Full Length Research Paper

Views of students about visuals used in Turkish language course and workbooks

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Turkish course books and workbooks delivered to the second grade primary students are the most important course materials. The visual factors in these materials help the students know and understand the elements such as main theme, plot, scene, setting, characters and existence in a text. They help students develop their thoughts about the texts they have read or listened to. The visual elements integrated into the text and question that complement each other have great effect on understanding. In addition to those, visuality evokes the students' imagination and association. This study aims to show how the visual elements in the 6th, 7th and 8th grade primary Turkish course books and workbooks are assessed by the students. The study is carried out on 414 students (210 girls and 204 boys) from 6th, 7th and 8th grade. Students are asked 10 questions prepared on the basis of triad scale about the visual elements in the texts in the course books and in the activities in the workbooks. In this study, based on the views of students, several suggestions are made about the visual elements in the books. Besides, the effect of gender difference and Turkish course marks in terms of the views of students is searched.

Key words: Turkish Language course and workbooks, visuals, Turkish course marks, influence of gender difference.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, current 8 year SINGLE STAGE compulsory primary education system has been changed with the 12-year THREE-STAGE (4+4+4) compulsory primary education by the Ministry of Education (MEB) in Turkey. The first stage involves 4-year primary school (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades), the second stage involves 4-year secondary school (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades) and the third stage involves 4-year high school (9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades) (MEB, 2012:10). This study was conducted on the second stage students in 6th, 7th and 8th grades (11 to 14 ages) in 2011.

In Turkey, course books are given to students free. For Turkish classes, students are provided with a course book, which involves reading and listening texts, and a workbook which involves preparatory studies such as listening, reading, speaking and writing skills, and grammar drills. While the images on the course book complement the texts, those in the workbook (pictures, photographs, comics, graphics, story maps, etc) explain and evaluate them.

Contemporary education concepts are student-centered. Students are not the individuals who can learn by certain patterns and have common behaviors towards responses, but they are the ones who absorb and individualize the knowledge. Accessing to the knowledge by inherent behaviors, exploring it, being able to develop the learning ability and internalization of the knowledge are the qualifications which are aimed to be given to the

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students.

The most effective learning skill to access to the sources of knowledge is reading. Reading is described as the process of giving meaning, which is the result of interaction among written (writer) and unlettered sources, readers and environmental elements (Akyol, 2001:14). Beyond vocalization, reading gives meaning; it extrapolates and accesses to the thoughts aimed in a sentence, paragraph or a text. Evaluation of a text means correlating events and ideas meaningfully, creating intellectual coherence, making inferences, getting the core of the text and completing the structure of every element in the text. The essence of this activity is the goal of "understanding" (Epçapan and Erzen, 2010:22; Epçapan, 2009:207). The essence of reading skill is making of a text. According to Güneş (2004), comprehension not only means finding the meaning of a text, thinking on the meaning, researching for the reasons and making deductions and evaluations; but also contains intellectual activities such as exploring, making choices, having decisions, translating, commenting, metalepsis, making analysis and synthesis and evaluating. Reading education is a process which must be taken seriously. Initializing this process in early ages with qualified means has great importance on the development of the perception abilities of the students. Reading is not an ability that begins with primary school. The books that take place in children's affective world as bathroom books and toys for games in pre-school period also appeal to the world of thought with the acquisition of reading skill. The duration of this skill is one of the goals of the Turkish Language courses. Güneş and Burgul (2007) have emphasized the importance of reading on the acquisition of knowledge. In 2005 Turkish Lesson Education Curriculum, the goals of reading skills are described as enabling students to read the texts in their daily lives correctly and fluently by using suitable methods, commenting on and evaluating what they read in a critical point of view and getting into the habit of reading (MEB, 2006:6). In accordance with these goals, there are 5 goals, 52 acquisitions intended for reading and learning in second grade primary school Turkish curriculum.

Visual organizers have an important role in learning. Visual organizers are diagrams, maps, figures, flowcharts, tables, graphics, etc. which are used for spatial exhibition of structural information in order to develop comprehension and learning in a particular field. These frames can also be used for the course planning with the aim of conceptualization of the course structure, making the students able to use the new information during the class, elucidating complicated ideas, reinforcing and evaluating learning, and identifying the acquired level at the end of the class (Kang, 2004).

Visuals are effective elements to access to the main theme and to support ideas of a text. They also support the elements that describe the other components of the text. Reading comprehension has a direct effect on accessing the world of emotion and thought the text contains. The dimension of the shapes used in a text complement the expression of the text. Therefore, the visuals in a text must be carefully prepared; it must be kept in mind that the components of a text are the illustration of the emotion and thought aspect. Epçapan and Erzen (2010) have emphasized the importance of visuals on understanding in "Reading Comprehension Skill Scale", they have developed questions to examine the effect of visuals on understanding. In primary first grade, "Visual Reading" takes place as a learning domain. However, in second grade Turkish curriculum, visual reading is assessed by the help of listening, reading, speaking and writing; thus, it is not evaluated as an independent learning domain. According to Ausburn and Ausburn (1978:291), visual reading is a group of skills that help individuals to understand the visuals and to make use of them intentionally while communicating with other people. Besides, in his Multiple Intelligence Theory, Gardner uses Visual/Spatial Intellect, which addresses to the right side of the brain and which is sensible to the visual elements such as picture, shape, graphics, tables, etc. also makes visuals important in education (Gardner, 1993:17-24). According to Akyol (2007:179-180) visual reading has many advantages;

*Provides being understood
*Develops oral skills
*Develops the interest and motivation skills
*Enriches the presentation
*Helps the knowledge to be permanent in memory

The attitudes of the students towards course books affect the academic success. According to Açıkgöz (1992), students' positive attitudes towards school, teachers, subjects and other elements increase their academic success. Hence, in order to develop terminal behaviors in education process, students have to be open to knowledge to be learned, eager for learning and have positive attitudes (İlter and Köksalan, 2011:115).

Three methods are usually applied while evaluating those attitudes. In the first method, one's behaviors for the subject of attitude are directly observed. In the second one, the individual is asked direct questions and s/he responses orally or in written way. The third method is applying the measurement that is called "attitude scale" to the individual whose attitudes are to be evaluated. Since some of the behaviors aimed in education have a direct relation with attitudes, attitude scales have important role in evaluating curriculums and applications. Additionally, as students' attitudes towards school, courses, course equipments, her/his friends, teachers, activities in and out school have significant effect on their success, determining possible negative attitudes of students towards variables listed are necessary in order to rehabilitate them. Attitude scales are also important as

they make it available for such studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies revealed that using visuals along with textual information has enhanced the performance of learners to a considerable extent (Chun and Plass, 1996; Levin, 1981; Mayer and Moreno, 2003; Mayer and Sims, 1994; Mousavi et al., 1995; Seghayer, 2001).

Garthwait (2001) aims to determine if hyper-media activities which involve the enrichment of written texts with visuals and audials have any effects on classroom. Garthwait (2001) states that the use of graphics and colors for organizing the thoughts leads to an increase in their motivation. Moreover, students are charmed with these activities. The term 'visual literacy' has been introduced by Debes (1969). According to Debes, visual literacy can be developed by vision integrated with other sensory experiences. Visual Literacy (VL) scholars have not arrived at a common consensus for a theoretical organization of the VL field. In this paper, we have synthesized a large number of VL studies and attempted to construct a cohesive theory of VL. The main components of the proposed VL theory are Visual Perception, Visual Language (VIL), Visual Learning, Visual Thinking, and Visual Communication. Here, Avgerinou and Pettersson have focused on discussing VIL and its constituent parts: 1) VIL exists; 2) VIL is holistic; 3) VIL must be learned; 4) VIL may improve learning; 5) VIL is not universal; 6) VIL often needs verbal support (2011:13).

Visual literacy is a dimension of multi-literacy. Multi-literacy claims the necessity and usefulness of meaning-making that depends on the multi-sources. For instance, the text should consist of not only texts, but also visuals, audials and various other social contexts (Unsworth, 2001).

According to Messaris (1994:1-40), visual education has four major goals:

1. To enhance the comprehension of visual media across a range of visual forms, including diagrams, graphs, editing and other technological effects.
2. To enhance cognitive abilities through the specific properties of the visual; for example, spatial relationships.
3. Awareness of visual manipulation, distortion and mis-information in advertising, political campaigns and propaganda.
4. Aesthetic appreciation of the visual arts and of visual skills in all forms of visual communication.

Multi-literacy offers that the cultural diversity of the texts should be understood and new texts should be constructed, experiences should be questioned and criticized within the framework of dynamic communication in meaning-making (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000; Kist, 2000; Pailliotet, 2000; Schwartz, 2001). Especially, the sensory aspect of learning is related to the mental images. Mental images provide support for the full comprehension of what is learnt. According to Avgerinou and Ericson (1997), a great part of sensory learning depends on the visuals. According to the researchers, one of the first mental operations a child experiences is visualization of the objects. For instance, 6 to 8 week babies construct the images of their mothers. This enables them to differentiate their mothers from other women (Bamford, 2003).

In a study conducted on 4th grade students, the teacher used television and video for reading and comprehending texts, and computers for writing and making readers get information about the language units. As a result, the comprehension and motivation level of the students increased and they started to give more appealing answers (Lapp et al., 1999).

Jester (2002) carried out reading, writing and grammar works by using multi-media tools in the process of reporting of a book belonging to the 6th grade. According to the results, students organized the ideas more clearly, used easier methods for revision and correction with the support these tools.

Children between 9 and 12 are in the stage of aesthetic conflict. They react correctly to the arrangements that they like in the picture. For those children, the colors used in the pictures should be in accordance with the real colors of the objects because in this stage, the rigid reality is part of children's approval (Parsons et al., 1978:97).

METHOD

Mayer (2000), developing the study of Levin and Mayer (1993), indicated several visual design principles;

1. Concentrated: The key ideas of the subject matter should be highlighted both in the illustrations and in the text through using underlining styles, appropriate font sizes, font colors and styles, highlights, and arrows.
2. Concise: In order to prevent redundancy, extraneous descriptions should be minimized in the text along with extraneous visual features such as unneeded colors and details.
3. Correspondent: Corresponding illustrations and text fragments should be presented near to each other on the very same page.
4. Concrete: The text and corresponding illustrations should be delivered in ways that help learners to visualize the learning materials easily.
5. Coherent: The presented texts and pictures should follow a consistent, clear and coherent structure. Thus, the segments explained in the text should be explained similarly in the picture. The text and the picture should have the same organizational structure. Finally, the structure followed in the text, say cause effect, should be supported with the illustrations as well.
6. Comprehensible: The text and illustrations should be familiar to learners, so they could apply relevant past experiences to understand the material.
7. Codable: Key terms in the text and key features of the visuals should be used consistently in some ways which can make them more memorable.

In this study, based on the visual design principles determined by

Table 1. The classification index of students in age and gender

Grade	Girls	Boys	Total
6	69	66	135
7	66	74	140
8	75	64	139
	210	204	414

previous studies conducted, we developed a 'Visuals Evaluating Scale' to find out second grade primary school students' ideas on the visuals in Turkish Language course and workbooks. The research is carried out in totally 13 primary schools in Trabzon, Ordu, Istanbul and Ankara with 414 students (210 girls and 204 boys) in sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. The classification of the students in terms of grades and gender is as follows (Table 1).

DATA ANALYSIS

"Visuals Evaluating Scale" was used as data gathering means in the research. While developing the scale, primarily, field scanning was conducted and the studies on the visual elements in the printed sources were examined. As a result of the scanning, no study concerning evaluation of the visual elements was found. The questions in the form are made up after the completion of field scanning and consultation with the teachers. Moreover, the views of three experts from the field of assessment and evaluation were taken about the form and based on their views; evaluation scale consisting of 23 statements was developed for the pre-testing application. The question items are positive in structure. The items in the pretesting of the scale are ranked as "Yes", "Partly", and "No". Furthermore, at the beginning of the scale, an instruction was added to give information about the content and aim of the scale. With the aim of revealing the validity and reliability of the outline evaluation scale, a pretesting is applied to the 113 second grade students at four primary schools in Ordu, a province in Turkey, by the researchers. As a result of the pretesting, the evaluation scale was reduced to ten items as its final form. The Cronbach's Alpha Value of the scale is evaluated as 0.90.

The developed **"Visuals Evaluating Scale"** is applied to 414 students, 210 girls and 204 boys, at 6, 7 and 8 grades in thirteen Primary Schools in Trabzon, Ordu, Istanbul and Ankara. The data gathered in the study is analyzed with SPSS 15.0 program. Besides, Chi Square Test was used to determine whether there was a correlation between gender and course mark averages and students' views.

Most of the students answered the question "Visuals make the questions interesting" as "Yes". From this result, it was concluded that visual reading as learning field in Turkish course at primary first grade has also an important place in the second grade. The result also emphasizes that the students who evaluate the questions with the visuals have to be successful in this field. Turkish course mark and the gender factor is an effective element in the answer of this question.

70% of the students answered the question "Visuals make it easier for me to understand the text I read" as "Yes". 29% answered "Partly" and 1% "No" for the same question. The "Partly" and "No" answers can be interpreted as the visuals related to the texts are elaborate and we should examine if they are suitable for the level of the students. The students who give these answers can be seen at every grade. This result can indicate that the visual elements in the books which are within the paradigm need to be reviewed and the coherence between the text and visual should be complemented. Gender factor is not effective in the answer of the question but the course grade is. For more accurate interpretation of the result, the answers for the questions "I find some visuals childish" and "I find the visuals suitable for my age and level" should be re-examined.

The question "I find some visuals as childish" by 34 % as "Yes", by 47% as "Partly" and by 19 % as "No". These percentages indicate that the visuals in the texts, workbooks and ahead of the questions are not suitable for the students' level. Students' age factor must be considered while preparing visual elements. Visual elements which cannot appeal to the students or the readers may cause distractibility, lack of interest, indifference and repulsiveness. Gender factor is not effective in the answer of the question but the course grade is.

The answers to the question "I find the visuals suitable for my age and level" show parallelism to the two questions above. The answers are "Partly" by 51%, "No" by 11% and "Yes" by 38%.The data supports the two results above. When the class factor is considered, the 6th grade students have evaluated the visuals more qualified. In contrast, the visuals are defined by 72% of the 8th grade students as "Partly" and 13% as insufficient. Gender factor is not effective in the answer of the question but the course grade is.

Parallel to the items above, the question "I can relate the texts with the visuals" is answered as "Partly" by most of the students (53%). 18% of the students have expressed that they cannot relate the texts with the visuals. This result indicates that the visuals are insufficient in terms of quality. Gender factor is not effective in the answer of the question but the Turkish course grade is.

The question "The abundance in the number of colors in the visuals grabs my attention and interest" is answered as "Yes" by 57%, "Partly" by 35% of the students. The "Yes" answers can be interpreted as the students are affected by the abundance in the number of colors. The "Partly" answers can be interpreted as the students have assessed the visuals in accordance with their ages and levels, not the number of colors. Gender factor is not effective in the answer of the question but the Turkish course grade is.

72% of the students answered "Yes" to the question "The questions with visuals seem to be easier for me". This data expresses that the students are aware of the importance of the visuals in finding the subject or main theme. Gender factor is not effective in the answer of the question but the Turkish course grade is.

The question "The visuals are related to the realities in daily life" is intended to understand the importance of using daily life experiences in the books. The dominant answer that is "Partly" in the other questions is also excessive for this one. 47% of the students answered "Partly" and 36% answered "Yes". These values emphasize the need that visual elements should be selected from daily life. This approach will have a positive effect on the attraction of the visuals and academic success. While Turkish Language course grade is effective in the answer of the question, the gender factor is not.

The item "I can make a meaningful relation between the base of the question, text, visual and answers" is answered as "Yes" by 56%, "Partly" by 44% .None of the students answered "No". When this data is compared with the items interpreted above, the result is more positive. It can be thought that what makes this item positive is the "question". In the items which question the visuals about the text, the students seem to be uncertain. But, in this question and the one "The questions with visuals seem to be easier for me", the answer "No" is so weak. It can be concluded that the visual elements in the questions are more qualified than those in the texts or activities. The "Yes" answers among the girls are more than those of the boys. 65% of the girls and 46% of the boys have answered this question. While Turkish Language course grade is effective in the answer of the question, the gender factor is not.

The question "I find the visuals in cartoons or by hand drawing more interesting" is answered as "Yes" by 64%, "Partly" by 24% and "No" by 12% of the students. The answers of the grade and gender factors are about on the same level. While Turkish Language course grade is effective in the answer of the question, the gender factor is not. The students who get 4 or 5 marks for Turkish Language course have more "Yes" answers for this question than the others. While Turkish Language course grade is effective in the answer of the question, the gender factor is not.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we teach our children to read, we can and should use picture books to teach them how to read the images as well (O'Neill, 2011:222). Book illustrations exemplify specific visions of described situations and allow readers to save memory and review potentially complex descriptions in brief. Visual proofs abstract from details and embody reliable meta-theories that provide semantic guarantees for inferences. And conceptual illustrations

when effective rely on the logical method of universal generalization to help viewers grasp general ideas (Kirsh, 2011:1).

Although resources, developed by YÖK (Turkish Council of Higher Education) and some researchers (Demirel et al., 2001; İşman, 2005; Kaya, 2005; Şahin and Yıldırım, 1999; Yalın, 2004) contribute to the improvement in Turkey, according to Kuzu et al. (2007, 13), generating an evaluation tool for visuals in course books with a quantitatively robust instrument has not been a research focus so far, since the preliminaries of development of visuals for instruction materials have not been totally covered yet. The current study can be accepted as an initial effort to construct such an instrument.

The visual elements in the texts and questions have effective functions to apprehend and find the subject, the main theme and emotion. The scale applied to the students indicates that the students are aware of this notion. The 80% of "Yes" answers to the item "The visuals make it easier for me to understand the text I read" supports this conclusion.

The scale has indicated that students find the visuals as childish. The related item is marked as "Yes" by 34%, "Partly" by 47% and as "No" by 19%.The visual elements in the books which are included in the paradigm is not suitable for students' age, psychological and emotional levels in terms of quality. This reveals a necessity for a review of the visuals. In the scale applied, the gender factor is not a dependent variable but Turkish Language course mark is. These variables have an important role in the answers of the students.

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations can be made related to the visuals in the course and workbooks of the primary school;

*Visual reading should take place as learning field in primary second grade Turkish Language course.
* The visuals in the texts should be suitable for students' social, psychological and emotional nature.
* The visuals presented in the texts and questions should correspond to the students' daily lives.
* The visuals in the student workbooks should be prepared by the experts in this field.
* Visual elements should be considered as complementary to the written texts and they should have correspondence with the texts.

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Appendix A. Visuals Evaluating Scale

Dear Students,

The scale you are presented is intended to evaluate your ideas about the visuals (pictures, photographs, cartoons, etc.) in Turkish Language course and workbooks. We will appreciate your sincere answers to the scale items. We would like you to mark only one choice for each item. Thank you for your precious contributions.

	YES	PARTLY	NO
Visuals make the questions interesting.			
Visuals make it easier for me to understand the text I read			
The abundance in the number of colors in the visuals grabs my attention and interest.			
I find some visuals as childish.			
I find the visuals suitable for my age and level.			
The questions with visuals seem to be easier for me.			
I can relate the texts with the visuals.			
I can make a meaningful relation between the base of the question, text, visual and answers.			
The visuals are related to the realities in daily life.			
I find the visuals in cartoons or by hand drawing more interesting.			