

# An Anthropocentric Approach to Evaluate English Language Teaching Course Books

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## Abstract

*The new geological epoch Anthropocene poses a significant problem to people because it shows how human activities have started to change and shape the world negatively to a big extent. One way to deal with this problem is education, including English language teaching. In English language teaching, course books can be used to deal with the Anthropocene. When the literature was reviewed, it was seen that English language course books were evaluated according to English language teachers' and students' perspectives, but not with an Anthropocentric perspective. Therefore, the present study aimed to evaluate an English language course book used in Turkey with an Anthropocentric approach. It was designed as a qualitative study. The data collected were documented analyzed. Qualifications of the researcher and thick description were used for the trustworthiness of the research. The findings have indicated that the course book has units and parts of units related to nature. They have also shown that students can understand the relationship between people and nature by studying this course book. The results were discussed, and suggestions for further research were made.*

**Keywords:** English language teaching, The Anthropocene, English language course book evaluation, ELT, The anthropocene and Course book evaluation.

## Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, human activities in nature have been accelerating. These activities have led to severe ecological, climatic, atmospheric, and chemical effects on nature (Crutzen, 2006a). According to Crutzen (2006a, 2006b), these effects include deforestation, global warming, climate change, increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the extinction of animals, plants, and insects and the hole in the ozone layer. All these effects have shown that natural forces such as wind and water have not been able to compete with a human in shaping the world (Crutzen, 2006a, 2006b), so this assumption means that the Holocene epoch where such natural forces were dominant in shaping the world ended and the world has entered into a geological epoch where human beings are the only force that can shape the world (Crutzen, 2006a, 2006b). Crutzen (2006a, 2006b) called this new epoch the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene emphasizes the fact that people should deal with what their activities have caused in the environment (Zalasiewicz, Williams, Haywood, & Ellis, 2011). This can be done in some ways. Education is one of them. Improving, designing, or organizing education with an Anthropocentric perspective can help people to understand their place in the environment (Somerville, 2017), be aware of nonhuman beings (Somerville, 2017), and learn how to live with nature in balance (Somerville, 2017; Sterling, 2017; Taylor, 2017). This approach to education has been suggested to be adopted in different disciplines (Gilbert, 2016; Mahaffy, 2014; Pawson, 2015; Truong, 2017).

As a part of education, English language teaching can also serve for the same purpose. One way to align English language teaching with the Anthropocene is teaching materials, especially English language course books, as they are the basic materials used to teach English. Therefore, a course book can help students be aware of the effects of human activities on nature and understand the relationship between people and nature. To understand whether a course book can serve for this purpose, it can be evaluated with an Anthropocentric perspective. Yet, the national and international course book evaluation studies have been conducted to evaluate English language course books according to English language teachers' perspective (Akhgar, Talebinejad, & Ansari, 2017; Dülger, 2016; Kayapınar, 2009; Jafarigahor & Ghaderi, 2013; Shahmohammadi, 2018), to English language teachers' and students' perspectives (Farsi & Sahragard, 2013; Lisna, 2016; Tekir & Arıkan, 2007; Zohrabi, 2011), and to researchers based on criteria (Papajani, 2015; Xiao- jie, 2017). In some studies, checklists to evaluate course books were suggested (Demir & Ertaş, 2014; Jusuf, 2018; Şahin, 2020). Those studies have not evaluated English language course books with an Anthropocentric perspective. Therefore, the present study has aimed to evaluate an English language teaching course book prepared and published by the Ministry of National Education of Turkey with an Anthropocentric perspective because of the word count limit. Accordingly, it has tried to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a unit related to nature in the English language course book?
2. What are the objectives of the unit(s) in the English language course book?
3. How are the objectives of the unit(s) contextualized and practiced in the English language course book?

## Methodology

### Research Design

The present study was designed as a qualitative study since qualitative research design could enable the researcher to analyze the English language course book with an Anthropocentric perspective by having a complex and detailed understanding as Creswell (2007) stated.

### Research Context

Turkey has a centralized education system in which state and public primary, lower secondary, and high schools follow the curriculum prepared and developed by the Ministry of National Education. In these centralized system, several foreign languages such as English, German, French, Arabic, and Chinese are taught at schools. Still, English is the most commonly taught language as a foreign language. English language education starts in the 2nd grade of primary school and continues until the 12th grade of high school. English language course books are prepared by the Ministry of National Education or by publishing houses according to the English language teaching program.

### Data Collection Tool

The data was collected from *Progress Preparatory Class Student's Book* prepared by Altunay et al. (2019) and published by the Ministry of National Education.

### Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data through documentation analysis. He made documentation analysis according to Yıldırım and Şimşek's (2013) framework for documentation analysis:

1. He first reached the printed version of the course book.
2. He ensured that the document was original.
3. As he had a ten-year English language teaching experience and used different types of English language course books to teach English, he could understand the document.
4. He prepared a protocol to document analyze the course book. He presented the analysis in the Results part according to the research questions.

### Trustworthiness

The researcher conducted several qualitative studies related to different aspects of English language teaching, was aware of the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research and was trained in qualitative research. Therefore, it can be said that he could conduct qualitative research. He also provided a thick description of the data in the Results to show that the findings reflect what the course book includes, not his ideas. These two strategies were

among the ones that are used to make a qualitative study trustworthy (Shenton, 2004).

## Results

The results of the study were given according to the research questions successively.

### The Units Related to Nature in the Course Book

There are 20 units in the course book. The table below presents the units.

**Table 1: The Units in Progress Preparatory Class Student's Book**

Unit	The name of the units	Unit	The name of the units
1	Studying abroad	11	School life
2	My neighborhood	12	Detective stories
3	Movies	13	Old times
4	Animals and nature	14	Travel
5	Celebrities	15	Sports
6	Intercultural topics	16	Helpful tips
7	Wonders of the world	17	Food and drinks
8	Emergency and health problems	18	Digital era
9	Party	19	Heroes and heroines
10	Television	20	Shopping

Units 4 (animals and nature) and 17 (food and drinks) are directly related to nature. Besides, units 2 (my neighborhood), 3 (movies), 6 (intercultural topics), 7 (wonders of the world), 8 (emergency and health problems), 10 (television), and 14 (travel) are also related to nature because they have one or two parts that focus on nature. These parts are as follow:

1. Unit 2: 2C – Shopping time
2. Unit 3: 3A – Action
3. Unit 6: 6A – Different weather events and cultures
4. Unit 7: 7C – Natural wonders of the world
5. Unit 8: 8B – An apple a day keeps the doctor away
6. Unit 10: 10C – Weather forecast
7. Unit 14: 14A – On the move and 14C – Before you set off

### The Objectives of the Units and their Contextualization and Practice

In 2C of unit 2, students are expected to learn phrases and expressions related to shopping in addition to quantities, numbers, and prices to use, give, and receive information while shopping. To reach these outcomes, the contextualization of 2C is based on fruit, vegetables, drinks, and food. Every activity in 2C is integrated with this contextualization.

3A in unit 3 aims to help them to talk about their likes, dislikes, hobbies, and free-time activities. The theme of 3A is indoor and outdoor sports. Outdoor sports include ones such as knitting, skiing, and riding a horse people do in nature. The activities in 3A were prepared according to this theme.

In unit 4, they are supposed to talk about their daily routines, the frequencies of their daily routines, their abilities, and inabilities, to modify their actions, and to express their preferences and how some natural events are formed. 4A is based on taking care of animals, including pets and zoo animals. 4B is contextualized in terms of the characteristics of different animals, including tigers and bats and insects such as bees and human activities as the reason for endangered animals such as polar bears. The contextualization of 4C is the formation of natural disasters and their negative effects on human life. The activities in 4A, 4B, and 4C are based on these themes.

6A of unit 6 expects them to talk about cities and countries by asking and describing them. Its theme is based on weather conditions, and weather conditions are used to describe countries such as Egypt and Greece in addition to what makes them famous. Its activities were prepared accordingly.

7C of unit 7 also expects them to make inquiries and talk about non-specific places. It is contextualized depending on the natural wonders of Turkey (e.g., Butterfly Valley) and around the world (e.g., Victoria Falls) and how they attract people. All activities in 7C are integrated with this theme.

In 8B of unit 8, they are expected to ask for and give advice for, make an appointment for, and talk about their illnesses. 8B is contextualized in terms of the effects of fruit, vegetables, and food on human health. For example, the course book includes the statement that corn, eggs, and carrot are good for

eyes. Each activity in 8B was prepared and developed according to this theme.

10C in unit 10 aims at helping them talk about the weather. Different weather conditions in cities and their effects on what people wear, eat, and do are the theme of 10C. Every activity of 10C is related to this theme.

In 14A and 14C, unit 14 expects them to participate in the interviews, talk about their past and present experiences, make reservations, and share their ideas and plans. 14A focuses on how different types of holidays, such as camping holidays in nature, affect people's decisions and needs as its theme. 14C is contextualized in terms of deciding where to go according to the weather and nature. The activities in 14A and 14C were organized and prepared, depending on these themes.

In unit 17, they are supposed to talk about food, drinks, their interests, customs, and traditions, to make generalizations, and to describe their actions. 17A, 17B, and 17C are all based on the relationship between food and culture, such as the one between taco and Mexico. Their activities are aligned with this contextualization.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The English language course book evaluated includes 8 units that focus on different aspects of nature, such as fruit, vegetables, drinks, animals, and weather conditions. Each unit describes the interaction and relationship between people and nature in two ways:

- a) Nature affects human life.
- b) Human beings affect nature.

2C of unit 2 can help students understand how nature can affect human life through fruit, vegetables, drinks, and food because these natural products are effective in people's decision-making process for buying something to eat and drink. Eating and drinking are vital to human life, and shopping is also an important part of people's life. Like 2C, 8B can show students the effect(s) of nature on people's health by expressing what kind of fruit, vegetables, and food affect people's health positively and negatively. Similarly, unit 17 can also indicate students how nature through food and drinks can affect people because it emphasizes the place of

food and drinks in a different culture, which is also a significant part of people's lives. Consequently, students can understand that nature affects people by studying the effects of natural products on people's activities in 2C, 8B, and unit 17 in line with the literature (Somerville, 2017).

Likes, dislikes, hobbies, free time activities, and holidays are also important to people. 3A relates likes, dislikes, hobbies, and free-time activities to outdoor sports, which are done in nature. Outdoor sports are one of the ways nature affects people because nature forms the basis of outdoor sports and determines when, where, and how they can be done. Like 3A, 7A relates holiday to natural wonders because natural wonders attract people while they are trying to decide where to go. That is, people's decision-making process for a holiday can be determined by natural wonders since when and how to visit these places depend on the features of natural wonders.

Similarly, 14A and 14C can indicate students how people make their holiday plans according to the type of holiday in nature they want to go on. Holiday in nature requires different planning in terms of making a reservation, where to stay, when and how to go, what to wear, and what to eat and drink. Therefore, 3A, 7A, 14A, and 14C can enable students to understand the effects of nature on people's lives by relating human activities to nature, as mentioned by Somerville (2017).

Weather conditions are also parts of nature. 6A focuses on another human activity: describing a city and country. Weather conditions are also considered in describing countries and cities in 6A. Besides 6A, 10C connects weather conditions with one human activity: decision-making. It indicates students how weather conditions can influence what people wear, eat, and drink. Students can also learn how closely human activities are related to nature by learning English through the effects of weather conditions on two human activities, as mentioned in the literature (Somerville, 2017).

On the one hand, 4A and 4B in unit 4 can show students how human activities can affect nature. 4A can enable students to be aware of the positive effect of human activities on nature by expressing how people can take care of pets and zoo animals. 4B

can help students to be aware of the negative effect of human activities on nature by mentioning why animals such as polar bears have become endangered animals. By studying 4A and 4B, students can understand that their activities can influence nature positively and negatively, as Crutzen (2006a, 2006b) stated. On the other hand, 4C can indicate students the negative impact of nature on people's lives negatively as it focuses on natural disasters such as earthquakes and expresses their negative influences on people's lives.

To conclude, the English language course book evaluated can be used to deal with what the Anthropocene has revealed. Studying English through nature-related units and parts of units can enable students to be aware of nonhuman beings and their place in nature because, according to Somerville (2017), such education can enable people to do so. Therefore, students can learn how to live with nature in balance through this book, as Somerville (2017), Sterling (2017), and Taylor (2017) stated.

### Suggestions for further Research

The present study is limited by data collection and research context. Yet, it can contribute to the literature by introducing the term Anthropocene and providing a framework to analyze English language teaching course books. Therefore, future studies can be made in different contexts with English language course books and teaching materials. These studies can help English language teachers, course book writers, and curriculum developers to find out the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching materials in terms of the Anthropocene and can improve their weaknesses to make their students environmentally friendly and sensitive to nature.

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