

REPRESENTATION OF SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSEBOOKS

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Abstract: Studying coursebooks and instructional materials in terms of their cultural, social and value-based qualities has been a significant aspect of research in language education since what is inherent in coursebooks directly affects users' perspective. In this research study, contents of English language coursebooks used in Turkish senior primary schools are studied by focusing on how sports and recreational activities are portrayed in relation to some variables such as identities of the persons doing sports, which sports are particularly shown, and the social values associated with them. A total number of 3 coursebooks are studied and the findings revealed the problems associated with the representation of sports in these coursebooks.

Keywords: Wellbeing, sports, recreational activities, English, coursebook

Introduction

Research has shown that sports have always been a popular topic in English language coursebooks (Kırmızı, 2007; Öztürk, 2007; Arıkan, 2008). It can easily be claimed that sports and recreational activities are and can be of students' interest. Selecting interesting topics for classroom use such as sports and recreational activities is important because as Harmer (2001) articulates, topic selection is important in catering students' interests.

Wellbeing has been defined in many scientific fields which can be summarized through such keywords as self-acceptance, sense of purpose, fulfilment in life, sense of continued growth, feeling of interpersonal connectedness, happiness, spiritual wellness, sense of coherence, and quality of life (de Chavez, Backett-Milburn, Parry, & Platt, 2005) all of which refer to positive qualities that should be achieved or attained by individuals in society. Sports, or at least doing sports is most often associated with the particular aforementioned keywords since it can be inferred that doing sports can lead individuals to realizing or attaining all of the keywords mentioned above.

Visualisation is fundamental in human learning because concrete sensory stimuli (e.g. visual materials) which can be verbalized will be verbalized and concrete words which can be imaged may be imaged (Croft & Burton, 1994). Kramsch (2000) argues that language in use both reflects and

creates social structures and political ideologies. Hence, it can be argued that visual materials and texts in course books can alter students' opinions and beliefs (Arikan, 2005). Stubbs (1982: p. 138) claims English teachers are 'responsible not only for the linguistic development of their pupils, but also for their psychological, moral and interpersonal development- and to expect them also to provide a world view and philosophy of life.'

As Arikan (2009) argues, in today's classrooms, coursebooks remain as the major instructional instrument and resource both for teachers and students. In fact, even a short visit or observation in any Turkish classroom will easily show that majority of instructional time depends on the use of the coursebook. In relation to the brief review of the literature cited above, the aim of this study is to learn how sports and recreational activities were represented in English language coursebooks. It was hypothesized that by focusing on how sports and recreational activities were represented in coursebooks, values about sports can be spotted and conclusions can be drawn upon which we can provide suggestions about how education works in shaping beliefs about sports and recreational activities.

Method

Visual materials and accompanying texts about sports in English language coursebooks were studied thematically while focusing on sports are represented as cultural and social images. A total amount of 3 course books, each from the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades are studied. First, all visual materials related to sports and recreational activities were represented in frequency tables and texts about them are studied qualitatively. In the thematic analysis, the focus was on which sports were left out and which ones were highly used. This over all pictures is discussed between the researchers from a pedagogical perspective.

Findings

Table 1 reveals that 6th grade English coursebook includes 14 different sport branches. Basketball (26.48%) is the leading sport in representation. Swimming (20.59%) and tennis (14.71%) are at the second and third rank respectively. Although it is one of the most popular sports not only Turkey but also in Europe, football (13.23%) is ranked fourth in the Table 1. Windsurfing (5.88%), athletics (4.41%) are the fifth and sixth in the list respectively. Cycling (2.94%) and horse riding (2.94%) shares the seventh rank as both of them have the same percentage. Golf (1.47%), skating (1.47%), badminton (1.47%), volleyball (1.47%), formula 1 (1.47%), and sailing (1.47%) are the least represented sport branches in the 6th grade English coursebook with the same percentage.

Table 1: 6th grade English coursebook (in percentages)

Sport Branches	<i>n</i>	%
Basketball	18	26.48
Swimming	14	20.59
Tennis	10	14.71
Football	9	13.23
Windsurfing	4	5.88
Athletics	3	4.41
Cycling	2	2.94
Horse riding	2	2.94
Skating	1	1.47
Badminton	1	1.47
Volleyball	1	1.47
Formula 1	1	1.47
Golf	1	1.47
Sailing	1	1.47
Total	68	100

As can be seen in Table 2, 7th grade English coursebook includes 12 sport branches, which is less than the sport branches included in the 6th grade English coursebook. Unlike in the 6th grade English coursebook, football (32.14%) is the leading sport in representation in the 7th grade English coursebook. Climbing (10.71%), swimming (10.71%) and cycling (10.71%) have the same percentage and share the second rank. It is surprising that climbing, which is represented in neither the 6th grade nor in the 8th grade English coursebook, is at the second rank in the list though it is not one of the most popular sports in Turkey. Basketball (26.48%), which is the leading sport in the Table 1 and tennis (14.71%), which is at the third rank in the Table 1 are respectively at the third and fourth rank in Table 2. Ice-skating (3.57%), volleyball (3.57%), judo (3.57%), athletics (3.57%), weightlifting (3.57%), and boxing (3.57%) are the least represented sport branches in the 7th grade English coursebook. Climbing, ice-skating, judo, weightlifting and boxing are the sport branches that are not represented in the other two coursebooks.

Table 2: 7th grade English coursebook (in percentages)

Sport Branches	<i>n</i>	%
Football	9	32.14
Climbing	3	10.71
Swimming	3	10.71
Cycling	3	10.71
Basketball	2	7.14
Tennis	2	7.14
Boxing	1	3.57
Ice-skating	1	3.57
Volleyball	1	3.57
Weightlifting	1	3.57
Judo	1	3.57
Athletics	1	3.57
Total	28	100

It can be seen in Table 3 that the 8th grade English coursebook includes only 5 different sport branches. Swimming (29.43%) and basketball (29.43%) having the same percentage are the leading sport branches in representation. Football (17.64%) is the third, Athletics (11.78%), karate (11.78%) are the least represented sport branches in the coursebook, and have the same percentage as well. Unlike 6th and 7th grades English coursebooks, the 8th grade English coursebook includes karate as a different sport branches. It can be inferred from both the number of sport branches and their percentages in the Table 3 that sport branches are neglected in the 8th grade English coursebook compared with the 6th and 7th grade English coursebooks.

Table3: 8th grade English coursebook (in percentages)

Sport Branches	<i>n</i>	%
Swimming	5	29.43
Basketball	5	29.43
Football	3	17.64
Athletics	2	11.78
Karate	2	11.78
Total	17	100

Discussion

In general, reading texts and sample sentences representing sports are not accompanied with visual materials except for a few cases. In some cases, visual materials about sports are used to accompany the texts with an attempt to represent the image of the action described in the teaching of some certain verbs or grammar structures. Hence, contextualizing the grammar forms used through visual materials is rather weak and selective in the coursebooks studied.

Table4: Overall Findings (in percentages)

Sport Branches	<i>n</i>	%
Basketball	25	22.12
Swimming	22	19.46
Football	21	18.58
Tennis	12	10.61
Athletics	6	5.3
Total	113	76.07/100

Table 4 exclusively includes the sports portrayed in all of the three coursebooks. As can be seen in Table 4, basketball (22.12%), swimming (19.46%), football (18.58%), tennis (10.61%) and athletics (5.3%) are the leading sports as represented in all of the coursebooks studied. The total percentages of the five sport branches are more than three of fourths of the total sport branches represented in all of the three coursebooks studied. Sports such as wrestling, which is known to be a national sport in Turkey does not exist in English language coursebooks produced by Turkish writers. Exclusion of

national and well known topics or activities in primary school coursebooks seems to be a problem especially when the importance of students' current knowledge of the world around them is considered because at this age, students are known to go from concrete to abstract and from known to unknown. Although Turkish students are more likely to know wrestling more than they do about badminton, weightlifting or climbing at this age, coursebooks should include such sports like wrestling especially at early stages.

It is expected that the number of sport branches in the English coursebooks increase according to the grades of the coursebooks. In other words, the 6th grade students are expected to have less sport branches in their schema than the 7th grade students. However, there is an inverse proportion in the coursebooks. The 6th grade English coursebook includes more sport branches than the 7th grade coursebook whereas the 7th grade English coursebook includes more sport branches than the 8th grade English coursebook.

In all of the three coursebooks studied there are imbalances in representation of the sports branches. Basketball (26.48%) and swimming (20.59%) have the highest percentage in the 6th grade coursebook. However, there is sharp decrease in the representation of the other sport branches in that coursebook. The same imbalance occurs in the 7th grade coursebooks as well. Football is the leading sport with 32.14% whereas the percentage of climbing, swimming and cycling (10.71% for each) is less than half of it. The sharp decrease is seen in the representation of the other sports in the 7th grade coursebook. The 8th grade coursebook has the same imbalance seen in the first two coursebooks. Basketball and swimming (29.43% for each), which are the leading sports in the 8th grade coursebook, are approximately as twice as football (17.64%), which is at the third rank, whereas they are almost as three times as athletics and karate (11.78%) in terms of representation in Table 3.

Recreation and sport play a vital role in our wellbeing and bring people together to create stronger communities (Zorba, 2011). However, in all of the three coursebooks studied, sport branches and recreational activities do not have any references to health and wellbeing except for a very few cases although it is known that sport has a positive influence on health and wellbeing. Although Zorba (2011) briefly defines recreation activities as those non-competitive physical activities with leisure purposes, sport and recreational activities are not differentiated in the coursebooks studied. However interestingly, the texts or visual materials studied do not include major sports activities such as the Olympics, which is undoubtedly the most popular sport organization in the world. This is a surprising and also thought-provoking situation when considered that Turkey is one of the candidate countries to the 2020 Olympics.

Suggestions

In today's classrooms, coursebooks remain as the major instructional instrument and resource and effectiveness and quality of coursebooks must be studied in their actual classroom use (Arikan, 2009). Hence, future studies must focus on how students perceive the texts and visual materials published in coursebooks. We argue that sports and recreational activities should be a vivid part of coursebooks because through coursebooks students are informed about the world around them. Hence, it is our belief that especially primary school students should be acknowledged about the importance of sports and recreational activities so that they realize the importance of them as well.

It is seen that texts and visuals do not inform students about the value of sports and recreational activities as vehicles for wellbeing. Coursebooks should emphasize the value of sports in society's wellbeing. National and regional sports should be included in coursebooks and those sports which are not meaningful to students' world should not be used unless they are given in concrete and meaningful contexts.

People who do sports are generally healthier, more active, and conscious therefore it is safe to say that the widespread of sports increase public health, thus increasing the number of healthy people in society (Zorba, 2005). Hence recreational activities and sport represented in the English coursebooks should be supported with sport for health messages and they should include visual materials and texts which can be useful for understanding and placing the importance sport culture to the primary schools. Moreover, the texts and visual materials related to recreational activities and sport should be used to encourage students to attend in such activities. Although these coursebooks are prepared by the Ministry of Education, it surprising that representation of sport and recreational activities is rather weak and stereotype.

Visual materials should be in close and meaningful relationship with the related texts. Visuals should not be seen as objects of decoration because through these visual materials students concretize the abstract vocabulary and meaning. Even though visual materials and texts may be simple in design and contain few elements, relationships amongst recreation and sport can evoke interest for the students. Thus recreational activities and sport in such coursebooks should be designed to convey messages about sport for wellbeing, and to encourage life-long sport and sport culture rather than stereotype use of sport branches.

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