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To cite this article

Gun, M. & Ugur, A. (2020). Evaluation of Free Reading Texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set For Foreigners. Base for Electronic Educational Sciences, 1(1), 40-50.

Published Online	September 17, 2020
Article Views	21 single - 32 cumulative
Article Download	72 single - 131 cumulative

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Evaluation of Free Reading Texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set For Foreigners

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APA Citation:

Gün, M. & Uğur, A. (2020). Evaluation of free reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish set for foreigners. *Base For Electronic Educational Sciences*, 16(3), 00-00.

Submission Date: 22/06/2020

Acceptance Date: 13 /09/2020

Abstract

Reading is a competence gained after listening and speaking skills in mother tongue teaching but it might be said that it is one of the first competences gained in foreign language learning. Reading texts play a great role in gaining and developing the reading skill. Therefore, a great care should be given when choosing the reading texts in Turkish Sets prepared to teach Turkish as a foreign language. In this study, some of the free reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set were selected and evaluated on the basis of free reading activities given in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages. In this study, the document review method, which is one of the data collection tools in qualitative research, was employed. The findings of our research indicated that the visuals used in the free reading texts are neither effective nor original. However, cultural transfer through the reading texts is given weight as much as possible. It is, in particular, remarkable that comprehension activities are missing following the free reading texts. To help improve learners' skill to understand a word during their language learning process, free reading texts should be followed by some activities and exercises to ensure deeper and accurate comprehension

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Keywords: Reading, free reading, evaluation, teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

Introduction

To date, many definitions for reading, which is one of the basic skills in language teaching, have been made. Reading, as defined by Özdemir (2000: 11), is the reception, explanation, comprehension and interpretation of printed or written words by our sense organs. Dökmen (1994: 15) also remarks that reading skill is reading a text by understanding through some mental activities rather than seeing it. In Turkish Dictionary (2011: 1793), reading is defined as "looking at the letters and signs that make up a text, analysing or vocalizing them". As can be understood from these definitions, reading is just a process of comprehension of the text, in other words, it means understanding the text. Sever (2004: 14), explains the comprehension dimension of reading as: "Reading is an activity that requires a

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mental effort beyond barely seeing words, sentences, paragraphs and the text and vocalizing them; it is a process of thinking and it requires sense-making.”

Reading is one of the main skills gained during the language learning process because one may not be able to read a text just by looking at it. Therefore, reading is a tool that helps reader to use the information gained during the language learning process. Reading might have several kinds according to the reader's environment and purpose of reading. In this study, only the free reading technique will be focused on since free reading texts in *Yedi İklim Turkish* set form the basis of our study.

Free Reading

Savaş (2006: 59) defines free reading as follows: “reading a text written with a system of symbols and getting informed or having a leisure time and so having a desire for reading new books”. Öz (2001: 203), on the other hand, explains free reading as “an activity that students do to make use of their spare times (out of class, at school, at home or on holiday)”. Free reading in teaching Turkish as a foreign language, might be expressed as a developmental process of activating an individual's language skills, and understanding, and comprehending words by reading a text written on several topics in Turkish.

Free reading is an activity which develops language learners' skills of understanding a word, comprehending and interpreting its meaning according to the context it is in. The aim of free reading activities is not only forming a habit of reading but also enriching the vocabulary of the reader. Hence, Okur (2007: 5) tried to prove the effect of free reading on developing vocabulary and concepts by giving examples from Turkey and Turkish and concluded that free reading activities affect vocabulary and concept acquisition positively. According to Harmon (1998: 529), when such reading activities are chosen from some literary works, vocabulary and concept acquisition might be more productive. It is important that free reading texts in Turkish course book sets have a variety of literary genres as they display the eloquence of Turkish, as well. Özer (2007: 62) examined the contribution of free reading activities to language learners' vocabulary knowledge and found that they had a significant role in improving students' success.

Free reading texts are important as they improve the acquisition of the target language vocabulary and culture. According to Yıldız (2003; 99), reading the literary texts of a contemporary author in the classroom, introducing him, and exhibiting his/her literary works is an efficient way of forming a habit of free reading. Using free reading texts in the Turkish Sets and introducing the target culture and presenting relevant situations related to the target culture becomes more of an issue in learning a language together with its culture. In this respect, free reading texts should appeal to the foreign learners of Turkish language.

Implementing the free reading activity in teaching mother tongue is performed at schools in Turkey during the reading hour. The aim here is to help students gain the love of books and to form a habit of reading. Karadüz (2011:145) indicates that students employ some strategies during the reading process such as referring and relating between the reading text and their life experiences, interpreting, taking notes, underlining, rereading, developing empathy and imagining, getting motivated and paying attention. In teaching Turkish as a foreign language as well, it is observed that students use the same strategies by using their mother tongue, as well.

The following points should be considered when preparing free reading activities that appeal to the learners of Turkish:

- The words in free reading texts should reflect some certain patterns of expressions used in Turkish and should be appropriate to Turkish.
- Language levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) of students should be kept in mind when choosing the texts and the length of the texts should be adjusted according to their language levels.
- The text should be above the language level of the student as it aims to develop the student's ability of grasping and comprehending words.
- The content of the texts should reflect the real-life situations that student is to encounter in daily life.
- Free reading texts should be followed by some interesting activities, practices designed to determine the students' level of comprehension of the words.

The reading and comprehension activities given in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2017:54) are as follows:

- Reading correspondence
- Reading for orientation
- Reading for information and argument
- Reading instructions
- Reading as a free activity

As free reading texts are among "reading as a free activity" they are going to be evaluated in this framework.

Table 1

"Reading as a free activity" in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2017: 64).

Level	Descriptors
Pre-A1	No descriptors available
A1	Can understand short picture stories about daily activities written in a list of simple words. Can understand simple picture stories if helped to predict the content of the visual to summarize them. Can understand life stories, short stories and definitions written in a list of simple words.
A2	Can understand the content of a photograph story. (e.g. in a life style magazine) and can form an impression about how the characters look like. Can understand most of a short description of a person. (e.g. a celebrity) Can understand an event (e.g. Oscar), the gist of a short report, an article written in a clear and simple level. Can read and understand the key points of a film, book, concert etc., newspapers and magazines mass written for a large audience. Can understand places, events, emotions and visuals in the high frequency stories, guide books and magazines written in daily language.
B1	Can express and understand a travel diary, the major events of a travel, travel experiences and discoveries of a person. Can follow clear linear stories and high frequency stories, the chronology of events in stories, simple novels and comics written in daily language by regular use of a dictionary.
B2	Can read freely to a great extent a variety of texts (e.g. magazines, novels, history books, biographies, travel books, directories, lyrics and poems) for pleasure by adjusting style and speed of reading and by using appropriate reference sources. Can read clear, non-exhaustive novels with spirited narration provided that s/he can take his/her time and use a dictionary.
C1	Can read and evaluate a variety of literary texts provided that certain parts are chosen and h/she is allowed to access reference tools when needed.

Can read modern literary texts and implicit meanings and ideas written in standard but not fictional language.

C2 Can read almost all kinds of literary or non-literary texts of various genres, and understand finer points and implicit and indirect meaning.

The recently increasing interest in Turkish has accelerated the studies in the field of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. This has led to the preparation of new learning settings in accordance with the needs of our age and extended to formation of new learning environments appropriate to the expectations of the students. Therefore, free reading texts should also appeal to their needs and expectations.

Method

The Aim of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the free reading texts in *Yedi İklim* Turkish Set prepared for use in teaching Turkish as a foreign language and to examine their conformity with the reading-comprehension activities in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages.

The Research Method

This is a qualitative study, which is conducted when observation and interview is not possible and may include some written and visual materials to enhance its validity (Tanrıoğen, 2009: 239). In this respect, the document review method was used in this study, which aims to examine and evaluate the free reading texts. In the document review method, both written and visual (pictures, videos, etc.) materials might be used (Metin, 2015: 363).

Limitations to the Study

This study is limited to the examination of free reading texts included in the *Yedi İklim Turkish Set* prepared by Yunus Emre Institute.

Results

Table 2

Free Reading Texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set A1 Course Book

A1 Course Book Free Reading Texts

My Family (p. 52)
 What do we say when we do shopping? (p. 74)
 Poems & Hymns from Hacı Bayram Veli (p. 94)
 Traditional Jobs : Coppersmith (p. 114)
 Phaeton (p. 134)
 Correspondence (p. 152)
 Salat eideain (p. 172)

The visuals used for free reading activities in A1 Course Book are not prepared to help students to predict the content of the text. It might be said that the visuals here are inadequate as they do not reflect the text content. It would help the students to better predict the content when original pictures are used. In the text *My Family*, it is critical to teach the vocabulary used for family members such as “*grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, elder brother,*” as they display the rich vocabulary of the Turkish language. It can also be said that such expressions are important because they also show the family structure in the Turkish culture. In the text *What do we say when we do shopping?* some simple daily expressions like

“have a nice working day, thank God, enjoy it!, good luck with it, keep the change” are given. More of such kind of expressions should be given in free reading texts prepared for the A1 level because the language learner is very likely to encounter and use them very often. Some epigrams by the Turkish Sufi and poet Hacı Bayram Veli are given and some universal values (be respectful to your elderly, love children, tell the truth at all times, never lie, etc.) are emphasized. In the text *Traditional Jobs: Coppersmith*, a traditional Turkish job is introduced and in “*Phaeton*,” which refers to an old means of transportation, is presented. Free reading texts prepared for the A1 level should contain more daily language rather than being information-based. In the text *Correspondence*, the old Turkish communication system is given. Instead of this text, another text about communication tools could be given for A1 level. For instance, a text about telephone, which is one of the communication tools, could be given and the expression “Alo” could be taught here. In the text *Salat eideain*, the routine of rituals in the morning of a religious holiday is given as a chain of events, so language learners are informed of the Turkish traditions and customs. With regard to determining the students’ level of comprehension and understanding, some interesting and appealing activities or practises are missing. Only the text *Salat eideain* is followed by a speaking activity.

Table 3

Free reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set A2 Course Book

A2 Course Book Free Reading Texts

Kayseri Mantisi (p. 26)
 Turkish Baths (p. 46)
 Our Ancestor Sport: *Cirit* (p. 68)
 Gllaç and Aşure (p. 88)
 Art of Tile (p. 110)
 Bird Houses (p. 148)
 Whizz Kid (p. 168)

It is observed that the visuals used for free reading texts in the A2 Course Book do not help the student to predict the content. The text titled “Tile Art” has no visuals to help the student understand the content of the text. Free reading texts are activities for reading comprehension and therefore supporting the texts with appropriate visuals will help students to understand the text more easily. In reference to the text *Kayseri Mantısı* (Turkish type of ravioli), using the well-known expression “*Fitting 40 each manti in one spoon*”, highlighting that *manti* is one of the primary delicacies in the Turkish Cuisine, it might be said that it is important to use such culture-specific expressions in teaching Turkish food culture and introducing the Turkish foods. Similarly, the texts *Gllaç* and *Aşure* introduce the traditional Turkish food. In the text *Turkish Baths*, Turkish hammams are introduced and in the text *Our Ancestor Sport: Cirit*, an old Turkish horse-riding sport is introduced. In the text *Tile Art*, one of the traditional Turkish arts is introduced. Likewise, in the text *Bird Houses*, bird houses that are important in the Turkish culture and arts are introduced. In the text *Whizz-Kid*, a short life story of Barış Manço is given. When we look at the texts insofar, we see that mostly Turkish culture specific topics are preferred. We might say that the text *Whizz-Kid* is written so as to meet the criteria such as understanding short stories and definitions. In addition, adding a song by Barış Manço before or after the text might ensure more effective and permanent learning. Some interesting activities or practices to determine the students’ level of comprehension and understanding are missing. Only the texts *Gllaç* and *Aşure* are followed by a writing activity.

Table 4*Free Reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set B1 Course Book***B1 Course Book Free Reading Texts**

Bellman (p. 24)
Interpreter of Conditions (p. 44)
Turkish Bookbinding Art (p. 66)
Does our lifetime have a certificate of warranty? (p. 88)
Aşık Veysel Şatıroğlu (p. 106)
Having a dream in Turkish Society (p. 126)
Have a long lasting marriage (p. 146)
Unforgettable Couple of Turkish Cinema: Münir Özkul - Adile Naşit (p. 166)

It might be said that the visuals in the B1 course book are more predictable than those in the A1 and A2 Course Books with respect to the free reading texts. The text *Does our lifetime have a certificate of warranty?* has no visuals to help student to understand the content of the text. The texts *Bellman*, *Interpreter of Conditions*, *Turkish Bookbinding Art* inform the reader about the first Turkish newspaper and first bookbinding practices of Turks. Such texts might be evaluated within the category of “reading for information and argument set out in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages.” Therefore, these two texts should not be included in the category of “free reading activity”. In the text *Does our lifetime have a certificate of warranty?*, some daily life situations are given. In addition, this text draws attention as being the lengthiest free reading text in the course book serving as a resource for our text review. In the text *Âşık Veysel Şatıroğlu*, a short life story of Aşık Veysel is given. According to the criteria “can understand the lyrics of a song written in a list of simple words” given in the chart “reading as a free activity” in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages B1 level, it might be useful to add an activity including the lyrics of Aşık Veysel following the text. The pictures used in the text *Having a dream in Turkish Society* are of importance as they reflect the content of the text. Here, the text focuses on how Turkish people take dreams seriously. In the text *Have a long lasting marriage*, the use of this expression is important. More of such Turkish phrases should be added to free reading texts. In the text *Unforgettable Couple of Turkish Cinema*, the character traits of this famous couple, Münir Özkul and Adile Naşit are presented. Such free reading texts might be followed by films of such actors and actresses. Some of the free reading activities are given with some interesting activities or practices in order to determine the students’ level of comprehension and understanding in terms of the words. A speaking activity is given as a follow up activity after the texts like *Tercüman-ı Ahvâl* and *Aşık Veysel Şatıroğlu*. A writing activity follows the text *Have a long lasting marriage*.

Table 5*Free Reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set B2 Course Book***B2 Course Book Free Reading Texts**

Trick (p. 32)
Collective Work (p. 54)
Turkish tradition of naming a new-born (p. 78)
Do not look a gift horse in the mouth (p. 98)
Language of Emotions: Art of embroidery (p. 116)
He managed to fly with fake wings, flew over the ocean with muscle power, rode over the polar line on a bike (p. 138)
Jobs from past to present (p. 158)
Unexpected guest (p. 178)

It is observed that the pictures used for free reading activities in B2 Course Book are not facilitating the prediction of the text content. However, the effect of the pictures lessens as the language level progresses. In this respect, it might be said that the pictures here do not have a direct effect on free reading. The free reading texts in the B2 Course Book are edited and simplified. More original texts should be preferred in language teaching. Original texts are the ones written to serve to a social purpose and they make the language learner feel that he or she is learning the real language, and he/she is in communication with the speakers of that language and with those who live in that country (Durmuş and Okur, 2013: 297). According to Table 1, a B2 language learner can read several types of texts with the appropriate style and speed. Free reading texts in B2 do not display a variety in terms of their types. Using the phrases and proverbs like “*know a trick of*” and “*do not look a gift horse in the mouth*” in the texts *Trick* and *Do not look a gift horse in the mouth*, are important because they show the language learner how to understand and interpret the meanings of the words . In the text *Turkish tradition of naming a new-born*, an old Turkish tradition is introduced, which has a significant place in Turkish culture. Some activities or exercises from Dede Korkud Epic, where we can find the best examples of naming a new-born tradition could be given here. The *Collective Work* and *Art of embroidery* also inform the language learner about the old Turkish traditions. *He managed to fly with fake wings, flew over the ocean with muscle power, rode over the polar line on a bike* are the texts knitted with more abstract thoughts. It is notable to use the texts with abstract meanings rather than the ones with concrete expressions in language development. Literary texts might be used for this purpose. Traditional Jobs such as “*ironmonger, vegetable seller, cattle dealer*” are introduced in the text *Jobs from past to present* and the modern-day versions of these traditional jobs are given here. The importance of Turkish hospitality is explained in the text *Unexpected Guest*. Some engaging activities to check and consolidate students’ comprehension of the text and words are missing. Only the text *Collective Work* is followed up by a writing activity, in the text *Language of emotions: Art of Embroidery*, as a pre-reading activity a writing activity is given; similarly, in the text *Unexpected Guest*, a speaking activity related to the text is given.

Table 6

Free Reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set C1 Course Book

C1 Course Book Free Reading Texts

A Traditional Turkish Sport : Matrak (p. 32)
 Antioch (p. 52)
 Man of Heart: Yunus Emre (p. 70)
 Sherbet (p. 90)
 Treaty of Kadesh (p. 110)
 Cultural Relations (p. 128)
 I was a hidden secret in God’s lamp (p. 152)
 Typologies (p. 168)

It is observed that the pictures used for free reading texts in the C1 Course Book are not prepared to facilitate predicting and comprehending the content of the texts. However, the effect of pictures lessens as the language level advances. In this respect, it might be said that visuals have no direct effect in free reading. Free reading texts in the C1 Course Book offering a variety of literary texts for the language learner are important for language development. In the text *A Traditional Turkish Sport*, “*Matrak*” is introduced. In *Antioch*, the reader is informed about “*Antakya*,” and here universal values are highlighted. In the text *Man of Heart: Yunus Emre*, a short life story of Yunus Emre is given and some verses by him are presented. Including poetry in free reading texts is essential so that different usages

of Turkish can be seen by students. In the text *Sherbet*, different pronunciations of this word are given. Thus, vocabulary learning is ensured by using the words pronounced same in different languages or by using similar words. In *Treaty of Kadesh*, a historical treaty is given. These kinds of texts might be discussed under the category of reading for information and argument as set out in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages- reading-comprehension activities. Therefore, it is inappropriate to present this text under the category of free reading activity. In *Cultural Relations*, a current issue, the program of “International Turkish Arab Common Cultural Inheritance Symposium” is given. In *I was a hidden secret in God’s lamp*, a text by Karacaoğlan, who is one of the most prominent poets of minstrel literature, is given. In *Typologies*, a literary genre in the Old Turkish Literature is introduced. There are no interesting and appealing activities or exercises that will determine the students’ level of comprehension and understanding. However, in the *Treaty of Kadesh*, a writing activity as a pre-reading exercise is given. To ensure better understanding of free reading texts, some pre- and post-reading activities need to be included.

Table 7

Free reading texts in Yedi İklim Turkish Set C2 Course Book

C2 Course Book Free Reading Texts

Full of Folk Songs (p. 24)

Mona Rosa (p. 42)

Woman Outfit (p.64)

Death of Philosophers and the Ladder (p. 80)

When a faded rose touches (p. 100)

Lavinia and May rose not go away from my window (p. 116)

Serenade (p. 132)

I cannot Express - The passenger and the coachman (p. 152)

In *Full of Folk Songs*, a poem by Bedri Rahmi Eyüpoğlu, in *Mona Rosa*, a poem by Sezai Karakoç, in the text *Death of Philosophers*, a poem by Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, in *Ladder*, a poem by Ahmet Haşim, in *When a faded rose touches*, a poem by Ahmet Necatigil, in *Lavinia* a poem by Özdemir Asaf, in *May rose never go away from my window*, a poem by Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı, in *Serenade*, a poem by Ahmet Muhip Dranas, in *I cannot Express*, a poem by Orhan Veli Kanık, and in *The passenger and the coachman*, a poem by Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel are presented. Free reading texts offering a variety of literary genres here are remarkable in that they allow students to get familiar with different types of texts. Especially making use of poems here is important as they show different meanings of words as well as reflecting the rich world of meaning in Turkish. In the text *Woman Outfit*, some information about female dresses is given. For free reading activities, special attention should be paid to choose interesting texts, as well as those reflecting real-life situations which students might encounter in real life. The free reading texts in the C2 Course Book are not supported with relevant visuals to help students predict the content of the text. This might be because the free reading texts in the C2 are mostly poems. As indicated in the chart “reading as a free activity”, a language learner at the C2 level can read all literary or non-literary texts and can understand finer details and implicit meanings. For this purpose, in C2, more implicit and finer poems are preferred in comparison with other genres. Interesting activities and exercises to determine students’ level of vocabulary comprehension are missing.

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendation

Not an exact consensus has been reached yet about what kind of reading texts should be chosen and what criteria should be taken into consideration for these reading texts in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. The aim of this study is not to explicate the sort of reading texts but to evaluate free reading texts within the context of Yedi İklim Turkish Set. As a matter of fact, free reading is an important matter which needs to be emphasized in teaching Turkish as a foreign language to ensure that students make use of their spare time by reading texts in the target language. Yedi İklim Turkish Set offers seven free reading texts in each of the A1 and A2 levels and eight free reading texts in each of the B1, B2, C1 and C2 levels. Upon reviewing the selected free reading texts, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The pictures given with free reading texts in A1 and A2 are not original and do not facilitate prediction of the text content. Selection of original pictures for free reading texts, especially for the A1 and A2 levels, is important as they motivate students to read the text and help them to predict the content.
- The free reading texts given in the A1 and A2 levels mostly introduce the Turkish culture and give past and current information about the Turkish culture.
- It might be said that the length of the selected texts are appropriate to the levels of A1 and A2.
- The free reading texts in the B1 and B2 course books are also more about the Turkish culture.
- It might be said that the length of the selected texts are appropriate to the levels of B1 and B2. However, they do not have a significant difference from the ones in A1 and A2 course books in terms of their level and content.
- The free reading texts given in the C1 and C2 course books go on with culture specific texts, as well; the Turkish culture is introduced and past and current information about Turkish culture is given here.
- It might be said that the length of the selected texts for the C1 and C2 levels are not appropriate. However, choosing lengthy poems as a literary genre here may have an effect on that.
- Pre-reading or post-reading activities related to the free reading texts are given little space.

According to the results obtained about the free reading texts, the following recommendation could be made:

- Turkish culture should not be necessarily focussed on that much in the free reading texts examined here. This is because it might cause a feeling of cultural assimilation and giving current cultural elements where language use is to be performed would be more appropriate rather than those of the old Turkish culture. Therefore, it is also necessary to include certain universal cultural elements in the free reading texts.
- A list of vocabulary to be learned according to the language level should be compiled and these words should be given in the free reading texts.
- Using a variety of literary genres in free reading texts helps students' read different types of texts and understand them. Therefore, poems should be made use of as much as possible to show the rich world of meaning in Turkish.
- As free reading texts improve perception and comprehension skills of language learners, they should be supported with some activities to help them better understand the text and interpret it more accurately.

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