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HIGH LEVEL THINKING EDUCATION IN MOTHER TONGUE TEXTBOOKS IN TURKEY AND FRANCE

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to comparatively examine whether questions in Turkish and French mother tongue textbooks improve high level thinking skills of students. The questions were examined by use of content analysis method in accordance with Haladyna's classification giving weight to high level thinking skills. The study showed that French and Turkish textbooks contain the "Understanding" subcategory the most. In the textbooks of both countries, the numbers of questions for the improvement of "Critical Thinking" skills are at close proportions, whereas the rate of questions for the improvement of "Problem Solving" skills is quite low. While French textbooks contain adequate and functional questions for the improvement of "Creativity" skills, Turkish textbooks were found to be poor in this respect.

Key Words: High Level Thinking Education, Questions, Turkish Textbooks, French Textbooks.

1. Introduction

Reading, containing many elaborated actions, is an active process of communication and interaction between the writer and the reader. The essential purpose of reading activity is to perceive the meaning by comprehending it accurately and quickly; in other words, to understand what is communicated by the writer. Reading, one of the most fundamental ways of learning and getting informed, requires an intellectual effort and interpretation; in short, a creative concern beyond the actions of seeing and vocalizing the text. It is a process of progress embodying cognitive, affective and kinaesthetic dimensions, and it consists of reasoning (Beck, 1989; Öz, 2001; Sever, 2004). The essential variable of reading comprehension skill is the wealth of vocabulary and realm of concepts as words are concepts and they are the basic elements of thinking. There are studies proving a strong relationship between the wealth of vocabulary and understanding / learning (Sever, 2004; PISA, 2006).

In addition to the national assessment studies conducted in the field of education, some countries also participate in international assessment programmes such as PIRLS and PISA, focusing on "reading skills" as well and actually coming in for criticism with regard to the topics of "cultural equality" and "the existence of biased item functioning" (Yıldırım, 2006; Goldstein and Thomas, 2008), in order to determine their status on an international level and increase the level of education by establishing certain standards by taking the findings reached as a base. In the PIRLS project organized in 2001, in the field of reading skills, Turkey held the 28th rank. While Norway, Switzerland, Japan, France, USA and Germany were in the middle segment, Turkey, again with a low average score, was in the low segment. In PISA 2006, the success score for reading skills in Turkey was found to be 447 points; 63,2% of the students in Turkey was on the 1st and 2nd proficiency levels. As can be seen, in the field of reading comprehension skills, Turkish students are at a lower level than their peers particularly in European countries (PISA 2003/2006 and PIRLS, 2001 International Reports). Many students in Turkey get quite low grades in national-scale success assessment examinations such as SBS, OKS and OSS (EARGED, 2002). Among the reasons for this failure, lack of functional activities to enhance vocabulary, setbacks in teaching the habits of reading/understanding literary texts, and difficulty in understanding the quality of mother tongue

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education can be listed (Sever, 2002). Another important reason is that Turkish textbooks are not efficient enough in terms of both texts, activities and questions (Göğüş, 1994; Ruhi and Kocaman, 1996).

1.1. Questions in Mother Tongue Textbooks and Their Place in High Level Thinking Education

Textbooks still remain the most widely used education tools in elementary and secondary education curricula (Özbay, 2003; Conderman and Elf, 2007). Questions are parts of a textbook that openly interact with the student and that are directly posed to students. The activity of thinking begins with questions; however, it is the effective and qualified questions that force the students into an intellectual effort. The questions should be of the quality that will improve students' reasoning skills and processes, allow for the students to synthesize their own knowledge and experiences with what they learn at school, encourage them to improve their personal viewpoints and interpretation on a topic, create new fields of questioning in the students' minds, and make sure that the students can use other viewpoints (Bağlı and Esen, 2003).

The most general objective that contemporary mother tongue education should reach is to train individuals with improved high level thinking and communicative skills (Marshall, 1994; Sever, 2002). Being able to reach this objective requires the preparation of qualified questions for mother tongue textbooks, as well as other variables (Worthy and Hoffman, 1997; Goatly, 2000; Nas, 2003). The questions in the textbooks need to be prepared in a way that they will allow for the students to make logical inferences, analysis, syntheses, assessments and interpretations, and contribute in the improvement of their high level thinking skills such as understanding, problem solving, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, assessment and creativity (Bloom, Hastings, and Madaus, 1971; Morgan and Shermis, 1989; Simpson, 1996; Haladyna, 1997; Facione, 1998; Küçük, 2002; Elder and Paul, 2003).

High level thinking skills are important and integral to the educational process. Fostering students' higher order thinking skills is considered an important educational goal (Harper, 2003; Zohar and Dori, 2003; İpşiroğlu, 2004). The use of thinking in learning-teaching environments serves both for a better understanding of the lesson and for a better learning of thinking (Paul and Elder, 2001). Individuals with high level thinking skills can better interpret events and facts, respect other people's rights, and be more successful in life. People with this skill have wider fields of interest; they have a conditioned store of knowledge based on a rich explanatory process (Koberg and Bagnall, 1981; Patrick, 1986; Kazancı, 1989; Hirose, 1992; Keenan, 1997; Ferrett, 1997; Woolfolk, 1998; Wright, 2002; Commission of the European Communities, 2009).

Comparative education as a field of study that emerged after World War II is the branch of education that studies theories and practices of education in various countries for the discussion of educational problems in a wider scope. It is a diverse field which most commonly addresses questions about schooling and school / society relations (Arnové, Altbach, and Kelly, 1992). Comparative education is naturally concerned with cross-national analyses and/or cross-cultural studies, and the field encourages its participants to be outward-looking. It may draw experiences from other countries to broaden perspectives on educational change and development (Bray, 2005; Kelly and Altbach, 1989; Noah and Eckstein, 1998).

In the elementary education Turkish language curricula put into effect in the 2005-2006 education year in Turkey, "raising individuals who understand what they read, make sense of events and situations correctly using their own experiences, find alternative and creative solutions for the problems they face, think critically and creatively, and adopt a behaviour to research into, question, criticize and interpret events, situations and information by making use of their own background" are listed among the essential purposes. Likewise, the importance of training individuals with improved critical and analytical thinking skills is frequently emphasized in French education curriculum. According to the curriculum, one of the two approaches in studying texts is analytical reading. Analytical reading is defined as reading that is done for the clarification of the meaning of the text and that tries to establish high level thinking skills in the student such as analysis and interpretation (French Education Program, 2008). Textbooks are prepared in accordance with the understanding in the curriculum (Ceyhan and Yiğit, 2004). Accordingly, whether the reading comprehension questions in Turkish and French textbooks are of quality that will improve students' high level thinking skills as emphasized in the curricula is a topic that is worth knowing about.

In this study, Turkish and French mother tongue textbooks will be studied in terms of the quality of reading comprehension questions by taking into consideration that France is at a higher level than Turkey according to the PISA 2003 and 2006 assessment results, and no studies have been conducted so far on the comparison of the questions in French mother tongue textbooks with those in Turkish mother tongue textbooks. The general objective of this study is to examine whether reading skills questions in Turkish and French textbooks improve high level thinking skills of students and to make a comparison between the textbooks of the two countries in terms of their containing questions for the improvement of high level thinking skills.

2. Methods

2.1. Turkish and French Education System

Elementary education in Turkey given for a period of eight years and covering the education of children from the ages of 6-14 is obligatory. Whereas in France, obligatory education covers the education of children aged from 6 to 15 and the first five years is called “elementary education”. In French education system, elementary education consists of the education of children between the ages of 6-11; while college education contains the education of children aged between 11-15, which corresponds to the 6th, 7th and 8th grades of elementary education in Turkey. Secondary education takes place over a seven-year period, from sixième to terminale (www.meb.gov.tr; Eurydice, 2009).

2.2. Selection of textbooks

In this study, reading comprehension questions in elementary education 6th, 7th and 8th grade Turkish textbooks (TTB6, TTB7, TTB8) and in French textbooks (FTB6, FTB7 and FTB8) that correspond to elementary education in Turkey but found within the scope of secondary education in France were analysed according to the classification by Haladyna (1997) on the grounds that it is a classification putting weight on “high level thinking skills”. In France, “collège education” lasts 4 years (Eurydice, 2009); however, in order to equalize the number and level of textbooks of both countries, 3rd grade French textbook was not included in the analysis. Therefore, the number of the textbooks that were examined is 6. The titles and credentials of the books are given in Annex 1. In the textbooks of both countries, “Grammar” questions were not included in the analysis. Some questions contain options such as “a”, “b”, and “c”. Each of these questions were analysed separately.

2.3. Data collection and analysis procedures

The questions were analysed through “content analysis”, a qualitative research method frequently used in this type of studies. Content analysis is perhaps the fastest-growing technique in quantitative research. It may be briefly defined as the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). In the study, “high level thinking skills” was taken as the analysis category, and this main category was divided into four subcategories as “Understanding” (U), “Problem Solving” (PS), “Critical Thinking” (CT) and “Creativity” (C) in accordance with Haladyna’s (1997) classification. Besides, the questions that did not belong to any of these categories but that were posed in order to get information students’ daily lives were studied under the title “Any Category” (AC). These subcategories were included in the present analysis as follows:

Understanding: It applies to facts, concepts, principles, and procedures. It is related to three specific types of student behavior: define the fact, concept, principle or procedure without using the verbatim definition given; generate or select the relevant characteristics of the fact, concept, principle, or procedure. Select or identify examples of the fact, concept, principle, or procedure being understood. Key verbs are: define, demonstrate, describe, find, exemplify, illustrate, list, listen, provide, show, and tell (Haladyna, 1997).

Problem Solving: It is a set of mental steps leading to the realization of a goal, usually an answer. Problem solving can also involve physical steps or a combination of mental and physical steps; it may also involve other types of mental behavior, like memorising, understanding, and critical thinking. Key verbs are: answer, compute, conclude, determine, find, figure out, locate and solve (Haladyna, 1997).

Critical Thinking: It makes us reflect, compare, evaluate, and then make a judgment. It is often thought of as a collection of mental skills that can be taught. It has two aspects: evaluating and predicting. Key verbs are: anticipate, appraise, attack, analyze, classify, compare, contrast, critique, defend, distinguish, expect, evaluate, hypothesize, infer, judge, predict, relate, value (Haladyna, 1997).

Creativity: It involves new combinations of familiar elements. It requires tremendous energy, commitment, discipline, dedication, hard work, and motivation. While creative ability may be innate, teaching and testing for creativity involves creating situations where creativity can be expressed, providing resources for creative expression, and evaluating the result. Key verbs are: build, construct, create, design, invent, make, perform, plan, redesign, and write (Haladyna, 1997).

To provide inter-rater reliability of the content areas, all subcategories and all questions in TTB8 were randomly chosen and coded by another educational sciences academician. An average of 96 % consistency was noted, implying a good inter-rater reliability (Hall and Houten, 1983). “Question” was chosen as the “unit of analysis” while analysing the books in the research, and the frequency of occurrence of the designated subcategories in each question was determined. At this stage, the questions matching the subcategories or explaining designated subcategories or questions directly conveying the meaning were taken into consideration. The weight of each aspect was valued as a point in order to find out the total question numbers in the textbooks. The values of subcategories in the textbooks are indicated in the tables as frequency and percentage values.

3. Findings

3.1. Turkish Textbooks

Turkish textbooks consist of 3 separate books as Turkish Student’s Textbook (TTB), Teacher’s Guide Book (TGB), and a separate book containing texts only. The examples given in the study are extracted from TTBs and TGBs. In the textbooks of the three grades, there are 18 themes and 58 texts in total. Categories of “high level thinking skills” related to the reading comprehension questions in Turkish textbooks are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of All the Categories in Turkish Textbooks according to Frequency (f) and Percentage (%)

Categories		Turkish Textbooks			TOTAL
		TTB6	TTB7	TTB8	
U	F	281	416	422	1119
	%	61.3	66.1	67	65.2
PS	F	17	10	13	40
	%	3.7	1.6	2.1	2.3
CT	F	96	84	78	258
	%	21	13.4	12.4	15
C	F	26	38	16	80
	%	5.7	6	2.5	4.7
AC	F	38	81	101	220
	%	8.3	12.9	16	12.8
TOTAL	F	458	629	630	1717
	%	100	100	100	100

According to Table 1, the subcategory that has a significantly higher rate in all the three Turkish textbooks is the subcategory “U” (61,3% in TTB6, 66,1% in TTB7, 67% in TTB8 and 65.2 % in average in total). Besides, 220 questions (12.8%) in total in the three textbooks were evaluated under the title “AC”. In TTB6, the subcategory “U” is followed by “CT” (21%) and “AC” (8,3%). The lowest intensity scores in the textbook belong to the subcategories “C” (5,7%) and “PS” (3,7%).

In TTB7, the subcategory “U” is again followed by “CT” (13,4%) and “AC” (12,9%). The lowest intensity scores in the textbook belong to the subcategories “C” (6%) and “PS” (1,6%). In TTB8 in which the subcategory “U” is found the most, this subcategory is followed by “AC” (16%)” and “CT” (12,4%). The lowest intensity scores in the textbook belong to the subcategories “C” (2,5%) and “PS” (2,1%).

The below statements quoted from the Turkish textbooks can be given as examples for the subcategory “U”:

What does the writer consider as the reason for the loss of the land? Which examples does he give about deforestation? (TGB6, 264).

According to the text, what is the most evident difference between human beings and mannequins? (TGB7, 68).

Examples for the subcategory “PS”:

Below you can see a city that has lost its blue. Imagine you are the Environmental Minister. What would you do for this city, and how would you make the city recover its blue? (TGB6, 253).

What problems does the writer’s father have? Suggest some solutions for these problems. (TSB7, 178).

Examples for the subcategory “CT”:

Evaluate the text in terms of language and expression (the word counts of the sentences, semantic features of adjectives, figurative uses). (TGBK6, 217).

Why do you think the fish does not go inside the house? What might Mr. Zihni have said wrong in your opinion? (TGB8, 221).

Examples for the subcategory “C”:

If you were the grandfather, how would you explain your grandchildren that books are a person’s best friend and the benefits of books? (TGB6, 86).

Fictionalize the ending of the story considering that the text is not finished. (TGB8, 146).

Examples for the subcategory “AC”:

Is there a bookcase at your home where your books are found? (TGB6, 86).

Which poets’ poems are found in your poem book? (TGB7, 146).

3.2. French Textbooks

French textbook is just one book; that is, the texts and questions for the comprehensions of the texts are found in the same book. While there are 6 themes in each of the Turkish textbooks, there are 10 sequences corresponding to the concept of “theme” in French textbooks. In short, the number of themes in French textbooks is about twice more than that of Turkish textbooks. One of the remarkable findings is that the reading comprehension questions in French textbooks (n=3143) is much more than those in Turkish textbooks (n=1717), they are almost twice more than the questions in Turkish textbooks.

In FTB6, there are 54 texts. This amount is about three times more than that of TTB6. While there are 19 texts in TTB7, there are 63 texts in FTB7; and this number is more than three times of the number of texts in TTB7. And while there are 20 texts in total in TTB8, there are 76 texts in FTB8; in other words, the number of texts in FTB8 is more than four times the number of texts in TTB8. Categories of “high level thinking skills” related to the reading comprehension questions in French textbooks are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Breakdown of All the Categories in French Textbooks according to Frequency (f) and Percentage (%)

Categories	French Textbooks			TOTAL
	FTB6	FTB7	FTB8	
U	454	679	792	1925
	64.7	60.8	59.8	61.2
PS	21	23	28	72
	3	2.1	2.1	2.3
CT	60	141	286	487
	8.5	12.6	21.6	15.5
C	116	192	193	501
	16.5	17.2	14.5	16
AC	51	81	26	158
	7.3	7.3	2	5
TOTAL	702	1116	1325	3143
	100	100	100	100

According to Table 2, as the case is in Turkish textbooks, the subcategory with the highest rate in French textbooks is subcategory “U” (64,7% in FTB6, 60,8% in FTB7, 59,8% in FTB8 and 61,2% in total in average). Besides, a total of 158 questions (5%) in all the three books are found in the subcategory “AC”. In FTB6, subcategory “U” is followed by “C” (16,5%) and “CT” (8,5%). The lowest intensity scores in the textbook belong to the subcategories “AC” (7,3%) and “PS” (3%).

In FTB7, subcategory “U” is followed by “C” (17,2%) and “CT” (12,6%). The lowest intensity scores in the textbook belong to the subcategories “AC” (7,3%) and “PS” (2,1%). In FTB8, subcategory “U” is followed by “CT” (21,6%) and “C” (14,5%). The lowest intensity scores in the textbook belong to the subcategories “PS” (2,1%) and “AC” (2%).

The below statements quoted from the French textbooks can be given as examples for the subcategory “U”:

According to the ethnologist, what is the good of knowing languages? Indicate the passage that supports your answer on the text. (FTB6, 23).

In this poem, who is addressing who for what purpose? (FTB7, 38).

Examples for the subcategory “PS”:

You go to a new country. That country’s people come near you. Make a speech for them to meet you trustingly. (FTB7, 219).

What needs to be done in order to turn this dialogue into an act? (FTB8, 196).

Examples for the subcategory “CT”:

Who might have talked first? Prove your reply. (FTB6, 35).

Make your assessments about the characters and figures in this story and the benefits of reading this story. (FTB8, 163).

Examples for the subcategory “C”:

A Greek comes to your city from antiquity. You can’t wait to interview him as a journalist. Act out this scene of two people using your history knowledge. (FTB6, 190).

Choose one of the suggested situations and write a scene about that situation. Give names to people, and a title to the scene. (FTB7, 67).

Examples for the subcategories “AC”:

The 11th text is a poem written in Finnish. Who speaks this language? (FTB6, 40).

What is the genre of the work which this extract belongs to? How many items are there? (FTB7, 20).

4. Discussion

In this study, questions for the comprehension of the texts in French and Turkish textbooks were analysed comparatively in terms of their level of containing “high level thinking skills” in accordance with Haladyna’s classification. The first remarkable finding is that the number of reading comprehension questions in French textbooks is much more than the number of such questions in Turkish textbooks; this number is almost doubled in French textbooks. This case can be associated with the extra number of themes and texts in French textbooks. As the number of the texts increases, the number of questions also increases naturally. It is a positive conclusion for French textbooks that they expose students to more texts of both literary / artistic and informative type, and more questions to study those texts, and that the number of texts and questions incrementally increases as the grade increases. On the other hand, in Turkish textbooks, an incremental increase is observed neither in the number of texts nor in the number of questions in particularly 7th and 8th grade textbooks.

In the textbooks of both countries, the subcategory “U” is given more places at close rates when compared to the other subcategories. This result may be related with the analysis of only the questions directly for the comprehension of the texts. The writers of the textbooks have given more places to

questions for the understanding/comprehension of the events in the texts. Questions for the understanding of what is being read and for the comprehension of the entire text are of course important; however, it could have been possible to pose such questions in a way that would not only question the understanding skill, but also improve high level thinking skills with additional questions. For example, the question “According to the writer, what is the reason for lack of communication among people?” (TGB8, 202) could have been arranged in a way that would also improve high level thinking skills by adding questions such as “In your opinion, what kind of problems does lack of communication among people lead to? Why?”.

Furthermore, in both Turkish and French textbooks, some of the questions evaluated under subcategory “U” are on the literal dimension of comprehension skills; in other words, the answers to these questions are given exactly and explicitly in the text. One of such questions is “Where and when was Atatürk born?” (TGB6, 107) and in the text, there is the statement “Atatürk was born in 1881 in Salonika”. At the end of a text the title of which is “Atatürk and His Great Work” and which is entirely about Atatürk, there is the question “Who is being discussed in the text?” (TGB6, 108). Such questions do not serve for the improvement of students’ high level skills.

Another important finding is that the questions for the improvement of “CT” skills in the textbooks of both countries are at very close rates and functional whereas the questions for the improvement of “PS” skills are at equal rates and very few in number. When the importance of problem solving skill in a person’s life is considered, it is evident that such questions should be included more in the textbooks of both countries.

The very few number of questions for the improvement of “C” skill in Turkish textbooks is a significant deficiency. “Creative thinking is generative, divergent, lateral, diffuse, subjective, visual, associative and respectively. It is essential to all rational dialogical thinking” (Glassner and Schwarz, 2007). In creativity; originality, innovation, production, invention; in short, making a synthesis are in question (Sönmez, 2007), and the questions in textbooks should be qualified to improve this skill as well. In French textbooks, questions for the improvement of this skill are included sufficiently and functionally.

In the textbooks of both countries, but particularly in Turkish textbooks, there are many questions evaluated within the scope of the title “AC”. In fact, just like the comprehension questions on a literal level, these questions could also have been arranged in a way that they would improve high level thinking skills. For example, the question “What do you know about İstanbul?” (TGB7, 184) assessed under the “AC” category could have been arranged in a way that would both improve the “PS” skill included very little in textbooks and serve to the objectives of mother tongue teaching, in other words, to the improvement of understanding and expressing skills by use of some additional questions such as “List the problems that İstanbul has as far as you have heard from the press. If you were the mayor of İstanbul, how would you overcome those problems?”. This finding is consistent with the findings of other studies conducted in Turkey on Turkish textbooks. In a study conducted by Aslan and Polat (2007) on the questions in Turkish textbooks, it was found that while questions for the improvement of high level skills such as “Evaluation” and “Analysis” are given no place, there were 40 questions for the improvement of the level of knowledge and it was not possible to include 78 of the questions into any category determined within the scope of the study. Likewise, in the studies conducted by Tarba Ceylan (2003), and Kutlu and Durukan (2009), it was observed that the questions for reading comprehension in Turkish textbooks and Turkish language and literature textbooks did not allow for the students to improve their high level thinking skills.

Among the French textbooks, the highest number of questions for the improvement of “CT” skill is found in FTB8. This case may be associated with the presence of scientific, explicative, and evaluative texts and thus, questions in the book (“La Fin de Robinson Crusoe”, 84; Entretiens avec Jules Verne”, 152; “Pourquoi le savon mousse-t-il?”, 155). In TTB6 and FTB7, there are multiple choice and “True-False” questions (TTB6, 107, 113; FTB7, 43, 75) that are in contrast with the nature of both mother tongue teaching and high level thinking skills as such questions do not allow for the clear expression of students’ opinions (Özbay, 2006). However, as the number of such questions is very few, this case was not considered as a significant problem.

5. Results and Recommendations

Contemporary modern tongue instruction aims to teach individuals to seek and obtain information, to make individuals think and understand accurately, to live in the society harmoniously, to criticize and solve problems individually rather than to equip individuals with knowledge. According to the results of this study, the questions in Turkish textbooks are not of the quality and sufficient in number to improve particularly “PS” and “C” in contrast to what the curriculum reads. One of the general aims of Turkish instruction is to “develop the basic skills such as scientific, constructive, critical and creative thinking, expressing himself/herself, communicating, cooperating, problem solving...”. Yet, it can be said that French textbooks are prepared expediently as they contain more texts, and thus more questions with higher quality.

In this study, only the reading comprehension questions, covered by 6th - 8th grade Turkish and French textbooks were analysed. That the other questions and texts in these books and in high school mother tongue and literature textbooks should be studied from the same point of view can be brought forward as a suggestion. Another suggestion that can be made within the scope of this study is that the curricula and mother tongue textbooks of Sweden, the Netherlands, England, Bulgaria, Korea, Finland, all of which are on the topmost segment with respect to reading skills according to the results of PIRLS and PISA, should be studied and the results of such studies should be made use of when preparing Turkish textbooks.

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