



TOPICS OF READING PASSAGES IN ELT COURSEBOOKS: WHAT DO OUR STUDENTS REALLY READ?

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the nature of the topics of the reading passages in ELT coursebooks. To find out the content of the topics, a total number of 15 ELT coursebooks are studied by using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The discrepancies found are discussed and recommendations are made to underline the importance of topic selection in any second and foreign language teaching classroom. As for conclusion, English language teachers are invited to consider issues related to the topic selection processes in their coursebooks as they assess, choose or use them.

Introduction

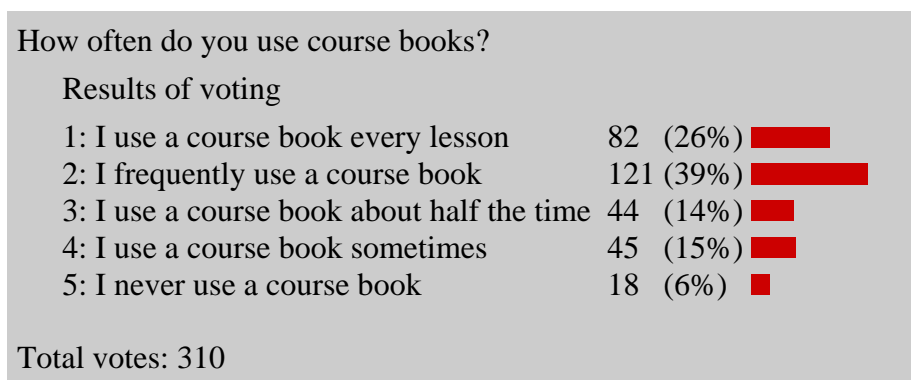
Students in Turkey are brought up by families who live in a country where various forms of social and political inequality are experienced, a reality that is not different in any other country. In such a sociopolitical environment, a world view is always attached to the values or knowledge pieces given to these students. Marx (1968: 183) states that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, one the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. The combination of the aforementioned reality with Marx’ statement leads us to the conclusion that the social being constructed in families and through schooling feeds the consciousness of the student, thus, real change towards creating a just society is becoming more and more difficult since the formation of the mind of the youth by family and schooling happens between what we may call through the famous pendulum effect. In short, I argue that the harmful effects of TV shows, newspapers, political agenda of various neo-liberal conservative political parties on family and social values is constantly supported by course books, leaving almost no place to experience and examine alternative ways of re-structuring the social environment. This situation is most tense when the recent increase in nationalist spirit pumped into teenagers is examined. As a teacher educator, I note that although it is more difficult now to set up critical education in classrooms, the need for such an activity is even more pressing. As such, I start my work with the course books with which we teach, to examine what kind of a world is tailored for my students. This resistant activity is first pedagogically important because the pre-service teachers with whom I study gain a lot of insight through such activity which as

Kincheloe (2004) claims to “resist dominant power by exposing and subverting it within schools.”

Similar to many teachers of English as a foreign or second language, I have used numerous coursebooks not only to follow administrative decisions, but also because of my belief grounded in my experiences with coursebooks as valuable instructional materials. As my experiences suggest, coursebooks present a smooth running curricular program for the teaching of the essential and necessary items of the language taught with which one cannot lose his or her way as a teacher. Coursebooks still continue to be the single most important resource in the language classroom throughout the world. Hence, the importance of coursebooks in the professional lives of the ELT practitioners is obvious. In many classrooms, coursebooks and their components make up the only instructional material used in the classroom. The on-line voting system opened by BBC collects ELT practitioners views on the frequency of ELT teachers’ use of course books and shows that about only 6% of the 310 voters claim that they never use coursebooks in their classrooms although those claim that they use coursebooks more than half of the classroom time makes up 79% of the teachers.

(See: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/talk/vote/vote4_coursebooks.shtml).

Figure 1. Frequency of ELT teachers’ use of course books



It was long after I started teaching and using coursebooks I noticed and verbalized that teaching with coursebooks had another advantage which was that coursebooks expanded our general knowledge more than any material or activity with which we were engaged within or outside our classrooms. As teachers of English, we are able to talk about tourism, foods, habits, culture and history, and psychology- especially with the knowledge we get from our coursebooks. It can also be said that as foreign language teachers, we have a unique chance of facing multiplicity of topics on our daily activities since the coursebooks we use are full of a variety of topics of reading passages. The help we get from our coursebooks is beneficial, simply because we are aware that, as can be seen in the words of Stubbs (1982:138), English teachers have always been ‘responsible not only for the linguistic development of their pupils, but also for their psychological, moral and interpersonal development- and to expect them also to provide a world view and philosophy of life.’ In short, coursebooks are not instructional materials only, but they are sources of knowledge and information on various aspects of individual and societal phenomena. With the help of such knowledge, English language teachers build onto the speaking activities in the classroom, assign writing assignments, prepare additional questions or activities,

present icebreakers, and develop any classroom discourse written or oral. In short, topics are fundamentally important for various discourses energizing and making up the ELT classrooms.

My awareness on the power of topics on our knowledge and comprehension; both linguistic as well as social, grew out of this positive experience all the while I noticed that coursebooks meant more to our students than we could have ever thought. Coursebooks were used by my students as tools possessing linguistic as well as cultural learning opportunities. My informal interviews with my students revealed that my students were viewing these coursebooks as resources of English language as well as a resource book about the Western world, delivering knowledge of American and British cultures. Our students learn the language as well as the cultures associated with it especially through reading passages through exercises which aim to improve their 'reading comprehension.' It is my belief that any kind of problem related to comprehension has something to do with 'what' is there to comprehend in ESL/EFL reading materials, namely in coursebooks and other classroom materials. This is an important and timely question which leads us re-think what actually happens when any kind of comprehension occurs. Because we still rely on coursebooks as the main instructional material used in ELT classrooms, this question can be answered by focusing on the intersection of coursebooks, reading passages, and what students read. This intersection is the reading topics found in the coursebooks our students read. Hence, the aim of this present study is to identify the topics of the reading passages in English language course books and analyse them from a pedagogical perspective. To do that, a total amount of 4 course books (thus, 28 reading passages) are studied. A critical reading of the repertoire of the topics is used under the light of the EFL research literature to see which topics are left out, which topics are highly used. Finally, such an analysis helped to see the meaning that can be attributed to this over all picture from a pedagogical perspective. While doing that, following questions guided this study:

Research question 1: What are the topics of the reading passages in ELT coursebooks?

Research question 2: What does the dispersion of the topics mean from a pedagogical perspective?

Sub research question 1: Which topics are overly represented?

Sub research question 2: Which topics are under represented or left out?

Background and Literature Review

Language coursebooks

As Olshtain and Celce Murcia suggest (2001: 708) throughout the twentieth century, language teaching, like linguistics, used sentence as its basic unit of analysis signaling an approach which legitimized decontextualized language practice. However, as they also inform, more recent approaches to language learning and teaching have picked up discourse or text as the basic unit of analysis. In such a shift, in their words:

More recent language textbooks present texts, short or long, as a basis for both understanding and practicing language use within larger meaningful contexts. This approach has greatly altered the type of activities undertaken in language classrooms. Learners need to focus, therefore, on various discourse features within any specified language activity (708).

In such a shift, therefore, not only the features of language activities changed but also what is expected of the language learner has changed dramatically because the individual learner is exposed to numerous numbers of bits and pieces of grammar, vocabulary, skills, and knowledge pieces which are undergone a conscious or unconscious learning on behalf of the student because they do not clearly know how to deal with each and every of them in any given classroom. Given the fact that, “the texts we and our colleagues put before them are not only secular, but man-made, fallible, and possibly biased. When students read these texts, we want them to be analytical and critical,” (Oster, 1989: 89) the difficulty becomes more obvious since in this paradoxical situation how students (should) understand the (ideological) text is not within the control of the teacher.

As we move towards a more discourse based language teaching in which the selection of the topics and functions of the language that need to be acquired by learners come to the foreground, the importance of reading materials in relation to their topics becomes more visible. Thornbury’s (1996) critical review and study of how ‘grammar’ is presented in the ELT coursebook market, reveals that smart marketing strategies of coursebooks companies aim to deliver their services in a consumer alluring way:

As well as being 'scientific', grammar is packaged as *fun*: in my survey of publishers' catalogues, this was another recurring theme. *Grammar* frequently co-occurs with adjectives such as *lively, stimulating, motivating, imaginative*. Like the consumers of hamburgers, teachers and learners are 'blissed out' by this constant diet of (junk) grammar. Everyone is kept happy and no one complains. The McDonaldization of grammar provides the perfect means for capitalizing (literally) on the global spread of English.

It is my argument that even though grammar has always been important to EFL text books, an updated analysis will reveal that reading has become a fundamental denominator of what text books offer to learners and teachers of English worldwide because of many contextual as well as cross-cultural reasons. For instance, Murdoch’s (2000) study reveals that although coursebook writers often claim that the topics in ELT coursebooks are chosen under the light of some surveys targeted to collect students’ views on the most interesting topics, there is a wide gap between the information on who those surveyors were and to whom the coursebook is taught. As she states, such information is of utmost importance since ‘knowledge of these students would determine if they are generally representative of the learners’ (4) in the context in which the coursebook is used.

(See Murdoch’s study: <http://www.cels.bham.ac.uk/resources/essays/yvette3.pdf>)

What do blurbs say on topics?

The blurbs of the coursebooks I studied may show the importance of reading topics in this global marketing strategy. Table 1 shows the descriptions I found in the blurbs of the coursebooks as advertised by coursebook companies:

Table 1: The blurbs’ notes on topics of reading passages

Coursebook	The blurbs’ note on the topics
Changes	Text based authentic materials, selected for their appeal to a young adult audience.
Streetwise	Thought provoking topics of intrinsic

	interest to teenagers authentic reading texts.
Opportunities for Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic-based units • Informative themes
Pacesetter	Motivating topics that draw on the students' experiences and develop their interest in the world around them
Generation 2000	Motivating topics engage mixed ability students and actively involve them in the learning process
Think Ahead	Uses a rich variety of topics as a stimulating context for language
New Headway	Motivating topics
Hotline	Cross-cultural and cross-curricular units topics from other school subjects are introduced to integrate language studies with other subjects in the curriculum
Ideas and Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of topical issues... towards successful communication • Authentic reading texts from British, American and other English-language sources
Inside Out	A rich selection of accessible and entertaining texts: cartoons, postcards, letters and extracts from newspapers, magazines and novels.
Lifelines	Motivating texts from a variety of sources

As the blurbs suggest, for these coursebooks writers, topics function so as to:

- Provoke thinking.
- Motivate students.
- Entertain students.
- Lead students to successful communication.
- Integrate language studies with other subjects in the curriculum.
- Stimulate context for language.
- Activate students to involve in the learning process.
- Develop students' interest in the world around them.
- Inform them.

Topics in reading passages

As Block (1992) suggests, reading is such a hidden process that it often goes unnoticed in the language classroom despite the fact that readers actively control this hidden control process largely with the help of their background knowledge and individual reading strategies. Harmer (2001) advises that we should try and choose topics in which our students will be interested despite the fact that individual learners have individual interests and that inclusion of a variety of topics and genres will help us cater their interests. Hence, it is expected that course books make

use of interesting and catchy topics for reading passages so that they can lead the learners to a productive reading and learning activity. As Shih (1992) states, any reading selection should present substantial new information on topics appropriate to students' ages, educational levels, and interests especially at the secondary and college level ESL classes. In short, topics about which the reading passages are written have significant importance for the success of reading as a skill with its teaching as well as its place in course books.

From an applied linguistics perspective, as Kramersch (2000) claims, two questions are fundamental to any educational planning and instructional practices: how language in discourse both reflects and creates social structures and political ideologies (Pennycook, 1994, 1998, as cited in Kramersch (2000)), and what the relation of language to social and cultural identity is (Peirce, 1995, as cited in Kramersch (2000)). Both of these questions have a lot to do with the discourses of reading passages and the reader's interaction with the texts they read. Hence, as students read for comprehension, they do not only comprehend the linguistic forms but they grab the facts, thoughts, and values that come into being with their reading process. Topics of reading passages, under the light of these, seem to be an important area of critical study to scrutinize their potentials in affecting the students' acquiring or learning of the facts, thoughts, and values implicitly as well as explicitly. In short, so as we can say, topics of reading passages are ideological statements themselves as much as what each topic includes as reading passages.

Ur (1999:185) underlines the fact that topics must be relevant to and interesting for the language learner. Neuner ve Hunfeld (1993: 112-113) have outlined the types of topics used in foreign language teaching coursebooks which are claimed to be applicable to almost all cultures as follows (another translation can be found here: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/schools/clc/pachler/culture/otherness/activity2.html>):

1. Fundamental existence (birth and death)
2. Individual identities (the self and the personal)
3. Social identities in private life (family, "we")
4. Social identities in social sphere (neighbors, group identities, nation and the State)
5. Relationships (friendships, love, and "you")
6. Housing (home and housing)
7. External world (environment, Nature, and civilization)
8. Work life
9. Education
10. Needs (nutrition and clothing)
11. Mobility (deportation and tourism)
12. Free time activities (hand crafts)
13. Communication and the use of media
14. Health (Illness and Hygiene)
15. Norms and approaches to norms (ethics, norms, religion, and values)
16. Chronological and historical experiences (the past, present, and future)
17. Mental and psychological processes (cognitive psychological processes, self reflexivity, dreams and fantasies, the emotional)

As Wade (1992) suggests, sensational topics such as death, danger, chaos, power, money, sex, and romantic intrigue are almost always within the students' interest. As cited by Brantmeier (2006), "Wade, Buxton and Kelly (1999) used multiple measures to examine what text characteristics readers found interesting and uninteresting and how interest affected recall in two expository texts. Findings revealed that the following five text characteristics were most

associated with interest: (a) information that was important, new, and valued; (b) information that was unexpected; (c) connections readers made between the text and their prior knowledge or experience; (d) imagery and descriptive language; and (e) authors' connection (pp. 207-208). Regarding comprehension, readers more successfully recalled information that they rated as both interesting and important.”

However, while analyzing the coursebooks for the purposes of this study, it became necessary to add one category to this list which was crime, a topic which was not mentioned by the coursebooks writers, but were continuously appearing in the reading passages. As one can see in the list above, topics are vague constructions or general key words that are later filled with interrelated statements exemplifying that specific key word. As the list shows, vague key topics such as ‘fundamental existence’ is narrowed down by coursebooks writers, after which the topic may become ‘death’ but what the following reading passage may include a variety of topics such like funeral ceremonies in different cultures, beliefs about after life, euthanasia or death penalty. Therefore, every topic is given life with value laden statements under the influence of presuppositions of the writers and publishers. In this process, assumptions about or results of the survey studies on students’ topical interests and some marketing strategies are thought to have an effect on such choices. Thus, apart from the kind of the topic, how that topic is revitalized by the writer(s) as well as how it is read by the reader(s) in what we may call discursive practices is a matter worth studying. In the context of teaching of English as a Foreign Language where language learners’ exposition to the language is confined to the classroom materials and interaction, such problem with the topics of reading passages becomes obvious let alone necessary to study. For example, it can be seen that topics such as clothing is most often attached to fashion, deportation to travel, and mental and cognitive processes to the supernatural. These predictable attachments show the value laden appearance of how the ‘educational’ is filled with the conscious or subconscious presuppositions, beliefs and knowledge of writers and publishers, leading the students to form a world view similar to that of the coursebooks’.

In his case study of six general coursebooks at elementary and pre-intermediate level coursebooks, Cunningsworth (1995) found the following:

1. Even though the range of topics varies considerably, common topics include travel and tourism, wild life, famous people, and teenage life styles, less common topics are design and ballooning.
2. Even though there are some topics of cross traditional subject boundaries like history and geography, the boundary crossing is limited and not sustained.
3. Sensitive socio-cultural topics are dealt with including people in need, homelessness, physical handicap, world poverty and discrimination without an extensive but sufficient prominent attitude in order not to be the product of tokenism.
4. Even though the representation of women and men shows an equal balance, there are some unbalanced topics such as famous people in which famous men outnumber women in history.
5. Social class is barely evident, signaling a classless society but this world is middle class, reflecting the users of the books.
6. People of different ethnic origins appear although, in some cases, they are simply represented in the visuals and do not have much of a role in the presentations or story line.
7. Disability gets very little place.
8. Only one book represents any real image of family life, so there was no real opportunity to analyze which sorts of families are portrayed.
9. Expressions of personal feelings are almost completely absent (92-96).

Norton (2005) has concluded that the majority of the relevant articles produced have raised questions about the types of topics that should be included to challenge and motivate students to participate in class. She has also pointed at the importance of topic choices and developing teaching materials which offer learners choices.

(See: http://www.matsda.org.uk/folio_article_jan05.htm). From another corner, upon the importance of coursebooks, it is, in an ironic way, suggested that new editions of coursebooks, although they claim to be revised in consideration of newer methods, are “basically the same old stuff, but the colours and typeface are nice and we bunged in an article about Eminem, so it will look vaguely up-to-date for another six months.”

(See: <http://www.englishdroid.com/coursebooks.html>). Furthermore, as Tomlinson (1998) puts forth, teachers may not like the texts in the coursebooks often because of the fact that such content may restrict the teacher in terms of content and procedures.

O’ Neill (1993) clarifies the mist surrounding why coursebooks cannot adequately fulfill the needs of all students by arguing that because coursebook are written for an imaginary group of learners who are assumed to have similar profiles, it is impossible to cover all materials that are liked or enjoyed by such learners. Alptekin (1993), on the other hand, argues that writers write materials in line with their own culture rather than that of the learners’, which eventually leads to a break down in the materials’ intelligibility

(See: <http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/47/2/136>). Furthermore, Rivas’ (1999) study of reading materials has pointed out that, in general, coursebooks seem to reflect current interactive views on reading, but concluded that EFL teachers need to supplement deficient reading activities to help learners become efficient readers

(<http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/53/1/12>). Hence, English language teachers must confront the gaps in the topics coursebooks present and fill this gap by adapting and producing materials, a task which is often voiced in relation to the grammar supplements but not to the topics.

What do our students read?

It has been argued that reading is the most important skill for second language learners (Lynch & Hudson, 1991) and reading comprehension is a complex construct in which general topic knowledge, not just culturally bound prior knowledge is significant in second language reading comprehension (Hammadou, 2000). Reading as the most important skill in language learning and reading comprehension as the most widely used technique are studied from various vantage points. From a classroom teaching perspective, reading is the solid rock around which all other skill-based activities are situated as the structure of the majority of ELT coursebooks show. However, among many characteristics of foreign language teaching course books, problems with reading passages and especially with topic selection is one of the most important. Cunningsworth (1995:86), while underlining the importance of students’ background knowledge, suggests that topics and subject matters, whilst being primarily designed for language teaching, is also informative, challenging, amusing, exciting and occasionally provocative to provide opportunities for expanding students’ experience in general, as well as in language learning. Hence, even though a lot of functions are attributed to topics, often times, topics of reading passages are so over-familiar to the reader such as ‘the clothes we wear’ or ‘transport’ that they recount the facts that have long been part of the reader’s general knowledge (Nuttall, 1989). In such a situation, not only such over-familiar topics bring boredom to the classroom interaction but also many learning opportunities can be lost in the reading process which is supposed to

involve the learning or practicing of many vocabulary or grammar points that are fundamental parts of the total language learning.

Critical theorists reject the claim that schooling constitutes an apolitical and value-neutral process and argue that schools often operate with the intent to reproduce the values and privileges of the dominant culture (Darder, 1991, 78). It is obvious that all aspects of schooling including teachers, course books, and classroom materials along with the activities and attitudes of all members of a given school or classroom contribute to the formation of value-laden practices that pass an infinite number of values to the students. In such a pedagogical realm, values resting in course books seem to be important because students are in interaction with them both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, students are exposed to values both societal as well as ideological through many aspects of these course books including the pictures, example sentences, reading passages, discussion questions, and many other skill based activities.

While writing about inefficient readers in context of English as a second or foreign language, Gorman (1989: 158) underlines the importance of comprehension since those inefficient readers “do not comprehend what is read.” Comprehension in language learning has been studied for many reasons most of which has focused on the grammatical or syntactic aspects of the language. The rest, on the other hand, picked up the reading materials and studied them with sociopolitical concerns including theoretical considerations derived from feminism. Comprehending what? What happens when language learners comprehend? What effects live by these learners long after they comprehend the components of ELT materials? Further, do ELT reading materials have an effect on the identity of the learners? These questions have triggered many analytical as well as philosophical arguments on identity politics, English as a global language, culture and language relationship, necessitating further analysis and rigorous examination of such materials.

Topic familiarity has been discussed by many researchers as facilitating reading comprehension (Carrell, 1983; Lee, 1986). As put forward by van Dijk and Kintsch (1982: 342), ‘learning from text is not usually learning text,’ hence individuals may learn different things from the same text read. It can be said that because ‘prior knowledge about the topic speeds up basic comprehension and leaves working memory free to make connections between the new material and previously learned information,’ (Davoudi, 2005: 112) (See: <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/davoudi/article.pdf>), we can say that students learn or enforce their background knowledge with the topic read. At this point, the importance of language coursebooks’ use of topics becomes an important issue since these topics are learned by these students, leaving the nature of the knowledge read and learned into serious question. Swan (2003, as reviewed by Komiyama (2005)) reminds readers that students do not develop the cognitive strategies required of engaged readers without being provided with books that appeal to them. Hence, genres and topics, which define the framework of reading materials are important in selecting appropriate topics for reading.

Students’ choice of topics

Studies on students’ choices of topics have shed light on the favorite topics students want to read in their English language classrooms. Ozturk’s (2007: 86) study revealed that among 78 topics suggested, the top ten topics students preferred were cinema, the Internet, sports, hobbies, love, music, computer games, money, computers, holidays whereas the least wanted were agriculture, sculpture, opera, housing, poetry, architecture, painting, literature, population, and punishment. Also, Kirmızı’s (2007: 81) study suggested that among 20 topics given to students,

the top ten topics students preferred were cinema, music, computers, holidays, sports, love, touristic places, entertainment, travel, and shopping although the least wanted were life styles, hobbies, natural life, and family. The topics these studies found to be most preferred were cinema, computers and the Internet, sports, holidays, and love. The least wanted were housing and family. Hence, although it is hard to suggest that these results are conclusive, it can be inferred that students are more interested in the topics with which they can engage in their lives as a part of the technology driven society in which sports, holidays, and love are seen as activating and interesting life activities. Students' choices of topics of reading materials are, naturally, dependent on contextual factors. However, the representation of topics in coursebooks is rather easier to be studied and located. In this study, such an aim is tried to be accomplished.

METHODS

Data collection

A case study method employing descriptive content analysis is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation. As a qualitative research practice case study method raises a question about something that perplexes and challenges the mind (Merriam, 1998: 57). In this research, the case is decided to be four ELT coursebooks which represent 'a single unit' or 'bounded system' (Smith, 1978) to represent the representative sample of the issue under interrogation. As Creswell (1998: 65) points out, data collection in a case study involves using multiple sources as in this research study it included the contents pages of the coursebooks studied to capture what the writers claim for the topics and numerous reading passages whose topics are individually categorized but then compared to the topics proposed by the writers. For the purposes of this research, and to propose a valid representation of the coursebooks, the coursebooks are chosen randomly, among a pile of intermediate and upper intermediate level coursebooks used worldwide.

Data analysis

In the analysis of the reading passages, I have used a descriptive content analysis procedure similar to the one used by Esen (2007) in the same course she taught. Primary scanning and data reduction was performed on the text books by a group of 43 students from the 4th year English Language Teaching Program in the Faculty of Education of Hacettepe University in the academic year of 2006- 2007 and with another group of 41 students in the same school, but in a different 4th year course titled Materials Evaluation and Adaptation. Hence, conclusions reached in this paper are the result of the researcher's final analysis of the evaluations of eighty-four 4th year students' study of these reading passages.

Results

Table 2 shows the numerical analysis of the topics of reading passages. This dispersion seems to present equilibrium since the numerical difference between the most and least occurring topics does not seem to be wide. First, it seems like crime related topics (7,14%) outnumbers those on education, norms, and values (1,53%). Also, media including celebrities, fame, and popular music (7,14%) outnumbers historical figures/ biographies (2,55%). Hence, it is obvious that students read about success stories of singers roughly three times more than they do the

accomplishments of philosophers and scientists. This should be studied together with the current power of media images on children and the youth, and the importance of setting role models for the youth. As the analyses of the reading passages revealed, passages on education, values, and religion are the least mentioned in coursebooks along with historical figures/ biographies. Reading passages on the supernatural (4,59%) are less than those on science and technology (6,14%).

Table 2: Distribution of the Topics

Topics	f	%
Family & Housing	33	16,83
Science & technology	12	6,12
Nature: animals, plants, ecology	15	7,65
Business and work life	21	10,71
Food, Sports & Health	27	13,77
The supernatural	9	4,59
Free time activities	24	12,24
Media (fame, celebrities, cinema, popular music)	14	7,14
Education, norms, & values	3	1,53
Crime	14	7,14
Languages and cultures	19	9,69
Historical figures/ biographies	5	2,55

This repertoire of topics, first, tells us a lot about what is left out, thus, what is not included. First of all it is clear that these topics do not show ‘real life’ as they often claim to do so, through those so called controversial topics, which are not controversial at all. For instance, even though the leading academic journals as well as more practical journals have focused on issues of gays, lesbians, transgenders, etc., no topic is detected covering these social issues. What is more, a critical reading of the coursebooks with their historical development shows that more and more, students are exposed to commercial products probably because the students see these products more than they see actual occurrences of injustice, human rights violation, child abuse, or battering of women in their societies. Similar to the findings of Thornbury who uses the term ‘McDonaldization of grammar’, we can talk about the ‘McDonaldization of topics’ which ‘provides the perfect means for capitalizing (literally) on the global spread of English’ (page number needed). However, a critical look at the representation of these topics may suggest that if what students read affects their identity and adds onto their social being, then there appears to be a problematic situation.

Crime, both as mystery and social problem, is a high frequency topic often used as stimulator for debate. This, again, echoes the growing amount of crime news that are becoming the center of media especially the news on TV. From another corner, tourism is another high frequency topic often given in form of describing a location or resort that is a must see. Apart from its formation as a paradise for those who cannot even dream of going there because of economic reasons, such locations are directly given in forms of tourism brochures, another resemblance to the growth of market economy which turns locations (touristic places) into products (travel packages).

It is stated in literature that although younger learners may prefer fiction, they should gradually be introduced to nonfiction in forms of the topics and genres of reading materials (Renandya & Jacobs 2002). The analysis of these coursebooks revealed that the topics in these intermediate level coursebooks are almost always nonfictional, what is worse, mythical. This, again, points at a great discrepancy between research literature and the state of our course books.

Discussion and Conclusion

Not every coursebook is alike. As it became obvious during the analyses of this study, coursebooks have varying degrees of topic selections in terms of their topical dispersion. While some coursebooks rely heavily on technology and commercial enterprise, some others give importance to environment and tourism. Hence, teachers who know what their students like can easily figure out which coursebooks may work in their classes. However, as the dispersion of the topics show, understanding the topics of reading passages by looking at the coursebooks' covers can lead us to astray since there is a significant difference between some of the topics as they are represented. Nature and ecology (7,65%) and science & technology (6,12%) are also far behind of other topics.

The findings of this study show that students' favorite topics as found by Ozturk's (2007) and Kirmizi's (2007) studies are not realized in the coursebooks studied. The topics these studies found to be most preferred were cinema, computers and the Internet, sports, holidays, and love although the least wanted were housing and family. However, the coursebooks studied in this research showed that family and housing is the leading topic (16,83%) although media and cinema get a mediocre place (7,14%).

This research study revealed that some topics such as relationships, love, work life, education, and values do not appear in the coursebooks in reading passages. This is significantly important because violence, crime, and the supernatural appear as popular topics in these coursebooks. Especially 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 eradicate crime and violence in the world around us through social awareness. Furthermore, although coursebooks writers do not declare that they write on topics commerce and trade, it becomes obvious that these topics were used in the reading passages studied. This, again, shows that there are hidden topics in the coursebooks studied. When the findings of this study are evaluated, there appears a discrepancy between the topics claimed to be in the reading passages and the actual existence of the topics when the reading passages are read. Then, it can be said that there is existence of hidden topics in the coursebooks with which we teach.

As these findings considered in relation to the claims made by the coursebooks writers, we are supposed to believe that students (teenagers) are not interested in the topics such as friendship, love, education, and norms but are interested in crime although crime was not defined as a category in literature as such. This requires careful and vigorous study on behalf of ELT teachers when the current crime rates in schools are considered and as teachers of English we aim to establish a peaceful environment in our classrooms in which we teach through peaceful images.

Any method used in the study of the coursebook should not see it as a product but it must take the preparation phase seriously such as under the influence of which language teaching approach the book is written, its aims and objectives, and whether the coursebook is written by native or non-native speakers and writers of English. For example, it is now accepted that the open market economy leads the principles of coursebook writing by seeing it a marketable

product first. However, as it is mentioned above, the effect of approaches to and principles of language teaching is the most important factor that brings a coursebook forward. Such a fact can be observed in the bifurcated situation of those books written either from communicative or intercultural perspectives. While in communicative coursebooks all activities and skills circle around discursive examples of the daily language, intercultural ones circle around topical examples of the daily language in with many realities of and assumptions about cultural appearances in the target as well as native cultures of the speakers. When the situation of the reading passages considered, the most impressive observation can be that the reading passages in communicative coursebooks are composed of numerous examples of speech acts in forms of dialogues whereas in intercultural reading passages prose narratives are the leading forms, often with the extensive use of literary genres, to introduce the students with cultural realities and richness of the speakers and learners. As these examples suggest, it can well be said that reading passages in coursebooks are organic entities with certain forms and contents, all serving a function that are framed within the economic, cultural, and methodological realities and purposes.

Future Research

This research produced a body of knowledge that emphasizes the McDonaldization of the topics of reading passages resting in EFL course books. However, future research should scrutinize whether or not or to what extent these topics and those reading passages themselves affect the world views of the students who follow these materials. For instance, how much of these materials are used by these students in forming their views of the world and are there conceptions or misconceptions learned by these students on various topics mentioned in EFL course books.

The results of this research study calls for further research concerning the nature of topics in ELT coursebooks both by researchers as well as by ELT teachers who select or use commercial ELT coursebooks in their classrooms. Although coursebook assessment is often suggested to be done through checklists which have been in use in the current system of coursebook selection, more qualitative approaches to our coursebook assessment procedures will bring new insight into our understanding of the coursebooks we teach. While doing that we also need wide array of survey studies to show which topics are of interest of the learners but the results of these surveys should be explicit about the profile of those students so that parallelisms can be drawn between them and those that are in our context.

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