

Primary school teachers' opinions on Turkish activity and workbook materials prepared for refugee students in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

As part of the project to support inclusive education for multilingual refugee children in the Turkish education system, books have been prepared with the support of the European Union to teach the Turkish language effectively. These books are distributed free of charge to students included in the PIKTES+ Project scope and are also available for free download to the public on the ministry's website. The teaching textbooks aim to assist teachers and students by providing information, correcting misinformation, promoting scientific thinking, and developing desired attitudes and behaviors. In this context, the purpose of this study is to examine the "Turkish Activity Book for Foreign Students," "Turkish Exercise Book for Foreign Students," and "Turkish Workbook for Foreign Students" prepared for refugee students based on the opinions of primary school teachers. The research was conducted as a case study, a type of qualitative research method. The study group consisted of 12 primary school teachers who continued their duties in the Beylikdüzü district of Istanbul during the 2023-2024 academic year. Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to select the study group. Data obtained from the interviews were evaluated through content analysis. The interview questions were designed and implemented to determine the opinions of primary school teachers regarding the appropriateness of the activities and content in the respective books for helping refugee students acquire the four basic skills in Turkish (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).

Introduction

In the past decade, many countries have become particularly sensitive to their migration strategies due to the increasing importance of migration-related issues at both local and global levels (Demiryontar, 2020). According to the statements of the Directorate General of Migration Management in our country, there are 3.115 million refugees from Syria alone. The countries from which most migrants come to our country are Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, and Iran, respectively (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). This diversity indicates that people will come to Turkey with different language proficiencies, gender

and family roles, expectations, cultural traditions, age-related perspectives, and rich social backgrounds, bringing them to the process of adapting to a new country (Marlowe et al., 2014).

The concept of acculturation suggests that settling into a new culture often requires compromise, negotiation, preservation, and the abandonment of certain cultural traditions and practices to adapt to a new host society (Marlowe et al., 2014). Achieving acculturation is possible through education. Education provides a safe environment and fosters new social relationships, enabling children to cope with their challenges and traumatic situations (Özdemir, 2017). In the absence of educational opportunities, there can be increased risks of joining radical groups, social exclusion, social problems, and early marriage (Moralı, 2018).

Textbooks are one of the most critical resources for educational activities. They are cultural products that guide teachers and students within the established curriculum (Erol, 2021). Generally, textbooks are the primary instructional materials to achieve the educational objectives and knowledge standards outlined in the curriculum or catalog of information (Grmek et al., 2021). Additionally, textbooks help students gain social experience and facilitate social integration (İçme & Büyük, 2023). Textbooks are considered the backbone of educational processes, and there is a need to examine the textbooks used by different countries. Considering the cultural dimension of education, textbooks should not only convey a certain amount of educational information but also help to develop competencies in areas such as the cultural and social characteristics of the country, the language, and foundations of science, acquiring global skills, and entrepreneurship (Shevchuk, 2023).

Educational opportunities for refugee students are provided free of charge both in schools affiliated with the ministry and in projects funded by international institutions. The PIKTES+ Project, financed by the European Union, aims to support inclusive education for children within the Turkish Education System. Within the project's scope, additional lessons are offered in 29 provinces to ensure the successful integration of foreign children into the Turkish Education System, from preschool education to the end of secondary education (PIKTES, 2024). The ministry has also prepared books and supplementary resources to support the lessons taught by teachers employed by the Ministry of National Education.

Method

This qualitative study is conducted to determine primary school teachers' opinions on the Turkish Activity Book for Foreign Students, Turkish Exercise Book for Foreign Students, and Turkish Workbook for Foreign Students prepared for refugee students. Qualitative research argues that the depth and uniqueness of information are more critical than generalizations and focuses on deep and specific data obtained from smaller study groups rather than large samples (Creswell, 2002). The study is based on the case study model, one of the qualitative research methods. A case study is commonly used in research on language learning, native and second language acquisition, and teacher education and opinions (Seggie & Bayyurt, 2017). The current research aims to determine the opinions of primary school teachers actively involved in the PIKTES+ Project, conducted by the Ministry of National Education, regarding the books prepared by the same ministry and used in the project. The research examined the suitability of the activities and contents in the relevant books for helping refugee students acquire the four basic skills in Turkish (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) based on the opinions of the participating primary school teachers.

Study group

The research study group consists of primary school teachers who continued their duties in the Beylikdüzü district of Istanbul in the 2023-2024 academic year. The population of the Beylikdüzü district in Istanbul exceeds four hundred thousand, with more than eight thousand refugees residing there. This corresponds to approximately two percent of the district's total population (Istanbul Governorship Provincial Directorate of Migration, 2024). The criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to select the study group. Criterion sampling involves studying and reviewing situations that meet predetermined critical criteria within the scope of the study. The researcher may prepare these or previously established criteria (Başaran, 2017). Criterion 1 is teaching using these three books for at least one year; Criterion 2 is having worked with refugee students for at least three years; Criterion 3 is having at least three years of teaching experience. The research was conducted with twelve primary school teachers who met these criteria.

Data collection tools

The data collected for the research were obtained from the responses given by primary school teachers participating in the PIKTES+ Project to the interview form. Expert opinions were sought regarding the questions determined within the scope of the research. The experts consulted included one faculty member from the Department of Primary Education, one Turkish Language Teacher, and one Primary School Teacher. The consulted faculty member has three publications indexed in international databases on refugee students and has engaged in direct work with refugee students. The other consulted educators, including a Turkish language teacher and a classroom teacher, have participated in the PIKTES project and have worked with refugee students for at least one year. Based on the expert feedback, the form was reduced from six questions to five. The final version of the interview form prepared for the research was administered to the participants in writing. The obtained data were subjected to content analysis. The reliability of the data was calculated by comparing the coding process. According to Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula, "Reliability = Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement) x 100," the reliability among researchers was found to be 93%. In instances where consensus reached 90% or above, it was considered that the desired level of agreement had been achieved. In qualitative research, the detailed reporting of collected data and the explanation of how the researcher arrived at the conclusions are also crucial for validity (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this study, excerpts from students' opinions are presented in the findings section.

Analysis of data

The data collected in the scope of the research were analyzed using the content analysis method. Content analysis involves in-depth examination and organization of qualitative and quantitative studies conducted independently in a defined topic or field (Ültay et al., 2021). Additionally, content analysis is a systematic technique where texts are categorized and summarized using predefined codes (Büyüköztürk, 2014).

Findings

Table 1 Primary school teachers' opinions on the appropriateness of the activities in the textbooks for acquiring Turkish reading comprehension skills

Theme	Codes	f
The Suitability of Activities in Textbooks for Developing Turkish Reading Comprehension Skills	The activities should enhance reading comprehension skills	11
	The activities should align with the objectives and general aims of reading comprehension.	10
	The activities should not contain word errors or narrative inconsistencies that hinder comprehension.	9
	Sentences in the activities should neither be too long nor too short (suitability to the level).	8
	Texts in the activities should not be inadequate, dull, or outdated.	5

According to participant primary school teachers, regarding the suitability of textbook activities for enhancing Turkish comprehension skills, eleven participants generally believe that the activities enhance reading comprehension, and ten participants think they align with reading comprehension achievements. Some participants, however, mentioned issues of inadequacy, dullness, or lack of relevance in the activities.

Regarding the suitability of activities in textbooks for developing Turkish comprehension skills, the views of some participating teachers in the research are as follows:

T1: "There are very few activities that assess comprehension skills."

T3: "There should have been more scientific and up-to-date texts and activities in the textbooks."

T9: "The most important aspect in reading comprehension activities is that the main idea of the texts should be easily understandable. This can be observed in most of the texts."

Table 2 Primary school teachers' opinions on the appropriateness of the activities in the textbooks for acquiring fluent reading skills in Turkish

Theme	Codes	f
The Suitability of the Activities in the Textbooks for Acquiring Fluent Reading Skills in Turkish	The activities should positively enhance fluent reading skills.	11
	The activities should align with the objectives and aims of fluent reading in Turkish.	11
	Texts in the activities should avoid words that hinder fluent reading.	9
	The activities should contribute positively to oral/silent fluent reading.	7

According to participant primary school teachers, regarding the suitability of textbook activities for developing fluent reading skills in Turkish, eleven teachers expressed that the activities positively contribute to fluent reading skills and align with the objectives and aims of fluent reading. Nine participants mentioned that the texts avoid words that hinder fluent reading, while seven stated that the activities contribute positively to both oral and silent fluent reading.

Some opinions from participating teachers in the research regarding the suitability of textbook activities for developing Turkish fluent reading skills are as follows:

T1: "The activities allow for both oral and silent reading. However, there is no specific focus on fluent reading. Additionally, some scientific quotations should be added at the beginning of the texts, and our students should read them."

T8: “The texts are suitable for fluent reading in terms of format, visuals, and content.”

T12: “The activities are prepared parallel to the texts we use in class. The activities in the texts are also sufficient.”

Table 3 Primary school teachers' opinions on the appropriateness of the activities in the textbooks for acquiring Turkish writing skills

Theme	Codes	f
The Suitability of the Activities in the Textbooks for Acquiring Turkish Writing Skills	The activities should positively enhance Turkish writing (good handwriting) skills.	10
	The activities should encourage writing meaningful and grammatically correct sentences.	8
	Text writing the activities should be supported with visuals.	8
	The activities should support different writing strategies.	5
	The activities should enhance fluent writing skills.	3

According to participant primary school teachers, regarding the suitability of textbook activities for developing Turkish writing skills, ten teachers stated that the textbook activities enhance writing skills in terms of writing style. Eight mentioned encouraging meaningful and grammatically correct writing supported by visuals, five noted they develop different writing strategies, and three indicated they enhance fluent writing skills.

Some opinions from participating teachers in the research regarding the suitability of textbook activities for developing Turkish writing skills are as follows:

T2: “I cannot say there are stimulating writing activities for bilingual students in the textbook. They often find writing activities tedious. Additionally, I would like to point out the lack of activities with digital and more realistic visuals.”

T5: “I find the writing activities quite sufficient.”

T9: “While the activities support writing skills in a conventional sense, it is inaccurate to say they support different writing strategies.”

Table 4 Primary school teachers' opinions on the appropriateness of the activities in the textbooks for acquiring Turkish listening skills

Theme	Codes	f
The Suitability of the Activities in the Textbooks for Acquiring Turkish Listening Skills	The activities should positively enhance listening skills.	8
	The activities should enable distinguishing letters corresponding to heard sounds.	5
	The activities should develop the ability to imitate sounds.	4
	The activities should support different listening strategies.	4
	The activities should promote listening in accordance with etiquette rules.	2

According to participant primary school teachers, concerning the suitability of activities in textbooks for developing Turkish listening skills, eight indicated that the activities positively enhanced listening skills, five noted that they facilitated distinguishing letters corresponding to heard sounds, four mentioned that they supported the ability to mimic sounds and various listening strategies. Two reported that they supported listening by etiquette rules.

The opinions of some participating primary school teachers regarding the suitability of textbook activities for fostering Turkish listening skills are as follows:

T2: "I cannot specifically state that there are activities aimed at developing direct listening skills. While the books contain an abundance of texts, the activities are designed for silent/oral reading."

T5: "I did not observe any activities that support listening."

T11: "In my opinion, the most crucial listening gain in the program is the ability to listen constructively and in accordance with etiquette rules. There are no activities related to this gain."

Table 5 Primary school teachers' opinions on the appropriateness of the activities in the textbooks for acquiring Turkish speaking skills

Theme	Codes	f
The Suitability of the Activities in the Textbooks for Acquiring Turkish Speaking Skills	The activities positively enhanced speaking skills.	5
	Students engaged in class discussions on a topic incorporated within the activities.	3
	The activities fostered student communication with both peers and adults.	2
	The activities promoted alignment between spoken language and body language.	2
	The activities supported unprepared speaking with accurate pronunciation.	1

According to participant primary school teachers, regarding the suitability of activities in textbooks to develop Turkish speaking skills, five reported that the activities positively enhanced speaking proficiency. Additionally, three participants noted that the activities encouraged classroom discussions on the topics covered. Moreover, two participants highlighted that the activities supported students' communication with peers and adults and the coherence between speech and body language. One participant also indicated that the activities supported the ability to speak spontaneously with correct pronunciation.

Some of the teachers participating in the research expressed their views regarding the suitability of activities in textbooks for enhancing Turkish speaking skills as follows:

T1: "The activities do not align with speaking competencies. Apart from a few texts that emphasize pronunciation, body language, and communication elements, these aspects are not addressed. Bilingual students struggle the most when speaking. Therefore, in newly published textbooks, there should definitely be plenty of activities aimed at Turkish speaking."

T2: "Although there are dialogues in the textbooks, activities that would enhance students' speaking abilities are lacking."

T3: "There are no activities targeting speaking skills."

Results and discussion

This study aims to examine the Turkish Language Activity Book, Turkish Language Exercise Book, and Turkish Language Workbook for Foreign Students prepared under the PİKTES+ project funded by the European Union, based on the perspectives of primary school teachers. Participants evaluated the content of the reviewed books within the scope of the research, aiming to equip students participating in the PİKTES+ Project with foundational elements of Turkish language skills, including reading comprehension, reading, writing, listening, and speaking. As a result, it was determined that the textbook activities generally enhance Turkish reading comprehension

skills and are aligned with reading comprehension objectives. However, some activities were inadequate, tedious, or not up to date. Like findings by Tiryaki and Oğraş (2020), deficiencies in materials used for teaching Turkish to foreigners focusing on reading comprehension were noted. Biçer and Kılıç (2017) concluded in their study on Turkish books used for Syrian students that while the reading comprehension contents are aligned with objectives, the materials are insufficient.

As another outcome of the research, it has been noted that the activities in the textbooks positively enhance Turkish fluent reading skills and are aligned with fluent reading achievements and objectives. It has also been indicated that the texts in the activities are free from challenging words that hinder fluent reading and contribute positively to both oral and silent fluent reading. Regarding the suitability of activities in textbooks for developing Turkish writing skills, it was concluded that the activities enhance writing skills in terms of handwriting (neat writing). However, they need to be improved in developing different writing strategies and fluent writing skills. Similarly, Erdem (2017) identified issues in developing writing skills and writing and visual coherence among primary school teachers with refugee students.

Some participant primary school teachers indicated that the textbook activities positively enhance Turkish listening skills. In contrast, others mentioned that the activities are inadequate in achieving listening skill outcomes, with some even stating the absence of any listening-related activities. This finding aligns with other research indicating shortcomings in Ministry-prepared instructional materials in assessing listening skills (Biçer & Kılıç, 2017; Erdem, 2017; Gün et al., 2014; Kılıç & Yenen, 2015; Tiryaki & Oğraş, 2020). Lastly, participant primary school teachers noted inadequacies in the activities in textbooks used under the PİKTES+ Project for developing Turkish speaking skills, stating that they do not support speaking spontaneously with correct pronunciation or improving communication with peers and adults among refugee students. Given that very few refugee students are comfortable speaking Turkish, there is a need to increase speaking activities that are currently insufficient (Üstün & Alimcan, 2021). Furthermore, speaking courses should be offered to student parents after addressing the inadequacy of speaking activities for refugee students (Dinler & Hacifazlıoğlu, 2020).

Based on the findings above, several recommendations are proposed for researchers and practitioners:

- Firstly, considering the global reality of refugee students, it is essential to provide in-service training on "multilingualism and multiculturalism" to current and prospective teachers. These in-service training programs should be incorporated into the joint training content of UNICEF and the Ministry of Turkish National Education for classroom teachers.
- Under the PİKTES+ Project, there is a need to incorporate content specifically aimed at developing listening and speaking skills in the existing textbooks, along with a thorough review of current content.
- Given the equal weightage that should be placed on the four basic language skills in language teaching—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—it is recommended to revise and balance the number of activities for each skill.
- Teacher guidebooks should be prepared for PİKTES+ activity and exercise books.
- Content in the textbooks should be engaging, supported by visuals, and complemented with interesting digital materials to avoid monotony and boredom.
- The revision should support different strategies for the four basic language skills.
- There is a need to organize Turkish language teaching courses for parents of refugee students.

- Lastly, since this study involved only 12 classroom teachers, future research should include a more extensive and diverse sample of teachers from different disciplines.

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