Turkey's Primary English-as-a-foreign Language (EFL) Coursebooks: An Investigation of Emergent Literacy Tasks*

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Article Info

Abstract

Turkey's most recent primary English language curriculum, which highlights oral skills, mandates communicative English language teaching to young English language learners. Recent primary English curriculum comprises two hours per week of English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) instruction to include listening and speaking only for Grade 2 and very limited reading and writing for Grade 3 onward. While communicative skills are highly emphasized, literacy skills are kept on the back burner as reading and writing are incorporated gradually with minimal reading and writing at earlier grade levels and some literacy practices at upper grade levels. Successful emergent literacy development in English highly depends on young language learners' phonological (e.g. alliteration, rhyme), phonemic (i.e. sound manipulation), and orthographic awareness (i.e. spelling conventions) in English. The present study investigates to what extent Turkey's locally-designed primary EFL coursebooks—used in 2018-2021 academic period—cater to the early literacy needs of young learners at grades two, three, and four. The study explores early literacy content in coursebooks in a mixed-methods design: qualitatively with the descriptive content analysis and quantitatively with the frequency of early literacy constructs. The results of those analyses reveal primary English coursebooks do not promote a linguistically sound and pedagogically appropriate integration of literacy skills according to principles of second language (L2) literacy acquisition at primary levels. Turkey's misaligned early English literacy curriculum, in its current state, sends alarming messages to foreign language policy-makers, material designers, and EFL educators.

Türkiye'de İlkokul İngilizce Kitapları: Filizlenen Okuryazarlık Çalışmalarının İncelenmesi

Makale Bilgisi

Öz

Sözlü iletişim becerilerini ön planda tutan Türkiye'nin en yeni İngilizce öğretim müfredatı erken yaş İngilizcenin iletişime yönelik öğretilmesini öngörmektedir. İlkokul İngilizce programı haftada iki saatlik İngilizce saatlerinde 2. Sınıflar için dinleme ve konuşma ve 3. Sınıftan itibaren limitli miktarda okuma ve yazma çalışmalarından oluşmuştur. Sözlü iletişim becerileri vurgulanırken okuryazarlık becerileri ilkokulun alt düzeylerinde okuma ve yazmanın minimal düzeyde ve aşamalı olarak entegrasyonu ve üst kademelerde okuryazarlık pekiştirilmesi şeklinde arka plana alınmıştır. Başarılı bir İngilizce filizlenen okuryazarlık geliştirme erken yaş öğrenenlerin o dilde fonolojik (örn., aliterasyon, uyak), fonemik (örn., ses manipülasyonu), ve ortografik farkındalıklarına (örn., imla kuralları) bağlıdır. Mevcut çalışma Türkiye'nin yerel bağlamda oluşturmuş olduğu ve 2018-2021 akademik dönemlerinde okutulmuş İngilizce ders kitaplarının 2., 3., ve 4. Sınıflardaki erken yaş yabancı dil öğrenenlerin İngilizce okuryazarlık ihtiyaçlarına ne derece cevap verebildiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma ilkokul İngilizce ders

Ses-temelli yabancı dil öğretimi, Fonolojik ve fonemik farkındalık, Çocuklara İngilizce öğretimi.

kitaplarındaki erken yaş okuryazarlık farkındalığı içeriğini içerik analizine bağlı nitel ve betimleyici istatistiksel işlemleri içeren nicel analizlerle karma araştırma yöntemiyle incelemiştir. Analiz sonuçları incelenen ilkokul İngilizce kitaplarının dilbilimsel olarak ve pedagojik açıdan ikinci dil edinimi ve yabancı dil olarak İngilizce'de okuryazarlık geliştirilmesini sağlayamamaktadır. Türkiye'nin yanlış ayarlanmış erken yaş İngilizce okuryazarlık programı, hâlihazırdaki durumuyla, yabancı dil politikacılarına, materyal tasarımcılarına ve İngilizce öğretmenlerine ikaz mesajları iletmektedir.

Introduction

Coursebooks, laying out the content and educational activities, are the center piece determining most classroom activities (Byrd, 2001; Byrd & Schuemann, 2013). Basic principles of coursebook use and design for effective instruction are: being functional, contextualized, purposeful, realistic, and authentic; fostering learner autonomy; and engaging learners affectively and cognitively (Crawford, 1990,2002). Brown (1997) suggests a coursebook utilized by the instructor is part of the language instruction technique such as discussions, role-plays, or group-work.

Despite the exponentially growing body of new technologies, coursebooks continue to serve a crucial role in language teaching as a useful resource for both teachers and learners. In the existing literature, the two most commonly used terms- textbook and coursebook- are used interchangeably (McGrath, 2006). Coursebook will be the term to be used consistently throughout the current study. The key component of the present study- coursebook- has been operationally defined as the one-stop-shop for primary-level language courses providing everything language learner needs in one resource: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, functions and skills (Tomlinson, 2011, 2012).

Coursebooks hold the second place of importance and dominance in functionality after the teacher. According to a British Council survey conducted in 2013, 65% of teachers reported they frequently used coursebooks. Class time spent oncourse book-based activities in English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) contexts is significantly important for exposure to English is limited and poor-quality due to lack of authentic resources. Despite the pervasiveness of audio-visual resources and English language instructor input (McGrath, 2002), English coursebooks maintain the core of language learning experience. Coursebooks- the *sine-qua-non* element of EFL classes- need to be investigated for their appropriateness to the nature of primary-level language learners, functionality, and effectiveness in early English language learning experience which recognizes the child with all capacities and embraces the young EFL learner holistically with literacy and spoken skills development.

Existing literature reports numerous stakeholders' dissatisfaction with Turkey's English language coursebook for young language learners (Araujo Portugale, 2020; Çelik & Erbay, 2013; Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Kırkgöz, 2009a; Yaşar, 2015). Thus, coursebook selection is one of the most important decisions for teachers to make (Halliwell, 1992) and an analysis of coursebooks to reveal the strengths and weaknesses is crucial to further improve quality in coursebook design and thus quality in EFL instruction.

As "the visible heart of any ELT program" (Sheldon, 1988, p.237), coursebooks are the major sources of input and exercise for language instruction (O'Neill, 1982; Richards, 2001). Kırkgöz (2009a) suggests coursebooks serve a crucial role in the process of innovation as they are the potential *agents for change* as a vehicle for student learning and teacher training and a proof of what the curricular change looks like (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).Existing literature consists of studies examining English-as-a-foreign-language coursebooks from the perspectives of the main users- teachers (Kırkgöz, 2009a), as well as teachers and coursebook evaluators working for Turkey's Ministry of National Education-MoNE- (Güven & Saracaloğlu, 2020; MoNE, 2013). There have been reports implying a mismatch between the ideals of coursebook designers and evaluators, and the needs of the users who are the teachers, and the learners (Kırkgöz, 2009a, 2009b). This gap triggers the present study which aims to investigate whether Turkey's locally-prepared primary EFL coursebooks suit the early literacy development of young learners attending Grades 2, 3, and 4 at public primary schools in Turkey. Early literacy prerequisites such as phonological, phonemic, orthographic, and morphological awareness (Haznedar, 2021) appearing in the

primary level EFL coursebooks determine the nature of emergent English literacy development of young language learners. The current study multi-modally explores the quality of early literacy content and the frequency of precursor elements predicting success in emergent literacy development appearing in Turkey's primary level EFL coursebooks.

Early English Instruction in Turkey

The early introduction of English language worldwide resulted in many educational systems re-designing their Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) programs to meet the unique challenges of teaching languages to young children (Copland &Garton, 2014; Enever, 2011). In Turkey, one of the participants of this global trend, the curricular decisions regarding to early English educational goals, syllabi, and educational materials are made centrally by the Ministry of National Education (2018). EFL curriculum has a direct impact on English language acquisition in Turkey; thus, the evolution of Turkey's primary English instruction with successive curricular reforms deserves examination. First, the 1991 ELT-English Language Teaching- curriculum was put forward for Grades 6, 7 and 8 which were the earliest grades to introduce EFL. In 1997, English was introduced as a compulsory school subject for young language learners starting at Grade 4. The 1997 EFL reform initiated communicative language instruction through learner-centered, game-based, exploratory curricular content and instructional practices. Gaps between the top-down curricular decisions and in-class practice were detected and this paved the way to Turkey's ELT reform in 2005. With this reform, teaching materials were re-designed, the number of English instructional hours was increased and a post-method pedagogy maximizing learning opportunities, fostering language awareness, integrating language skills, and contextualizing linguistic input (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) was adopted.

Turkey's early English instruction had its basis on the communicative language teaching which was regarded as an improvement over the traditional grammar-translation method of language teaching (Kocaoluk & Kocaoluk, 2001). In 2012, the 4+4+4 education plan was put into practice and compulsory education in Turkey consisted of an uninterrupted twelve-year span of education. In the very same year, a new action plan for a revitalized primary ELT curriculum took place which lowered EFL instruction to Grade 2 in Turkey. Following these changes, the EFL curriculum needed an update as English introduction to accommodate the earlier start. A re-assessment of the nature of English language instruction at the primary and elementary levels in Turkey detected traces of socio-cognitive theory of learning and communicative approaches to language teaching as the essence of current TEYL instruction in Turkey (Kırkgöz et al., 2016).

The 2013 ELT curriculum for Grades 2 to 8 was developed and implemented in the 2013-2014 academic year for the first time. This latest ELT curriculum emphasized key competencies including functional literacy. In Turkey's current primary ELT program, as Table 1 below displays, the two communicative skills, speaking and listening were the emphases of Grade 2. For Grades 3 and 4, literacy skills were introduced as secondary skills. These had repercussions at the Board of Education (Board of Education, 2013) for coursebook design in accordance with those curricular decisions. Despite all the efforts, Turkey's MoNE has been criticized as falling short in completing tasks such as planning and delivery of curricula, and coursebook design aligned with policy and practice (Kırkgöz et al., 2016). Instructional or acquisitional bases underlying the introduction and practice of the four skills remain unclear (Haznedar, 2004; Haznedar & Uysal, 2013).

Table 1.

Skills Introduction and Integration across Grades in Primary ELT in Turkey (MoNE, 2018)

Levels [CEFR*] (Hours / Week)	Grades	Skill focus	Main activities/Strategies
1 [A1] (2)	2	Listening and Speaking	TPR/Arts and crafts/Drama
	3	Listening and Speaking Very Limited Reading and Writing°	
	4	Listening and Speaking Very Limited Reading and Writing°	

Early English Coursebooks in Turkey's Education System

Coursebooks were listed as one of the weaknesses holding the education systems back (Vale et al., 2013) and yet Turkey's EFL instruction predominantly relies on coursebooks. A British Council report by Vale et al. (2013) conducted a needs analysis on the EFL instruction in Turkish public schools and the report listed several inadequacies restraining quality of EFL education in Turkish public schools including coursebooks.

Since 2005, attendees of public schools have been supplied with coursebooks every academic year for free. Turkey's MoNE prepares primary EFL coursebooks because it is the major coursebook supplier and the publishers are local. While private primary schools can choose international publications for EFL coursebooks, Turkish public schools have limited options. During evaluation processes, book proposals are reviewed by the MoNE's Board of Education coursebook examination sub-committee which consists of four to five experts analyzing the book from numerous perspectives. Only the coursebook proposals approved continue with the publication and are chosen to be distributed nationally. In Turkey, coursebooks are not piloted before the official consumption by the teachers and the students; thus, an initial round of user feedback is rarely received (Şimşek & Dündar, 2017). Either determined centrally by the MoNE or locally by schools, selecting the right coursebook is a major decision in Turkey as an erroneously-chosen coursebook is difficult to compensate for.

Existing literature is a battle place of those who are for and against effectiveness of EFL coursebooks. Local English language coursebooks in Turkey have been the target of constant and severe criticisms as they have been accused of causing ineffective EFL instruction in Turkey (Büyükkantarcıoğlu, 2004; Kırkgöz, 2009a). Turkey's EFL coursebooks have been analyzed from numerous angles such as social justice, cultural appropriacy (Alptekin, 1993), cultural content (Çelik & Erbay, 2013), target culture awareness (Saraç&Arıkan, 2010), thematic choices, pedagogical and instructional decisions, primary language skills and vocabulary instruction (Çakır, 2010). Several empirical studies revealed some problems with Turkey's coursebooks. Özdemir (2007) evaluated teacher and student perceptions of the effectiveness of the primary EFL coursebook called *Time for English,* and the study reported the course book was found to be insufficient in providing instructional directions and engaging materials. Arıkan (2008) also examined the attitudes of 4th grade students and instructor ideas about the effectiveness of the coursebooks. Approximately 30% of the participating instructors and learners expressed their contentment with the coursebook. A recent study by Solhi et al. (2020) evaluated elementary EFL coursebooks for Turkish public schools in the 2019-2020 academic year. The study explored teacher beliefs on the efficacy of EFL coursebooks for public schools on the areas of all four skills. Utilizing Tomlinson and Masuhara's (2010) universal coursebook evaluation criteria, this study revealed the nature of the books from affective, cognitive, and communicative domains. The coursebooks were mainly found to be deficient in contributing enough meaningful exposure to English and tapping into early literacy skills. Research on coursebook studies showcases favorable evaluations of English language coursebooks as well. The one for Grade 4 by Turkish MoNE was evaluated by teachers and students based on an evaluation scheme and a follow-up interview. Student and teacher perceptions of the

primary EFL coursebook, as revealed by survey and interview results, were positive in terms of methodology, visuals, content, and skill integration (Kırkgöz, 2009a).

Early Written Literacy

EFL writing occurs in diverse contexts with learners coming from numerous educational backgrounds and learner profiles. *English literacy skills* is an umbrella term that embraces various skills including reading comprehension, decoding, alphabet knowledge, spelling, and writing (August & Shanahan, 2006). Bialystok (2002) proposed bilingual children needed three major components for a healthy bilingual literacy development and those were oral language capacity, written language and print concepts, and phonological awareness. In the present study, early literacy skills are defined as basic literacy constructs such as phonological and phonemic awareness, decoding, and spelling. Phonological awareness is an inclusive term that refers to an understanding of the sound system of a spoken language. Phonemic awareness, a subskill of phonological awareness, suggests the ability to hear and differentiate the individual sounds within words (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987; Wagner et al., 1994). Phonological awareness is critical for learning to read any alphabetic writing system. Difficulty with phonemic awareness and other phonological skills is a predictor of reading and spelling problems in English (Moats &Tolman, 2019).

Reading is a process of making connections between the written symbols and oral language to derive meaning out of written text by sounding out written symbols (Linse & Nunan, 2005). A child needs to understand letters and sound equivalents to decode (sound out) and develop a strong decoding ability to gain automaticity (fluency) and comprehension in reading. In other words, a young learner needs to go through several micro-linguistic loops to construct meaning. Cameron (2001), supporting this point, explicates "the child who picks up a set of words that she recognizes as whole words and uses this sight vocabulary to read simple texts needs to develop knowledge of grapho-phonemic relationships within words to progress to more difficult texts" (p. 151).

Geva and Wang (2001) examine cross linguistic reading and in their study the English language is regarded as a deep orthography with inconsistencies across sound-to-letter and letter-to-sound correspondences. *Enough* and *thought* have the same vowel combinations, but they are pronounced differently, *weight* and *wait* have different vowel combinations yet they are enunciated the same. This is not the case across other alphabetic languages and it takes longer time to develop English literacy due to such irregularities of the alphabetic principle (Katz & Frost, 1992).

Early literacy instruction is based on three major methods: the synthesis, analysis, and the eclectic methods. The synthesis method, also known as the alphabetic method, involves putting together the sounds and syllables that establish the words and eventually the sentences (National Reading Panel Report, 2000). The alphabetic method instructs the relationship between the letters of the alphabet and the names of the letters. This method is not as functional as it has been criticized for causing difficulties for the novice readers to decipher the connections between the letters and the functions of them during reading and writing. The analysis or phonetic method, instead, suggests each letter has a sound equivalent and this method has been functional in phonetic languages such as Turkish. In the phonetic method, instead of the letter names, the sound equivalents of the letters are introduced which establishes the heart of phonics instruction. Phonics instruction is the suggested model to be adopted in primary EFL course books for early literacy development of young EFL learners in Turkey.

Starting literacy practices with the recognition of certain sounds, novice language learners establish the knowledge of individual sounds, syllables, words, and sentences in Turkish. In phonetically-oriented Turkish learning, the introduction of sound-letter and letter-sound relationship is practiced in reading and writing. Introducing individual sounds and the associated letters first, emergent literacy practices in Turkish synthetically follows blending the new sounds/letters with the formerly learned ones to construct meaningful words. This method has been proven to be effective to teach Turkish to young learners and it can be functional to teach EFL to the same learners using this same familiar method.

After practicing pencil grasp, connecting the dots, and drawing lines, early literacy practices using phonetic approach follows a meaningful path that enables children to develop a feeling of the sounds (i.e. telling stories about the sounds, showing the shapes involved in it), reading and writing those sounds based on sound groups (i.e., first group e-l-a-k-i-n for Turkish and s-a-t-p-i-n for English), and eventually establishing syllables, words, and full sentences. Constructing meaningful, high-frequency syllables and words that are related to tangible and concrete items are essential for young learners to succeed in decoding and spelling. Reading and writing development in EFL should model after the phonetic approach used in teaching Turkish literacy skills that enables early language learners internalize sounds and letters of English language for decoding (i.e., reading) and spelling (i.e., encoding) words.

Early EFL instruction in Turkey adopts words and sentences as the most basic linguistic units presented through primary EFL coursebooks for public schools. There is almost no inclusion of more fine-grained linguistic constructs: sounds/letters, syllables, or onset-rime. Exercises are mostly related to word, phrase, and sentence level writing. Reading is practiced for comprehension purposes mainly and writing is usually word-level writing. Decoding has been neglected, although practicing decoding (i.e., word-level "sounding out") has a crucial role in improving emergent literacy skills of young language learners.

Brown and Lee (2015) discuss the psycholinguistic properties of literacy practices with bottom-up and top-down processing mechanisms. In bottom-up processing, readers deal with the linguistic signals such as "letters, morphemes, syllables, words, phrases" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 299). In this linguistically-driven processing system, the reader needs to rely on the data provided which are the linguistic elements. Turkey's primary English coursebooks follow the opposite direction with a heavy emphasis on top-down processing and almost no bottom-up processing activities to tap into phonological awareness or decoding- in short, early literacy skills in English. Brown and Lee (2015), finding a common ground between these processing systems and linking recent research trends to their argument, recommend experiencing both bottom-up and top-down practices for early literacy development of language learners. Especially for beginning level learners, Brown and Lee (2015) recommend the use of graphemic rules and patterns to facilitate bottom-up processing. This is because novice reader and writers encounter difficulties when making connections between spoken and written English. Young and novice learners who are accustomed to spoken features of English have difficulty with spelling conventions. Their literacy development needs to be scaffolded with a systematic phonics instruction which target the following key micro-linguistic patterns:

- grasping the relationships between letters and sounds (and vice-versa),

- noticing word families and the orthography patterns of English,

- recognizing word roots and word order patterns in sentences,

- differentiating between short-long vowels and other linguistic constructs unique to the language.

Phonics, "a popular and prominent approach to the teaching of reading" (Nunan, 2015, p. 68), has been popularly used for several decades. Phonics aims at directing learners' attention to the relationship between sounds and letters. Nunan critically evaluates the effectiveness of phonics and mentions it may not be the most effective method if used solely. Glancing over primary English coursebooks, one can see that top-down processing with a heavy emphasis on meaning/comprehension is the major trend across primary grade levels of Turkey's English education coursebooks. Reading for comprehension purposes is called macro-reading and reading for decoding is referred as micro-reading in the literature (Brown & Lee, 2015) and in the existing study.

Concluding about the importance of bottom-up processing for young language learners, Brown and Lee (2015) suggest "a multitude of other phonics approaches to reading can prove useful for learners at the beginning level, especially for teaching children and non-literate adults" (p. 307). The major question the present study poses is why such crucial skills are almost never paid attention to or practiced in

Turkey's primary English instruction agenda? The present study is the first to analyze Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks from emergent English literacy development point of view. Phonics and phonemic awareness are not included in Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks; however, these are commonly practiced emergent literacy building blocks in world nations' primary English practices (e.g., England with synthetic phonics). Turkey's early English instruction severely lacks a pedagogically- and instructionally-appropriate literacy skills introduction and practice based on principles of L2 acquisition. Such skills, necessary for a healthy early literacy development, are the prerequisites to higher-order literacy skills such as comprehension and inference. Without such basic skills and knowledge, young language learners fail to gain decoding and spelling fluency and accuracy, develop new vocabulary knowledge, and comprehend written materials in coursebooks.

In the light of the existing discussions originating from the literature, the present study poses the following research questions:

1. What type of emergent literacy practice indicators do Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks present (qualitative content analysis)?

2. What is the frequency of early literacy practice indicators, including phonological, phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, basic writing and spelling, presented in primary English coursebooks for Grades 2, 3, and 4 (quantitative analysis)?

3. How is reading presented and practiced in Turkish primary EFL coursebooks for Grades 2, 3, and 4: at a macro (comprehension) or micro (decoding) level?

4. What kind of emergent writing practices are offered in primary EFL coursebooks?

Overall, do Turkey's primary English language coursebooks support young learners' early literacy development in a pedagogically appropriate manner that will lead to successful English acquisition?

Method

Research Design

The present study is an extensive content analysis of primary English coursebooks prepared for Grades 2, 3, and 4 of Turkish public schools for 2018-2021 academic period. In the current study, early literacy constructs widely-known in the literature were used to systematically analyze the public-school EFL coursebooks for primary-grades English. The codes assigned according to early literacy skills framework (August & Shanahan, 2006; Yopp & Yopp, 2000) enabled a comprehensive coding and data analysis procedure. The present study is descriptive with quantitative and qualitative analyses of the early literacy components in the coursebooks recommended to be used by Turkey's MoNE in public primary education for Grades 2, 3 and 4 in 2018-2021

Content analysis is a technique enabling researchers analyze "usually but not necessarily written contents of communications" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 478) including coursebooks. Content analysis of the present study aimed at analyzing primary level EFL coursebooks based on emergent literacy instruction framework. In this framework, literacy constructs such as reading for comprehension and decoding, phonological and phonemic awareness, and writing, spelling indicators were detected in primary English coursebooks. A priori codes further extended as other emergent literacy constructs such as numeracy skills were also coded and reported separately. The content analyses were reported qualitatively via coding instructional tasks appearing in coursebooks into categories such as writing, reading and quantitatively with frequency of emergent literacy tasks appearance in coursebooks and ratio of emergent literacy tasks per pages of those coursebooks. While coding was completed based on emergent literacy checklist qualitatively, descriptive statistics such as frequency and ratio were calculated by using Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Sampling (Selecting the coursebooks)

The books selected and displayed in Table 2 were the most recently used coursebooks for 2018 to 2021 academic period as proposed by the 2023 Educational Vision of Turkey's MONE (2018).

Table 2.

Selected Coursebooks for Early Literacy Analysis

Grade level	Number of books analyzed	Publisher	Number of pages
2	1	İlkokul İngilizce Ders Kitabı Bilim Kültür Yayınları	177
3	1	Just Fun English Tutku Yayıncılık	223
4	1	İlkokul İngilizce Ders Kitabı FCM Yayıncılık Ferahnaz Tan	192

Coding (Identifying literacy constructs)

All the written and visual components tapping into early reading and writing were detected and coded. Basic early literacy constructs such as phonological and phonemic awareness were investigated and coded into categories. Content analysis can be done with pre-set categories at the beginning of analyses or the researchers can allow categories to emerge as the analysis continues (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In content analysis and specifically coding coursebook tasks into emergent literacy skills, rather than a software program, coding was done manually. In the present study's coding scheme, while the emergent literacy constructs were already known, other emerging themes during the course of analyses were considered as potential categories. The process of coding for early literacy practices in each coursebook by the researcher and an expert in the field were matched for inter-coder agreement level. In both coding procedures, the agreement rate was at an acceptable level of 85%(Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Findings

Having analyzed Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks prepared for public schools, the present study found that macro-linguistic concerns prevail throughout the coursebooks. The most significant findings, following the comprehensive analysis of the primary EFL coursebooks, were that reading and writing are practiced at word level at minimum (minimal writing). There is no emphasis on smaller units other than the alphabet letters. Phonological awareness, such as rhyme or alliteration, or phonemic awareness, such as phoneme deletion, addition, or substitution, is not practiced. Instead, the letters of the alphabet but not the key connections between the letters and the sounds were found in Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks. Reading for comprehending with no emphasis on decoding was another popular practice detected in Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks.

Research Question 1 and 2- *What type of emergent literacy indicators do Turkey's primary coursebooks present? What is the frequency of early literacy practice indicators including phonological, phonemic awareness, phonics and reading decoding, minimal writing and spelling presented in primary English coursebooks for Grades 2, 3, and 4?*

The selected coursebooks were examined extensively to search for early literacy constructs such as reading, writing, spelling, and metalinguistic awareness such as phonological and phonemic awareness. A total of 134 early literacy practices were found in Grade 2 coursebook (see Table 3). The number of early literacy practices located in Grade 3 coursebook was 162 and a total of 245 for Grade 4 coursebook, respectively. The ratio of the literacy activities per grade-level coursebook was calculated

and it was found that one early literacy point per page was the observed pattern across coursebooks. While Grades 2 and 3 coursebooks included less than 1 task per page, this was above 1 for Grade 4 coursebook.

Table 3.

Frequency of Early Literacy Practice Indicators in Primary EFL Coursebooks

Grades	Reading Decoding	Reading Comprehension	Phonological (and phonemic) Awareness	Minimal Writing/Spelling	Coded Literacy Total
2	41	42	-	48	131
3	44	101	-	13	158
4	21	138	-	47	206

In the Grade 2 coursebook, the most popularly practiced skill was writing and spelling (n=48) followed by reading for comprehension (n=42), and lastly by decoding (n=41). Reading for comprehension (n=101) was found to be the most popularly practiced literacy construct in the Grade 3 coursebook followed by decoding (n=44). Writing/spelling was the least commonly practiced skill in the Grade 3 coursebook. Reading for comprehension purposes was practiced 138 times in Grade 4 coursebook, writing/spelling oriented practices appeared 47 times, and reading at decoding level occurred 21 times. While reading for comprehension was the most popular for the upper grade levels studied, writing was found to be the most commonly utilized literacy tool for the earliest grade level—Grade 2—coursebook. Additional literacy practices (e.g., letter recognition, number writing) detected in coursebooks were not included in Table 3.

Research Question 3- *How is reading presented and practiced in Turkish primary EFL coursebooks for Grades 2, 3, and 4: at a macro (comprehension) or micro (decoding) level?*

It was already reported that reading for comprehension purposes was more commonly practiced compared to reading for decoding- sounding out- purposes as there were a total of 281 reading for comprehension (macro-level) entries compared to 106 entries of reading for decoding (micro-level) for all grade levels. The significance of micro-reading to macro-reading ratio was calculated using Microsoft Excel and the t-test analyses were found to yield statistically significant difference of micro and macro-level reading practices occurring in Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks prepared for Grades 2 to 4 at public schools (p < 0.5 level).

Table 4.

Micro- and Macro-Level Reading Frequency Significance

	Micro-reading (decoding)	Macro-reading (comprehension)
X	35,33	93,66
Variance	156,33	2344,33
Observations	3	3
Pearson Correlation	-0,71	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	2	
t Stat	-1,74	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0,11	
t Critical one-tail	2,91	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0,22	
t Critical two-tail	4,30	

Qualitative analyses of the micro and macro-reading demonstrated a mixed-order of presenting reading across coursebooks of various grade levels as reading at word, phrase, and sentence-levels.

Research Question 4- *What kind of emergent writing practices are offered in primary EFL coursebooks?*

Emergent writing practices appearing in Grades 2-4 coursebooks are coded at letter, syllable, word, phrase, and sentence-level writing. While Grade 2 and Grade 4 coursebooks contained more writing and spelling tasks (number of coded writing/spelling tasks were 48 and 47, respectively, for Grade 2 and Grade 4), the Grade 3coursebook did not practice writing as extensively. Furthermore, it was detected that writing at different difficulty levels such as practice pattern as tracing the dotted lines, word-level writing, and sentence-level writing did not follow a systematic introduction and that they were practiced sporadically throughout the same grade-level coursebook. Table 4 displays the grade-level breakdown of writing practices found in coursebooks; some tasks reported in Table 3 were not included in this analysis. Name writing was simply asking children to copy their names and number writing was writing numerals such as 1, 2, or 10 rather than writing out the words for numbers.

Table 5.

Grade-Level Breakdown of the Nature of Writing Practice in Primary EFL Coursebooks

Grade	Tracing / Dotting	Copying	Letter Writing	Word Writing	Phrase Writing	Sentence Writing	Name*/ Number Writing	Total
2	1	3	3	25	3	-	10	45
3	-	-	6	-	-	3	4	13
4	-	-	8	23	1	15	-	47

Qualitative analyses revealed early writing practices across coursebooks varied. For instance, the fill-in-the-blanks activity requires letter-level writing which is minimal writing that is linguistically-demanding as children need to know the correct order of the letters to put in the blank. Copying words activity was less linguistically demanding yet it appears in the later pages. This suggests there is no coherent presentation and practice of emergent writing tasks in the analyzed EFL coursebooks.

The nature of spelling/writing across grade levels varied, as the Grade 2 coursebook included mainly connecting/tracing the dots, letter insertion in the blanks (i.e. missing letters), name writing (i.e., self or friend names), number writing (i.e., listen and write numbers), task-based word-level writing (e.g., picture dictionary or poster design), and finally sentence-level writing. The most common writing practice in Grade 2 was word-level writing.

In the Grade 3 coursebook, spelling tasks were dominant: spell the words in a dictation task, spelling out names of self and classmates (e.g. M-U-S-T-A-F-A– which is a spelling/dictation task) or word-spelling with codes (triangle (D), rectangle (O), square (G) spells out DOG), and word spelling in crossword puzzles.

In Grade 4coursebook, while the number of occurrences for word-level writing was 25, sentence-level writing occurred about 10 times. There were several occurrences of spelling aiming at recognizing letters and letter combinations constructing the words.

The fifth research question is further probed in the discussion section of the paper.

Discussion & Conclusion

There is a heavy reliance on the coursebooks for English education in Turkey (Ersöz, 1990). The existing literature abundantly highlights the role of EFL coursebooks and the need for selecting high-quality ones (Genç, 2002; İnal, 2006). A systematic literature review investigated EFL coursebook

research trends in Turkey over a decade (Şimşek & Dündar, 2017). The study, analyzing over 50 theses evaluating EFL coursebooks in 2001-2013, revealed that a research focus on ELT coursebooks gained momentum following Turkish MoNE's curricular changes. In this review study, a small percentage (11% of the overall theses and dissertations) focused on primary-level language skills while theses and dissertations mostly reported teacher and student views on coursebooks (Şimşek & Dündar, 2017). The present study, by far, is the most comprehensive look at Turkey's EFL coursebooks and it elucidated the gaps in this field. The present study expanded the scope of coursebook evaluation beyond its current status and it aimed to remind policy-makers, coursebook designers, and EFL instructors the importance of early literacy development of young English learners in an EFL context.

Learning how to read and write is a challenge in one's first language and doing so in another language can be even more difficult. No matter what L1 backgrounds they come from, one major obstacle all children learning English—even the native English-speaking ones— endure are the inconsistencies of English language in reading and spelling. This is due to the opaque orthography of the English language (Seymour et al., 2003) and the alphabetic principle that does not follow one-to-one letter-to-sound and sound-to-letter correspondences (Katz & Frost, 1992). There are 26 letters in the English alphabet and 44 phonemes represented by the letters and letter combinations with over 250 graphemes (Moats, 2005). For example, /k/ sound can be represented with *k, c, ch, cc, lk, qu, q(u), ck*, and *x* as in **k**it, **c**at, **Ch**ris, fo**lk**, bou**qu**et, **q**ueen, ra**ck**, and bo**x**. In shallow orthographies such as Spanish and Turkish, there is great predictability in how a word may sound depending on the way it is written or vice versa how it might be spelled out when sounded out. In deep orthographies, however, it is difficult to sound out words from the way they are written or spelled as in the case of *r**ea**d (i:), br**ea**k (ei), br**ea**d (e)*. The number of ways the sound (phoneme) /i/ is represented in writing with letter and letter combinations (graphemes) in the words *be*, *bee*, *sea*, *ski*, *skied*, *receive* shows the level of intricacies of English language orthography (Joshi & Aaron, 2006; Treiman, 1998).

The present research focusing on primary-level EFL coursebooks' early literacy skills and knowledge presentation and practice found reading for decoding, phonological and phonemic awareness, minimal and basic writing were either ignored or put into practice in pedagogically unsound ways in Turkish primary EFL coursebooks. Within and cross-grade level analyses revealed that Turkish children attending primary grade-levels at public schools were expected to practice early literacy in English rather traditionally, as reading is mostly done for comprehension purposes and writing practices are minimal word writing. Reading and writing tasks appearing in primary EFL coursebooks reveal coursebooks do not have a micro-linguistic instruction focus nor do they follow a sequential pattern based on L2 acquisition research.

Haznedar's (2009) critical evaluation of the primary English coursebooks used in Turkish schools in 2006 investigated whether Grades 4 and 5 coursebooks matched with the goals of the new curriculum, and the study findings revealed coursebooks for Grades 4 and 5 were not compatible with MoNE's primary English objectives. Haznedar (2009) further discussed the effectiveness of scrambled word activities located in Grade 4 coursebook. Pyscholinguistically speaking, the effectiveness of this activity was unknown and working with a list of letters in an unconventional manner (e.g. *NTSTDEU* for *student*-whichis an actual task in the analyzed coursebooks in this present study) was a cognitive burden. Those children struggling with reading have difficulty reading nonsense words because such words have no semantic and visual association (Goswami& Bryant, 1990). *NTSTDEU* did not match with English orthography as there was no*NT* initial letter combination in English. Haznedar therefore concluded "Pedagogically, linguistically, and pyscholinguistically speaking, it is futile to expect beginner level children to read and write letter combinations that are non-existent in the target language" (p. 11), yet we observe similar mistakes being repeated in the most recent EFL coursebooks for public schools.

Overall, do Turkey's primary English language coursebooks support young learners' early literacy development in a pedagogically-appropriate manner that will lead to successful English acquisition?

The short answer to this question would be *no*. More elaborate responses are provided from linguistic, cognitive, and acquisitional perspectives. Overall, there are minimal traces of the micro-

linguistic units such as reading decoding, spelling, letter recognition, which all necessitate awareness of English phonology, morphology, and orthography. Linguistically speaking, being able to write the word '*down*' in the blank, the student first needs to know the associated letters, letter combination or how to encode them if this is a spelling dictation task. If the learner attention was directed to the initial letter-d- or the vowel in *down* instead of asking learners to write the word fully, it would have been more appropriate for young learners to process the linguistic features and complete the task successfully.

Cognitively speaking, when learners are forced to speak the target language before they are ready, they will suffer from cognitive overload. As Johnson (1995) points out, the novice language learner is so busy trying to identify sounds, word boundaries, decode and recall word or phrase meanings and hold it all in working memory that there is very little time left for language production with accuracy and speed. Before setting communicative goals for our young English learners, we need to support learners in gaining automaticity with phonological, phonemic and orthographic awareness, as well as letter awareness tasks (Ünal Gezer & Dixon, 2017).

Acquisitionally, in foreign language contexts, children are expected to develop functional literacy skills in their first language before learning to read and write in English. Age-appropriate and meaningful outputs of learners such as short messages or shopping lists can boost young language learners' enthusiasm to further explore English language and yet improve English literacy skills. Recommended literacy practices with young language learners incorporate children's stories which boost oral competence and teach chunks (i.e., *once upon a time*) and nursery rhymes and songs to boost their phonological awareness through rhyming patterns, alliteration, or phonemic manipulation activities such as phoneme addition, substitution, deletion or insertion (Ghosn, 2002; Shin & Crandall, 2014).

How else can Turkey's primary EFL coursebooks be designed so they spark young learners' love for languages and English learning? EFL coursebooks should be enriched with supplementary materials for young ones to develop a multi-sensory experience of phonics. Songs and rhymes are rich sources to be integrated to phonics instruction in the Turkish EFL context (Ünal Gezer, 2021). Through listening and singing songs, children start recognizing analogies below word level and finer constructs establishing the basis of words in English. They, for instance, notice rhyming parts in a song, they understand there are words with different initial sound and the same ending (e.g., one, two, three, four, f*ive*, once I caught a fish al*ive*). Recognizing patterns like this is useful for early literacy skills development only conditionally. Children who are already familiar with the sounds of English (e.g., Jill-hill, wall-fall) and those who can make semantic associations are the ones who can direct their attention fully on the rhyming parts. Pinter (2006) warns because young learners' English proficiency is low and because they are not quite familiar with nursery rhymes, songs, and stories, their early literacy development can be slowed down or halted.

To enrich early literacy development, Pinter (2006) recommends designing a print-rich environment with labels, posters, multi-sensory materials including magnetic letters, sandbox, playdough, and picture cards. Instructional practices through storybooks, songs, and games are recommended for a comprehensive early literacy instruction. Letters of the alphabet are the first to be taught; however, teaching the names of the letters of the alphabet is not helpful in reading and spelling English words properly. Instead, sounds of the letters should be highlighted. Stories help young learners improve their grammar and vocabulary development (Cameron, 2001). Setting a fine balance between meaning and sound awareness via stories is what every English instructor needs to put into practice with young English language learners.

Phonics instruction is the recommended instructional gateway for successful English literacy development of young pupils in Turkey. Phonics is a bottom-up approach to process a text through relationships between letters and sounds. The goal of phonics instruction is to assist young language learners in decoding or sounding out written language, use the sound-symbol relationships. Once they learn how to decode one word, they can apply this knowledge to new reading and spelling attempts. In conclusion, even young learners with a similar alphabetic system benefit from systematic, explicit instruction in sound/symbol correspondences in English for strong early literacy development.

Several recommendations for the upcoming course book projects of Turkey's MoNE follow. Phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary establish the key components of a successful literacy development. Practicing phonics through phonemic awareness activities which discriminate distinct phonemes, such as identifying, separating, blending, deleting, identifying individual spoken sounds, detecting rhymes in nursery rhymes, riddles, playing games targeting at identifying, pointing, sorting, matching, repeating, isolating individual sounds with fun, engaging, and multisensory tasks are the recommendations for the new EFL coursebook projects of primary-level Turkish MoNE. Already practiced at the private primary schools in the Turkish context, phonics, as a primary means of teaching decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling) at primary grade-levels is recommended for pupils attending public schools in Turkey. One of the most important goals of education systems of developed nations is to raise literate generations. Turkey, as a developing nation, needs to take its share in this global endeavor of educating skilled and informed younger generations through systematic early literacy instruction in both native and foreign language education.

The present study has content analysis in its core and the amount of content analyzed within the scope of this present study is the first limitation that needs mentioning. There were other EFL publications by private companies that could not be incorporated into the present study. Analyzing both public and private publisher coursebooks could have added variety to the data and the study findings. In its current form, the study has limited generalizability, which is another layer of limitation. As for directions for future studies, examining coursebooks, children's storybooks, and level-graded materials could further broaden the scope of EFL coursebook material examination studies.

All rules included in the "Directive for Scientific Research and Publication Ethics in Higher Education Institutions" have been adhered to, and none of the "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" included in the second section of the Directive have been implemented.

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