture. By contrast, the reading strategies are not emphasized enough to cater for teaching reading purposes. With regard to learner needs, the materials imply noticeable weaknesses such as lack of variety in activities and poor visuals to give clues about the content. Another major weakness of reading materials is considered to be vocabulary teaching since the words are neither recycled nor repeated in the following reading texts and exercises.

Modifications Suggested for the Reading Materials in the Speakout Coursebook

For the last research question of the present study, which investigated the necessary modifications suggested for the reading materials in *Speakout* coursebook, the data were obtained through stimulated recall protocols. During these protocols, the reading classes of the instructors were videotaped which were followed by interview sessions. In these sessions, the instructors reflected on the practices of reading activities in language classrooms.

After the content analysis of the interviews, what was immediately apparent from the transcripts was that almost all of the EFL instructors came up with the same experiences regarding their classroom practices. It was noticeable that the instructors' responses demonstrated parallel results with the questionnaire and reflective essays.

The frequency count of the important points that worked/did not work well in the classroom upon using materials were indicated in Table 5. In the end, the instructors suggested some modifications in order to increase the effectiveness of the reading materials for further practices.

Table 5. The stimulated recall frequency count of the implemented reading materials

			Frequency
1.	Was the topic of reading material interesting to the students?	Yes	5
		No	43
2.	Did the visuals attract students' attention and assist them in reading comprehension?	Yes	-
		No	48
3.	Do you think the reading activities addressed the students with different learning styles?	Yes	-
		No	48
4.	Did the reading activities employ various strategies during a class hour?	Yes	23
		No	25
5.	Were the instructions clear and carried out through three stages: pre, while and post?	Yes	48
		No	-
6.	Were the students willing to read the text?	Yes	23
		No	25
7.	Did the topic of the reading reflect target culture?	Yes	48
		No	-
8.	Were the students familiar with the mentioned genre?	Yes	48
		No	-
9.	Did the students have the opportunity to practice the new words in the subsequent exercises?	Yes	8
		No	40
10.	Did you make use of any kind of supplementary material?	Yes	48
		No	-

Based on the table above, the instructors recommended that the items such as topics, genre, visuals, activities, strategies and word recycle should be closely addressed in the process of preparing reading parallel to the interview questions presented in the table above.

Topics and Genre

Considering questions 1 and 8, the EFL instructors stated that the range of topics and genre should vary considerably according to the age, culture, language level and interest of the students from all over the world. The following excerpts from protocols support these issues:

> […] The topics should not solely mirror the daily routines, culture and habits of Western countries; in contrast, they should also bring out similarities and differences between target culture and the culture of students. (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015)

> […] The reading texts should not depend on the same sources frequently. They all give information about the programs on BBC. My students complained that they got so familiar with BBC and they put that they wanted to read something with no reference to BBC programs (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

> […] I think it is a good idea to include different examples of genre in the coursebook. The students got overfamiliar with the articles, interviews and narrative paragraphs. It would be very interesting to read a poem, lyrics of a song, parodies, fables or fairy tales (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

Visuals

As shown it the comments below, the students could not make use of visuals depicted in the coursebook which was mentioned both in the questionnaire and reflective essays as a weakness. In order to overcome this issue, the instructors recommended that some changes should be made in terms of the design and layout particularly on the visuals as shown in the following ideas:

> […] The visuals of the reading texts are mostly small in size. Thus, I always need to bring extra materials to introduce the texts; attractive videos, comics or PPTs with colorful pictures. I believe that the design and layout of the pages should be reconsidered (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

> […] The visuals should encourage students to make some comments about the reading texts; however, many of them simply depict a regular man, woman or portraits of celebrities (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

> […] The visuals related to the reading texts can be extraordinarily boring, simple and poor (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

Reading Activities

Considering questions 3 and 4, all the instructors stated that the reading activities did not address the students with different learning styles and they did not focus on extensive reading either. In the following excerpts, the instructors proposed their concerns on this issue:

> […] The reading texts cater for visual learners to some extent; however, for auditory or kinesthetic learners they should be revised. Maybe listening parts related to the text can be added (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol).

> […] The reading activities did not address the students with different learning styles in my class. To do so, for kinesthetic learners; I benefited more of a game. For auditory learners, I brought a short trailer of a movie to activate students' background information about the topic. The book lacks these kind of activities. (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

[…] None of the reading activities create curiosity for extensive reading, I believe that the reading activities that occur in the classroom may help students gain reading habits (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

Word Recognition /Recycle

As reflected in the EFL instructors' papers, one of the major weaknesses of reading materials in the *Speakout* coursebook was related to vocabulary development. In the same way, the real classroom practices verified that students did not have the opportunity to practice the new words in the subsequent exercises which affected their vocabulary development. The instructors touched upon some points in the following quotations:

> […] Reading text is an effective tool to introduce new words, yet we cannot expect the students to acquire them right away. The reading text or the following texts should include more recycle activities or the post stages of reading activities should require writing tasks in which the new words are repeated (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015).

> […] In this coursebook, many words are introduced through reading texts. However, the words in vocabulary bank are not related to the texts and we have to teach them in isolation. They are neither repeated nor recycled in the following texts (Instructor, Stimulated Recall Protocol data, 12th October, 2015 data, 12th October, 2015).

Based on the excerpts above, it is clear that modifications regarding topics, genre, visuals, activities, strategies and word recycle should be addressed for the effectiveness of the reading materials in order to aid with the language learning process of the students.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the reading materials used in *Speakout* coursebook which is designed and developed as an instructional material for EFL learners at the intermediate level classes at a language preparatory program.

The first research question attempted to investigate the perceptions of EFL instructors about the effectiveness of the reading materials used in the coursebook in terms of text appropriateness, purpose, learner needs and vocabulary development.

Considering text appropriateness, the results assured that the level and length of reading texts was appropriate for intermediate students and the reading texts were free of racist and sexist elements. The percentages of the instructors who agreed on these two statements were remarkably high, so one can conclude that almost no instructor has experienced such issues in their classroom practices. The results also demonstrated that the reading materials are not effective enough from the points of topics and genre. As it is understood from both questionnaire and reflective essay results, the reading topics were not appealing to the students and they failed to stimulate student motivation.

Moreover, the genre of reading texts was limited to articles or narrative paragraphs with which students were overfamiliar. This can also be an important reason why students showed reluctance to pay attention to the reading texts. It may be suggested that the topics and genre should be revised and renewed according to the interests, preference, culture and age of the students. Similarly, by adding lyrics, poems, fables, fairy tales or epics, the examples of genre could be enriched. Since, in the study of Kayapınar (2009) it was underlined that topics and genre of the materials were among the crucial elements what make coursebooks a very popular choice in the English learning curriculum.

As for the purpose of the materials, the findings revealed that the reading texts were authentic, reflected cultural elements and promoted real-life language use. As McDonough and Shaw (2011) mentioned previously in the literature, most of the texts function as 'text as process' to draw attention of the reader to authentic functions and meaning. Moreover, reading instructions were clear, precise and carried out through three stages: pre, while, and post reading. On the other hand, the results showed that the students did not find reading-related activities meaningful and useful. Furthermore, the majority of the instructors concluded that the materials neither taught variety of reading strategies

nor obliged students to read for different purposes. One can conclude from the excerpts that reading activities were quite repetitive and limited to True/False, open-ended and matching exercises. Thus, some strategies such as skimming and scanning were overwhelmingly dominant. This could be overcome by including such exercises which activated background information, let interpretation, and promoted critical thinking and made connections to the real-life by employing wide variety of strategies.

Regarding learner needs, the instructors seemed dissatisfied since the reading activities were not structured to respond to students' different learning styles. Basically, the activities are appropriate for visual learners; however, for auditory learners listening exercises are rarely included and for kinesthetic learners the instructors have to make preparations beforehand. These findings are in accordance with the findings of Çakıt's study (2006), previously mentioned in the literature review, which assessed the effectiveness of an intermediate coursebook. In her study, she also revealed that the reading materials failed to address different learner styles such as the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

One can also conclude from the findings that the reading materials lack in providing attractive visuals to motivate the students. These findings echo in Zohrabi's (2011) study which aimed to evaluate the coursebook "Reading English in Action". In this study, the researcher advices including drawings, figures and images so as to increase student interest and stimulate them for more intimate learning.

Finally, as for vocabulary development, the results revealed that the reading materials include word recognition exercises and the vocabulary items are graded from common to rare. The instructors seemed to be convinced with the idea that the reading materials aim to teach vocabulary to some extent. However, most of them do not reoccur or are not recycled in subsequent reading texts within units.

Based on the excerpts from the reflective essays, it is possible to say that the reading materials neither guarantee acquisition nor help students expand their vocabulary knowledge. These findings are also parallel to Azarnoosh's study (2014) which aimed to evaluate "Select Reading" for upper-intermediate learners. This study also demonstrated that vocabulary items are presented in different ways; however, the book falls short as the activities do not provide student enough practice and recycling. From these findings, it is possible to say vocabulary recycle and practice is not emphasized enough and it is an important area to be revised and developed.

Based on the gathered findings, it can be concluded that the perceptions of the instructors about the effectiveness of text appropriateness, purpose, learning needs and vocabulary development differ in many ways. Regarding text appropriateness, they seem satisfied since the length and level of the materials are appropriate, similarly, the texts are free of sexist and racist elements. However, they have some serious concerns about the topics and genres. With regard to purpose of the materials, the instructors thought that reading activities and strategies are ineffective and need close attention before practiced. As for learner needs, it is concluded that the materials lack addressing the students with different learning styles and attractive visuals. Finally, it is noticeable that inadequacy of practice and recycle is one of the major concerns for vocabulary development. For these reasons, the reading materials in the coursebook need modifications.

Furthermore, the second research question of the study aimed to determine the strongest and weakest aspects of reading materials used in *Speakout* coursebook. The findings based on the analysis of reflective essays revealed that the weaknesses of the reading materials outnumbered the strengths. Whereas the book had some strengths in terms of text appropriateness and purpose of the materials, considering learner needs and vocabulary development it was found to be weak in many aspects.

The results showed that the major strength was the length and level of the reading texts under the title *text appropriateness*. From the perspectives of the instructors, it is possible to claim that the students did not have comprehension problems because of the length or level of the reading texts. As for weaknesses, topics and genres were found to be insufficient to stimulate student motivation and did not appeal to learners' interests at all. The type of genre was limited to articles, interviews or narrative paragraphs. Therefore, it is possible to say that both topics and genre of the materials need to be revised and renewed.

Other strengths of the reading materials under the title *purpose of materials* were listed as authenticity, clear and precise instructions and the way the coursebook introduced the target culture. One possible

reason of authenticity could be that many of the reading texts in *Speakout* are sourced from the *BBC*. However, the reading materials were found to be inadequate to teach some specific reading strategies such as elaboration, inferences, critical thinking and bridging. The instructors concluded that students merely skimmed or scanned the text to be able to answer the comprehension questions or the text was used as a tool to introduce a grammatical item. Based on the statements above, it is noticeable that some specific strategies dominated the others; however, in order to ensure effectiveness material writers should put equal emphasis on the aforementioned strategies such as activating the schemata, making connections between the text and real life.

When it comes to learner needs and vocabulary development, it is possible to say that instructors were not really satisfied with the activity type, visuals and vocabulary range and load in a text. From their remarks, one can understand that the reading materials did not provide the students with wide variety of activities to ensure engagement. The follow-up reading activities were quite repetitive and limited to some certain types. In addition, the findings claimed that visuals did not aid reading comprehension and they were not attractive enough to encourage students to read the text. In addition, teaching vocabulary through reading texts was regarded as the major weakness. According to Stahl (2005), students have to see a word more than once to place it firmly in their long-term memories. "This does not mean mere repetition or drill of the word," but seeing the word in different and multiple contexts. In essence, it is important that vocabulary instruction should provide students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in more than one context (p.95). Based on the findings it is possible to conclude that the vocabulary load is very intense in this book, yet the target words are rarely recycled or repeated in different contexts.

Briefly, the findings of second research question showing the strong and weak aspects of the reading materials confirmed the arguments of some researchers (Cunningsworth, 1984; Graves, 2000; Richards, 2001) who claimed that coursebook evaluation was necessary to define how effective the materials were or in what ways they fell short in order to take the steps for improvement.

As for the last research question of the present study, what modifications could be suggested for the reading materials were investigated referring to the reflections of the EFL instructors regarding their classroom practices. The data were obtained from 5 instructors through stimulated recall protocols. The findings based on the stimulated recall protocols revealed that the instructors highly recommended that the reading components such as topics, genre, visuals along with activities/strategies and word recycle should be closely addressed in the process of preparing reading materials to ensure effectiveness.

To begin with, many EFL instructors that took part in this study recommended that topics and genres of the reading activities should be diverse in order to promote all the students' curiosity. Specifically, they should not heavily depend on one single source or praise specific culture but also bring out similarities and differences between target culture and the culture of students from different sources. In addition, they thought that immediate alteration is required in genre type; studying a poem, lyrics of a song, parodies, fables or fairy tales would be really appealing to less motivated students. Similarly, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) expressed that material developers should diversify language instruction as much as possible based upon the variety of affective attitudes likely to be found amongst a typical class of learners. He suggested this by providing choices of different types of text and activities and catering for the diverse interests of the identified target learners as well as being aware of the cultural sensitiveness.

In the literature, the illustrations in coursebooks are seen of great importance in determining the effectiveness of the materials (Ellis, 1994; Ur, 1996; Arıkan, 2005; Özdemir, 2007). Keeping this in mind; the reading materials in this coursebook found to be ineffective. From the classroom practices, it was obvious that the students could not make use of the visuals due to their poor quality, small size or simplicity. The EFL instructors urged that the design and layout should be reconsidered in order to encourage learners to make comment on the readings or simply attract them.

This study also underlined the fact that reading activities in this coursebook did not address the students with different learning styles; visual, auditory, kinesthetic, experiential and analytic learners. Thus, as Ellis (1994) also highlighted the material writers should be aware of this variety and cater for differences in their materials. From what EFL instructors stated in their excerpts, one can understand that the reading materials lacked bringing in learner awareness of reading strategies, either.

Cunningham & Allington (1994) offered some reading strategies such as using background knowledge, predicting, self-monitoring and self-correcting, identifying etc. that help students enhance their reading comprehension and increase their reading ability. In this essence, it is possible to conclude that the reading materials should include more of those strategies so that the learners are able to become better at monitoring their comprehension, review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know, inspire students to make real-life connections and learn more about the world by gaining insight towards specific concepts. Apart from that, it was surprising to find out that the EFL instructors wanted their students to pursue extensive reading through those reading materials. They recommended that the material developers should also consider the role of the texts they choose as they may build reading confidence and contribute the reading habit of the learners.

Lastly, parallel to questionnaire and reflective essay results, the real classroom practices also verified that the reading materials failed to provide the students with the opportunity to practice the new words within the texts. This issue was also held in Azarnoosh's study (2014) which concluded that vocabulary recycle and practice should be emphasized enough in the reading texts since vocabulary was considered as an integral part of reader's overall competence. The EFL instructors in this study demanded the same things mentioned above by adding that reading passages needed to be simplified in terms of vocabulary load in order not to lose the learner while reading.

To wrap up, the findings of the last research question confirmed the argument of Tomlinson (2011) who stated that materials should have a notable effect on learners and this can be achieved by novelty (unusual topics, illustrations, activities), variety (breaking up the monotony of a unit routine with an unexpected activity, using many different text types from different sources), attractive presentation, appealing content and achievable challenge.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of reading materials used in the *Speakout* coursebook designed and developed as an instructional material for EFL learners proficiency at a private (non-profit foundation) university in Turkish EFL context. Therefore, the study specifically focused on reading materials to find out their effectiveness related to the text appropriateness, purpose of materials, learner needs and vocabulary development; strengths-weaknesses of reading materials and necessary modifications from the perceptions of the EFL instructors.

The obtained findings provided an in-depth analysis of the reading materials used in its local context. The gathered data revealed that the instructors are quite contented with certain components of the reading materials such as length, level of the texts along with authenticity and introduction of target culture; however, some modifications with regard to topics, genre, visuals, strategies, activities and word recycle were still required to be closely addressed.

In this sense, the study suggests some implications for both for EFL instructors and material developers. To begin with, it helped instructors become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the reading materials they used in their own classrooms. In addition, the instructors had the opportunity to reflect on the actual use of the materials in their classroom practices and suggested some modifications for future use of the same materials. In this sense, they may decide to make adaptations, by adding or omitting the mentioned reading texts or exercises which in turn will influence reading proficiency level of the students. In addition, material developers can also benefit from this study by gaining closer insights into the certain features of reading materials. These insights can help them when they are developing local materials for a particular group of learners in Turkey. Since this study introduces some important features of effective reading materials, the recommendations should be implemented in order to improve the state of the teaching and learning of reading skills in the country.

To conclude, apart from the aforementioned limitations, the findings of this study are unique and crucial for the effectiveness of reading materials in coursebooks which may serve as a model study for other post-use micro evaluation studies in the future.

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