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Assessing Turkish language books used for the first and second echelon in primary education in terms OS principles of creative writing

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Abstract

Learning is a progress beginning with birth, and continuing for a lifetime. Primary education is the most important step where basic knowledge and skills are gained. Sound foundations in this stage will play an important role in one's lifetime achievements. In our age, where everything changes and develops with great speed, individuals; who can adapt to this speed, think, question, criticize, create solutions, always look forward, create multiple points of view, express his/her emotions independently, use his/her language effectively; are needed.

There are two dimensions of language; understanding and expression. Speaking and writing is the dimension of expression; listening and reading is the dimension of understanding. Writing is an activity which develops later than reading. For the healthy development of writing skill in the manner our age requires, a versatile support is needed. Curriculum, teacher, family, books, especially the textbooks used in mother tongue lessons have important responsibilities in order to have the student express his/her emotions, thoughts, dreams independently. The reason is that books play an important role in the development of both oral and written expression skills. Are books being prepared in a way to fulfill this important responsibility they undertake?

In this descriptive research, the sections and instructions of texts on written expression, included in Turkish Language textbooks (6-8) studied in school in Turkey during 2009-2010 education year. The data of the research have been gathered by document examination method, among qualitative research methods. A total of 638 activities and instructions in Turkish Language textbooks have been reviewed separately; the activities and instructions are evaluated according to our purpose. Direct quotations were taken and interpreted from the examined texts by presenting the findings with frequencies in tables.

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1. Introduction

Language is a versatile system in a society; providing emotions, thoughts and wishes to be transferred to others by using elements and rules that are common in sounds and meaning (Aksan, 1995, p. 55). Born out of the communication need of people, language has undertaken many functions from the first ages to our days.

Mother tongue is the mirror of emotions, thoughts, culture and personality (Hengirmen, 1998, p. 37). We cannot expect a child; who does not have the skill to use his/her mother tongue, the basic factor for acquiring personality; to

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display a complete development of personality. A child can only acquire the culture and values of the society, in which he/she is brought up, through his/her mother tongue (Emiri, 2000, s. 4). Even though the mother language learning begins within the family, learning with its real meaning happens in formal education institutions. Its basis is constructed during the primary education years.

Mother language teaching has basic purposes such as giving language skills that can materialize correct, open and effective communication, developing thinking abilities, providing thinking capabilities and contributing to socialization processes (Sever, 2004, p. 5). In mother language education, where skills and habits are aimed to be given instead of knowledge, it is expected to give basic language skills and habits. Basic language skills are constructed on four skills; speaking, writing, reading and listening. Speaking and writing can be generalized as expression skills, and listening and reading can be generalized as expression understanding skills.

The second element of expression skills, writing, is a skill acquired through writing. Writing is expressing emotions, thoughts and events through writing. Writing process should be perceived as a critical thought process, rather than mechanical (Demirel, 2002, p. 102). There is a clear relationship between writing and thinking. Teaching to write, in a way, means to teach to think. However, thinking is not writing. The conversion of thinking to writing starts with lining up the words that will meet the thoughts, and with their arrangement in a manner to communicate them (Özdemir, 1991, p. 27). The development of written language generally occurs after children start school (Power and Hubbard, 1996, p. 82).

One of the most emphasized concepts of the 20th century is the concept of creativity. When we look at the definitions of the concept of creativity, we see that there are countless definitions and no generally accepted one definition.

In Turkish Language Institution's Turkish Dictionary, creating defined as "putting up, making a new thing that has never been seen before, by using intellect, thought and imaginations; the action of causing something to happen or occur" (Turkish Language Institution (TDK), 1999:2395-2396); creativity, "the ability accepted to be possessed by everyone to design, find, perform a new and an original thing" (TDK, 1999:2386).

Creativity is a skill which holds an important place in the development of society and a person, possessed by everybody, found in every period of life (Maltepe, 2006: 59);

Creativity is one's ability to create his/her own symbols. Creative writing is to use writing language for conceptualizing, researching, and recording the symbol of experience for the purpose of creating (Marshall, 1974, 11).

It is a capability that exists in all emotional and mental activities, works and efforts, forming the basis of all aspects of human life and development (San, 1997,177).

The writing activities in Turkish Language textbooks used in lessons directly affect writing skill acquisition by the amount that they emphasize creativity. Through these activities, students have the opportunity to add their own knowledge and ideas into the subject area and to realize their creativity.

Creative writing is defines as the activity of putting up a new song, poem, story, essay or novel by reconstructing, linking existing knowledge, concepts, events, and sounds, images and dreams in the memory.

(Güleryüz, 2006, 126).

Creative writing is a person's independently putting up his emotions and ideas on a subject by using his/her imagination (Oral, 2003,8).

In order to improve the writing skills of students, it must be ensured that they enjoy writing. This can only be possible through creative writing activities. Creative writing activities are activities that substantially support and reinforce the creativities of students through their nature that provides possibilities for students to reflect their observations, imaginations, perceptions of the outside world on the basis of their lives and experiences, to use the language effectively and creatively, making students effective at every stage of writing education and requiring to use other language skills. Also, these activities may also be considered as an important step in the solutions of writing problems.

There is a belief in our society as "writing is a matter of skill, everyone can't write". However, writing is not a matter of skill. Writing beautifully may be a matter of skill but fine and correct writing, using Turkish without faults is something that everyone can do. Everyone can acquire the ability to write fine and correctly (Özbay,1995,224).

We can say that creative writing activities will have a major effect in improving writing skill and in making writing a loved activity.

In the new Turkish Language Education Curriculum, creative thinking of students is taken as an important acquisition. In order to see this acquisition in students, writing skill must be emphasized as much as the other basic language skills. For a child in primary education age, situations such as building up dreams and cruising in the land of dreams, getting emotional easily shows that he/she is a genius ready for creativity. In order to make use of this aptitude in the child, basic language skills must be supported with activities suitable for creativity. It is possible to improve the emotions and thoughts of children, their desires to perceive and define the world, to create a world of their own; through various activities presented to them in Turkish Language textbooks. In this context, it is a subject to be studied with attention for researchers whether the activities in Turkish Language textbooks serve creativity and improve creative writing skills.

1.1. Purpose of the Research

The basic purpose of this research is to evaluate the sections and instructions of texts on written expression, included in Turkish Language textbooks (6-8) studied in school in Turkey.

2. METHOD

In this descriptive research, the data of the research have been gathered by document examination method, among qualitative research methods.

A total of 658 activities and instructions in Turkish Language textbooks have been reviewed separately; the activities and instructions are evaluated according to our purpose. Direct quotations were taken and interpreted from the examined texts by presenting the findings with frequencies in tables.

The Primary School Turkish Language textbooks evaluated in the research are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Evaluated Turkish Language Textbooks (6-8)

Class Level	Examined Workbooks
6	Student Workbook (Öğrenci Çalışma Kitabı), Koza Yayın Dağıtım; Ahmet Kapulu, Süheyla Dedeoğlu Kapucu, Şükran Kaplan, Aliyar Karaca Accepted as a school book for 5 (five) years as of 2007-2008 education year, pursuant to Resolution 43 by the Board of Education and Discipline of the Ministry of Education dated 13.04.2007.
7	Student Workbook (Öğrenci Çalışma Kitabı), MEB, Devlet Kitapları, 3. Baskı; Abdülkadir Altan, Serdar Arhan, Sema Başar, Songül Özaykut, Gülderen Öztürker, Derya Yılmaz, Yavuz Yüksel.
8	Student Workbook (Öğrenci Çalışma Kitabı), MEB, Devlet Kitapları, 3. Baskı; Abdülkadir Altan, Serdar Arhan, Sema Başar, Gülderen Öztürker, Derya Yılmaz.

3. FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

The distribution according to activity numbers of the evaluated textbooks are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Activity Numbers in the Books

Level	f
6	200
7	232
8	206
Total	658

Reviewing the activity numbers in the examined books shown in Table 2, we see that there are 200 activities in 6th grade, 232 in 7th grade, 206 in 8th grade, and that the total activity number is 658.

The distribution of the activities according to basic language skills are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of the Numbers of Activities according to Skills

	Speaking		Reading		Writing		Listening		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
6	3	1,50	11	5,50	182	91,00	4	2,00	200	100
7	2	0,86	31	13,36	196	84,48	3	1,29	232	100
8	3	1,45	24	11,65	175	84,95	4	1,94	206	100

Reviewing the distribution of the numbers of activities according to skills shown in Table 3, we see that 3 of the 200 activities in 6th grade are for speaking, 11 are for reading, and 182 are for writing skills.

Among the activities included in 6th grade workbook, numerically, writing skill has the first place. Reading activity is ranked in 2nd, listening and speaking activities are ranked in 3rd and 4th places, respectively.

The numerical ranking of the activities in 7th and 8th grade workbooks show similarities with 6th grade activities and the rankings do not change.

The numerical data of activities related to writing skills, which has the first rank among the activities in the books, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Writing Activities among Grades

Class Level	Writing Activities
6	182
7	196
8	175
Total	553

Reviewing the writing activity numbers according to class levels shown in Table 4, we see that there are 196 activities in 7th grade, 182 in 6th grade, and 175 in 8th grade. The total writing activity number is 553 in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

As a result of the evaluation performed for the writing activities, we see that there are activities that improve and support the creativity of students but there are also activities that completely do the opposite. The numerical reflection of the situation revealed after evaluating the writing activities according to their creativity context is given in Table 5.

Table 5. Evaluation of Writing Activities according to Creativity Context

Class Level	Conventional	Creative	Writing
	Writing Study (f)	Study (f)	Writing Study (f)
6	158	24	182
7	167	29	196
8	134	41	175
Total	459	94	553

The total writing activity number is 553 in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, as shown in Table 5.

Reviewing the status of these activities in 6th grade level, we see that 158 of the 182 writing activities are conventional writing activities which do not support the creativity of the students, and that only 24 writing activities could be evaluated as being creative.

Reviewing the status of these activities in 7th grade level, we see that 167 of the 196 writing activities are conventional writing activities which do not support the creativity of the students, and that only 29 writing activities could be evaluated as being creative.

The distribution of 8th grade level activities are observed to be none different than 6th and 7th grade activities. 134 of the 175 writing activities are conventional writing activities which do not support the creativity of the students, and that only 41 writing activities could be evaluated as being creative.

Activities that support the creativity of the students, evaluated as being creative are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Creative Writing Activities

Class Level	Activity Examples
6 th Grade	Examine the photographs below. Select one of them. Write the emotions and thoughts that the photograph inspires in you, in the allocated place under the pictures. Do not use a title for your writing.
1 st Activity	Your friend will read your writing and determine a title. He/she will also evaluate your writing by using correction symbols (Sevgi Paylaşıldıkça Çoğalır, 6 th Activity)
2 nd Activity	Write 3 separate titles for the story you listened to: A title of one word, a title formed of a word group, and a title built up of a sentence (Keloğlan ile Sihirli Kuş, 5 th Activity)
3 rd Activity	Write down the concepts that the concepts of science and technology inspire in you. Based on the connotations, write the differences between concepts of science and technology (Alo... Graham Bell, 1 st Activity).
4 th Activity	If you would add a quatrain to the poem, which humanitarian values would you like to emphasize, please write (İnsanlık Mektebi, 2 nd Activity)
7 th Grade	Write down a dialogue that might occur between Hacivat and Karagöz by using simple and derivative verbs (Yolcu Konmaz Oteli 8 th Activity)
1 st Activity	Read the poem below. Based on the poem you have read, create a new text (Horozla İnci, 1 st Activity)
2 nd Activity	Below, photographs of Konya are given. Examine these and complete the story, whose entry is given, by linking with the photographs (Horozla İnci, 4 th Activity)
3 rd Activity	Read the idiom story, whose sentences are given in a mixed order. Putting the events in order, re-write the sentences (Horozla İnci, 4 th Activity).
4 th Activity	Write an essay by using the keywords you have found (Old Time Poems, 3 rd Activity)
8 th Grade	Write an essay by using the keywords you have found (Old Time Poems, 3 rd Activity)
1 st Activity	What kind of a dialogue might have happened between the writer and the old locksmith, after the customer entered inside? Please write (İhtiyar Çilingir, 4 th Activity)
2 nd Activity	Write down the topic you chose and the concepts it inspires in you. Please write a story by using these concepts (İhtiyar Çilingir, 8 th Activity)
3 rd Activity	What would you do for protecting, increase and maintain the below listed endangered species? Please write down solution recommendations.
4 th Activity	

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In this section, conclusions and suggestions reached on the basis of the findings of the research are presented.

In this descriptive research, distributions of the activities included in primary school Turkish Language textbooks (6-8th grades) were examined and among these activities, it was aimed to evaluate writing activities under the concept of creativity.

Reviewing the activity numbers in the examined books, we see that there are 200 activities in 6th grade, 232 in 7th grade, 206 in 8th grade, and that the total activity number is 658.

Reviewing the distribution of the numbers of activities according to skills; we see that 3 of the 200 activities in 6th grade are for speaking, 11 are for reading, and 182 are for writing skills.

Among the activities included in 6th grade workbook, numerically, writing skill has the first place. Reading activity is ranked in 2nd, listening and speaking activities are ranked in 3rd and 4th places, respectively. The numerical ranking of the activities in 7th and 8th grade workbooks show similarities with 6th grade activities and the rankings do not change.

Reviewing the writing activity numbers according to class levels; we see that there are 196 activities in 7th grade, 182 in 6th grade, and 175 in 8th grade. The total writing activity number is 553 in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

Reviewing the status of these activities in 6th grade level, we see that 158 of the 182 writing activities are conventional writing activities which do not support the creativity of the students, and that only 24 writing activities could be evaluated as being creative.

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The distribution of 8th grade level activities are observed to be none different than 6th and 7th grade activities. 134 of the 175 writing activities are conventional writing activities which do not support the creativity of the students, and that only 41 writing activities could be evaluated as being creative.

Based on the results of this research; the activities in the workbooks of 6-7 and 8th Grade Turkish Language textbooks must be distributed to learning areas in an equal, balanced way.

There should be more activities supporting and reinforcing the creativity of students, an essential attention must be paid to creative writing activities.

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