



A CASE STUDY: WORKSHEETS USED IN A LANGUAGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this case study is to analyze the supplementary instructional materials, namely worksheets, used in an English preparatory school in one of the Turkish universities. The data were gathered from the materials development unit of the school. Using the content analysis method, worksheets from 2015 spring and 2016 spring terms were analyzed. The findings revealed that most worksheets included decontextualized, repetitive grammar activities though the theme-based course book included integrated skills activities, appealing various learning styles. It was also observed that students were evaluated based on their proficiency in basic four skills while they studied mostly grammar based worksheets. As a result, a shift to a more eclectic method which caters for all learning styles and equally includes all skills is suggested to the school board.

Key Words: Materials design, worksheets, case study, content analysis, higher education.

1. Introduction

Throughout the years of struggling over the best method to create miracles in language classes, it has finally become evident in the field of English language teaching that strict adherence to a method and a course book is not sufficient to produce the desired outcomes; that is, autonomous and confident learners with fluent and accurate language use. From then on, instead of the "one size fits all" approach, most language classes have adopted using a core course book and supplementing it with extra instructional materials that are appropriate to the level and background of learners. The effectiveness of supplementary instructional materials lie in their flexibility to be molded to address the needs of the learners.

As mentioned above, with the tendency to incorporate the best in every method to create powerful and diverse activity palette, most language teachers carefully prepare their own instructional materials to supplement the course book. Student diversity, such as diverse needs, backgrounds, cultures, learning styles, poses a challenge to language teaching materials to rise because language teaching materials have to stimulate motivation, integration and learning. To that end, instructional materials should be to the point, understandable, and well-matched with the objectives of the lesson (Crawford, 2002; Sariçoban, 2006), which means that they should include extensive contextualized input that corresponds to learning objectives as well as embracing

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different learning styles, and attitudes (Tomlinson, 2009). Effective instructional materials stimulate learners by touching upon different skills and learning styles.

Among the many supplementary instructional materials used in foreign language classes, worksheets are championed over the others in Turkey though they were rather recently introduced (Kaymakçı, 2012). As far as the Turkish educational literature is concerned, up until 90s, worksheets were called exercise notebooks till the introduction of contemporary educational aids. Since then, they have mushroomed in all subjects through all grades, especially foreign language teaching.

On one hand, worksheets are made use of in classes for presentation of topics. Demircioğlu et al. (2004) define worksheets as “important tools to guide students, to help them to decide for themselves, and to facilitate participation in the learning process”. As Elvan (2012) highlights activities in a classroom should be diverted to make learners active doers rather than passive watchers. Thus, learners should be entitled to be held responsible of their own learning experience. On the other hand, teachers mostly make use of them to practice language use and usage in and out of class. Kaymakçı (2006) refers them as “teaching materials that can be used in and out of the classroom to ensure individual and active learning. Additionally, they enable both individual and group work as Yiğit et al. (2007) suggests.

The tendency to rely on mostly worksheets in language teaching in Turkey may be explained with the ease of designing an efficient worksheet (Dede, 2010). Well-thought worksheets incorporate colorful and fun design with lots of practical and contextualized activities (Tomlinson, 2009). The main factor to consider when preparing worksheets is that they address learners’ needs. Harmer (2007) points out that if learners see the relevance of the material to their needs, they feel more motivated to work on/with it. As well as motivation, worksheets facilitate meaningful learning instead of literal learning (Bayrak, 2008).

There are a number of practical benefits of using worksheets in language classes. Well-developed worksheets can include activities on any subject matter. They can be formed to work on any skills or subskills for both presentation and practice purposes. They can also be designed in a way to mix different teaching techniques. Furthermore, they can always be incorporated into any section of the lesson plan no matter what kind of a teaching methodology teacher follows.

Only a handful of studies from Turkey concentrate on the use of worksheets despite their popularity in language classes. To name a few, Tan (2008) investigates the impact of worksheets on student achievement in primary school. Biçer (2016) evaluates the pre-service teachers’ skills on preparing worksheets. Yet, there seems to be no studies that analyzes the actual content and use of worksheets in language classes in respect to the curriculum and evaluation methods. This study is an attempt to patch the void by presenting a case from a preparatory school at university level.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the focus of extra instructional materials used in CEFR-B1 level English preparatory classes in a Turkish university. In the study, answers to the following research questions are sought:

1. What is the focus of worksheets used in CEFR-B1 level classes?
2. What language skills are neglected in worksheets used in CEFR-B1 level classes?
3. Do worksheets include contextualized activities on each skill?
4. Do worksheets used in CEFR-B1 level classes support the assessed objectives?

2. Methodology

A through presentation of the research design, setting, data collection and analysis is given in this section.

2.1 Research design

For the purposes of this study, case study model, which is one of the qualitative research methods, is embarked (Cohen et al., 2007). The data are scanned using content analysis. Holsti (1969) defines content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". It provides an in-depth analysis of the data as well as a good overview of the situation and enables researchers to sort huge piles of data into meaningful chunks (Roberts, 1997).

2.2 Setting

Undergraduate programmes in Turkey have three different medium of instruction preferences and policies: English as a medium of instruction (EMI), Turkish as a medium of instruction (TMI), and Turkish and English as a medium of instruction (T-EMI). Even if the medium of instruction is varied, all universities have preparatory schools for teaching English. Students who enrol in EMI and T-EMI programmes have to finish these reaching at least CEFR-B1 level before they move onto their departments. Though they receive an intense language programme, undergraduate students in Turkey were ranked among the last ten in Europe for language competence (British Council, 2015).

The data were gathered by analyzing the worksheets used in 2015 and 2016 spring terms in a university preparatory school in Ankara, Turkey. All the worksheets were designed to supplement the CEFR-B1 level course book *Life* (Hughes et al., 2013). *Life* series are described as "a practical, competency-based series with the support to develop grammar, vocabulary, functions, pronunciation, and skills through appropriate communicative activities". Therefore, the worksheets were aimed at supplementing the book where necessary. They were prepared each academic year by different language instructors working in materials development unit of the school. The school accepts over 1000 students every year and %80 of them successfully graduate to their respective departments. Most students start from CEFR-A1 level and they graduate slightly over CEFR-B1. In a term of 16 weeks, students take five quizzes and three progress tests in addition

to a writing folder and three speaking exams to compile half of their final grade and they get the other half from a final proficiency test. They receive a total points of 1200 from the first half of their assessment and 100 points from the proficiency test, which is eventually transferred into a grade out of 100.

2. 3 Data collection

The researcher analyzed the worksheets of 14 weeks of instruction from both 2015 and 2016 spring terms with the consent of materials development unit. As well as the worksheets, the course book was also analyzed to see the relation between the book and the worksheets that supplemented it. The materials development unit also provided the researcher with sample exams to understand the level of competence sought to graduate.

2. 4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed based on a priori coding schema. In priori coding, the categories are formed based on a prior assumption on the data. Once the categories are agreed upon, the data are scanned for the particular codes under each category and results are consulted with a field expert for validity purposes (Weber, 1990). The validity of any content analysis depends on the accuracy of the coding units. Out of the types of coding units, context units, which identify codes based on its content, that may or may not overlap, and recording units, which determine codes based on ideas, were used to categorize the content of the worksheets.

After the codes were established, they were presented to a field expert for construct validity. The validity of the data was concluded to be high. Then, the worksheets were scanned based on the activity type, content, and skills included. After the analysis, the Kappa values of inter-rater and intra-rater reliabilities were calculated to ensure reliability. The calculated inter-rater Kappa value is .72 while the calculated intra-rater Kappa value is .81, which proves the analysis were reliable enough to draw conclusions from.

The priori codes according to which the analysis were conducted are shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1. The priori codes the worksheets were analyzed for

The main category	Sub-categories	Representation	The main category	Sub-categories	Representation
Separated skills	Grammar	G1	Decontextualized skills	Grammar	DG3
	Vocabulary	V1		Vocabulary	DV3
	Reading	R1		Reading	DR3
	Writing	W1		Writing	DW3
	Listening	L1		Listening	DL3
	Speaking	S1		Speaking	DS3
	Pronunciation	P1		Pronunciation	DP3
Integrated skills	Grammar& Vocabulary	GV2	Contextualized skills	Grammar	CG4
	Grammar& Reading	GR2		Vocabulary	CV4
	Grammar& Writing	GW2		Reading	CR4
	Grammar& Listening	GL2		Writing	CW4
	Grammar& Speaking	GS2		Listening	CL4
	Grammar& Pronunciation	GP2		Speaking	CS4

Vocabulary& Reading	VR2	Pronunciation	CP4
Vocabulary& Writing	VW2		
Vocabulary& Listening	VL2		
Vocabulary& Speaking	VS2		
Vocabulary& Pronunciation	VP2		
Reading& Writing	RW2		
Reading& Listening	RL2		
Reading& Speaking	RS2		
Reading& Pronunciation	RP2		
Writing& Listening	WL2		
Writing& Speaking	WS2		
Writing& Pronunciation	WP2		
Listening& Speaking	LS2		
Listening & Pronunciation	LP2		

3. Results

The findings are discussed here based on their relevance to the research questions. There are 132 worksheets in total; 72 in 2015 spring and 60 in 2016 spring. Worksheets were mostly designed for in-class study with the guidance of the instructor and each week students were assigned a weekend handout for out-of-class study. The length of the worksheets differed tremendously, some being 5 pages long with lots of activities and others being only 1 page long with a single activity. The activities in most of them were unrelated to each other so they were grouped as separated skills worksheets, and were assumed under different codes according to the skill they represented. The number of worksheets that included separated skills are 81 out of the total 132. However, some worksheets were assumed in this group based on single activities rather than the whole paper. Examples of each type is provided in Appendix A. As a result 144 separated skills worksheets appeared, Table 2 summarizes the frequency of the separated skills worksheets.

Table 2. The frequency of the separated skills worksheets

Separated skills	F	%
Grammar	60	86.4
Vocabulary	30	43.2
Reading	34	48.96
Writing	10	14.4
Listening	10	14.4
Speaking	0	0
Pronunciation	0	0
Total	144	

Based on the distribution of the skills, most worksheets present activities that focus on separated skills. The abundant number of grammar-centered worksheets indicate a tendency towards heavily grammar based instruction in the classes. This hints that though the course book encourages a communicative-constructivist approach to teaching, the instruction is still executed in the traditional grammar-enforced way. Concentrating on each skill to raise awareness is always welcomed in language classes (Richards and Rodgers, 2014), yet getting to a point where grammar

teaching receives most attention seems alarming (Lightbown and Spada, 2013), especially considering how it distances the learning atmosphere from the ideal. Another important point is the lack of speaking and pronunciation activities. This shows that either they were not considered important to work on or activities in the book were considered enough to cover these skills.

Out of the 132 worksheets, 51 of them entirely included integrated skills activities; however, 11 worksheets were designed so that integrated separated skills activities are presented together. Nonetheless, they were considered as integrated skills worksheets. Table 3 presents the distribution of integrated skills within the worksheets.

Table 3. The frequency of the integrated skills worksheets

Integrated skills	F	%
Grammar& Writing	10	16.1
Vocabulary& Reading	17	27.4
Vocabulary& Writing	10	16.1
Vocabulary& Speaking	4	6.4
Reading& Listening	6	9.6
Reading& Speaking	7	11.2
Writing& Speaking	7	11.2
Listening& Speaking	1	1.6
Total	62	

Table 3 illustrates the frequencies of the existent codes among all the codes illustrated in Table 1. Unfortunately, most skills were not integrated and finding examples of more than two integrated skills was impossible. The results show a focus on reading and vocabulary integration as opposed to the heavily-grammar based separated skills worksheets. Looking at Table 2 and Table 3, a lack of productive skills based worksheets is in evidence. This suggests a more input based approach to teaching. However, the number of listening activities is surprisingly low compared to other skills, and pronunciation activities seem to be neglected one more time. From a positive point of view, the number of activities in the book may be assumed to be sufficient. A more reasonable explanation is that it is respectively more difficult to prepare listening activities compared to others.

The calculated number of separated and integrated worksheets is 206 as opposed to the original number, 132. The analysis on contextualized and decontextualized activities were based on the former number to provide as much detailed explanation as possible. Table 4 displays the distribution of contextualized worksheets within the group.

Table 4. The frequencies of contextualized skills

Separated skills	F	%	Integrated skills	f	%
Grammar	0	0	Grammar& Writing	0	0
Vocabulary	12	31.5	Vocabulary& Reading	17	41.4
Reading	10	26.3	Vocabulary& Writing	0	0
Writing	6	15.7	Vocabulary& Speaking	0	0
Listening	10	26.3	Reading& Listening	4	9.7
Speaking	0	0	Reading& Speaking	6	14.6
Pronunciation	0	0	Writing& Speaking	7	17
			Listening& Speaking	7	17
Total	38			41	

When Table 4 is analyzed, 79 worksheets seem to include contextualized activities, which leaves 127 worksheets with decontextualized mostly grammar based activities. Learning is only forced unless it is meaningful to learners. Meaningful learning emerges from contextualized activities that are close to students' backgrounds and appealing to their learning styles. Shrum and Glisan highlight the importance of contextualized activities for creating an interactive learning environment with highly motivated students (2010). Though the book claims to create a meaningful learning environment, it is of utmost importance that extra instructional materials support this environment. In this case, they seem to hinder more, rather than support.

Another issue to overview is the balance between the instructional materials and assessment. The formative nature of the assessment, gives students a chance to work on and redeem their mistakes throughout the semester (Boston, 2002). Apart from the writing folder and speaking quizzes, students collect a maximum of 800 points from five quizzes and three progress tests. Strictly grammar and vocabulary based questions correspond to around 235 points out of total 800 points. Besides, each grammar or vocabulary question is worth 2 or less points while each reading and listening question is worth 5 points. Considering the huge focus on grammar, such low points assigned to it in the exams seem unjust to the students. The preparatory school states its goals as to raise students who can follow academic literature, communicate well on various social platforms, and master at least CEFR-B1 level English proficiency (YABDIL, 2016). The statement profiles a learner with mastery over each skill. So, the assessment system seems to cover all the goals of the preparatory school; however, exams can evaluate student proficiency better if they reflect what is valued most in the classroom.

3. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that though a considerable amount of worksheets are utilized in the classes, most of them display mechanical activities without a proper context to create a meaningful learning environment. As the book and the exams favor integrated skills studies which facilitate interaction, the nature of the worksheets seems to be in contrast with them. According to Tomlinson (2012), supplementary instructional materials should possess three qualities: being flexible enough to be transferred to other contexts to develop skills and strategies, being appropriate for learners' learning purposes and styles, and being integrated enough to allow learners to practice both verbal and nonverbal aspects of discourse. That is why, worksheets for the next semester could be revised to reflect the learner needs and course objectives. They could also be adapted to facilitate a more meaningful learning environment and to stimulate interaction.

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Appendix A

Worksheet for Separated Skills

GRAMMAR

Part A. Fill in each blank with one of the words in the box.

other the other another others one another

1. There are many kinds of insects in the world. Ant is one kind. The wasp is _____.
2. There are two books on the table. One is a novel, _____ is a course book.
3. He had a really serious accident. He is alright but his car is in a terrible condition. He needs to buy _____ car.
4. I have two dogs. One is called Tara and _____ is Laika.
5. There are many kinds of trees in the world. The oak is one kind. Some _____ are pine trees, willows and sycamores.

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6. There are many kinds of trees in the world. The oak is one kind. Some _____ kinds are willows and sycamores.
 7. It snowed a lot this morning, and it seems that there is going to be _____ snowstorm.
 8. There are four girls in the class. One of them is blonde. _____ are quite dark.
 9. There are many tourists from different countries in Istanbul. Many of them are from Japan. _____ are from Germany, England and the USA.
 10. Mr. and Mrs. Miller are a happily married couple. They love _____ very much.
 11. Some students are hardworking; _____ are lazy.
 12. They have four children. One is married. _____ is a graduate of university and has a nice job. _____ are high school students.
 13. One of the two countries I'd like to visit is Tibet. _____ is India. Of course, besides these two, there are _____ mystical places I would like to visit.

(Reference: Practice Your Grammar 1)

Appendix B

Worksheet for Integrated Skills

READING & LISTENING

How Much Can You Learn in a Month?

- a. Do you think people from your country are good at learning languages? Why (not)?
- b. Read about Anna, a British journalist who did an intensive Polish course. Answer the questions.

I work for a magazine and they were writing an article about British language learners. As an experiment, they asked me to learn a completely new language for one month. Then I had to go to the country and do some 'tests' to see if I could 'survive' in different situations. I decided to learn Polish because my great-grandmother was Polish and I have some relatives there. I can already speak French and Spanish really well but Polish isn't a Latin-based language so I knew it would be completely different.

I did a one-month intensive course at a language school in Birmingham. I thought I was good at languages before I started learning Polish, but now I'm not so sure. I found it incredibly difficult. The grammar was really complicated and the words were not like any other language I know, so it was very hard to remember them. For example, I thought 'football' was more or less an international word, but in Polish it's pilka nozna. And the pronunciation is unbelievable! Every word is full of "z"s where you don't expect them, like jezdysz which means 'you go'.

My course finished yesterday and I'm going to Krakow for the weekend to do my tests. A local guide called Kasia is coming with me and is going to give me a mark out of 10.

These are the tests and the rules:

Tests

You have to..

- 1 get a taxi.
- 2 order a drink in a bar.
- 3 ask for directions (and follow them).
- 4 phone and ask to speak to someone.
- 5 ask somebody the time.

Rules

- you mustn't use a dictionary or phrasebook.
- you mustn't speak English at any time.
- you mustn't use your hands or mime.

1. What languages did Anna already know?
 2. Why did she choose to learn Polish?
 3. Where did she do the course?
 4. What did she think was the most difficult thing about Polish?
 5. Where is she going to do the 'tests'?
 6. What five things does she have to do?
 7. What are the rules?
- c. Which test do you think will be the easiest for Anna? Which will be the most difficult? Listen to Anna doing the tests in Krakow and check your answers.
- d. Listen again. Mark the sentences T (true) or F (false). Correct the false ones.
- 1 The taxi driver couldn't speak English. ____
 - 2 Anna understood the waitress's question. ____
 - 3 She ordered a small Coke. ____
 - 4 Anna asked for directions to a bank. ____
 - 5 She couldn't understand what the woman said. ____
 - 6 Anna couldn't understand everything the woman on the phone said. ____

7 Anna thought telling the time in Polish was very easy. ____

8 She didn't find out what the time was. ____

9 Kasia gave her eight out of ten for her Polish. ____

SPEAKING

a) How well could you do Anna's five tests in English? How much do you think you can learn in a month?

b) Talk to a partner. Have you ever...

- spoken in English on the phone? Who to? What about?

- seen a film in English? Which? How much did you understand? spoken to a tourist in English? When? Why?

- read an English book or magazine? Which ones?

asked for directions in a foreign city? Where? What happened? learnt another foreign language? How well can you speak it?