



Enriching kindergarten learners' English by using language portfolio and additional instructional materials

Anaokulu öğrencilerinin İngilizce derslerinin dil portfolyosu ve ek öğretim materyalleri kullanılarak zenginleştirilmesi

Mehmet Galip Zorba¹

Sezen Tosun²

Abstract

As there has been an increasing demand on language education in kindergartens, a large number of kindergartens have begun to give English language education so as to meet the demand. However, most of the English teachers working in kindergartens have difficulty in finding right instructional materials appropriate for kindergarten students since there is not an official curriculum for such schools developed by the Ministry of Education. The aim of this qualitative study is two-fold: (1) to reveal the advantages of using language portfolio in kindergartens and, (2) to put forward suggestions for how to enrich use of language portfolio and instructional materials in these schools as well as effective language learning.

Key Words: Kindergarten, language education, language portfolio, instructional materials

Özet

Anaokullarında yabancı dil eğitime büyük bir talep olduğundan pek çok anaokulu, bu talepleri karşılayabilmek için, yabancı dil eğitimi vermeye başlamıştır. Ancak anaokullarında çalışan İngilizce öğretmenlerinin çoğu, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı tarafından bu okullar için hazırlanan resmi bir program bulunmadığı için, öğrencilere uygun, doğru öğretim gereçleri bulmakta zorluk çekmektedirler. Bu nitel araştırmanın iki temel amacı bulunmaktadır. İlki anaokullarında dil portfolyosu kullanımının yararları; ikinci ise dil portfolyolarının ve öğretim gereçlerinin kullanımının nasıl zenginleştirileceği ve etkili dil öğretimi ile ilgili önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Anaokulu, dil eğitimi, dil portfolyosu, öğretim gereçleri

¹ Research Assistant, Akdeniz University, Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching Department, galipzorba@hotmail.com

² English Instructor, İzmir University, MA Degree in English Language Teaching at Akdeniz University, sezent@sas.upenn.edu

Introduction

Although kindergarten or pre-school education is non-statutory and not compulsory in Turkey, it has come into fashion in the last decade. It is believed that young children put far less effort to learn new languages compared with adult learners (Lambert, 1972; Krashen 1973; Halliwell 1992; Harmer, 2007). Therefore many kindergartens have begun to give language education at early ages. However, there is not any national curriculum for kindergartens developed by the Ministry of Education. The kindergartens thus provide language educations according to their point of views and potentials (Sert *et al*, 2011), which leads to the English teachers applying different weekly course hours and using different methods and instructional materials. Since there is a haphazard approach in language teaching in kindergartens, a number of teachers who teach English to young learners have difficulty in finding appropriate materials for their students. As a result, they either spend too much time for choosing suitable instructional materials or prefer to develop their own materials for their classes.

Choosing and developing instructional materials for kindergarten learners are a demanding and sophisticated process due to their characteristics. As one of the significant characteristics of kindergarten learners is illiteracy, using special coursebooks designed for them is vital. Although most of the publishing companies have coursebooks for different age kindergarten learners, teachers need to consider weekly course hours, age, and objectives while choosing the coursebook to be used. McKay (2006) and Rixon (1999) define young learners as the learners between the ages of five and twelve whereas kindergarten learners are between the ages of three-six. As kindergarten learners have varying attention span and easily get bored (Cameron, 2005), teacher need to enrich the course with the help of using other instructional materials and techniques. Cartoons, realias, songs, flashcards, games are suitable means to foster young learner's imagination and fantasy (Drake, 1990; Sert, 2004; Pinter, 2006; Arıkan & Ulaş-Taraf, 2010; Yolageldili & Arıkan, 2010). In addition, tongue twisters, riddles and storytelling are effective activities to attract young learner's attentions and make learning process enjoyable as well (Damar, 2009; Ekşi, 2009). Furthermore, brightly coloured visuals, toys and puppets are quite effective for keeping them engaged in activities (Linse, 2005).

Considering that we are living in the technology age, such information and communication technologies (ICT) as podcasts, digital storytelling, online games and software suitable for kindergarten learners can also be used as technological authentic materials by the help of their teachers (Arıkan, 2010).

All of the activities and materials including such senses as hearing, seeing and touching address to learner's visual/spatial, body/kinesthetic and musical/rhythmic intelligences and thus yield to fostering a positive environment as well as prolonging their attention span (Ekşi, 2009). These activities and materials also make language input comprehensible for learners.

In addition to instructional materials and activities, learning environment of kindergarten learners should be distinctive and has inherent characteristics. Harmer (2007) states that young learner's classroom should be bright and colourful with windows the children can see out of, and be spacious enough for different activities. According to Harmer (2007), since children are curious, love discovering things and using their imagination, they may well be involved in puzzle-like activities, making things, games, physical movement and songs. Hence a good primary classroom harmonizes play and learning in a cheerful and supportive atmosphere.

The language teaching method kindergartens is as important as instructional materials and learning environment. When considered its principles, Total Physical Response is an effective method for young language learners as they have much more physical energy at those ages (Linse, 2005; Richards & Rodger, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2008; Ekşi, 2009). Furthermore, Tomlinson (2005) states that when learners visualise what they are learning by observing actions and perform the actions, they are less likely to make default inferences.

Portfolios have been used by such professionals as architects, artists and designers as a means of collecting sample works and documenting achievements for a long period of time (Gonzales, 2009). They have been used in language education since the middle of 90s as well. Basically, the aims of all kind of language portfolios are to keep records about learners' language learning process, to demonstrate how their skills developed in time and to promote language learning (Council of Europe, 2001; Little, 2002; Glover *et al*, 2005, Mirici 2008; Gonzales, 2009). In this sense, Council of Europe's Modern Languages Division devised *European Language Portfolio* (ELP). The ELP has two main aims: to motivate learners by acknowledging their efforts and diversify their language skills at levels; to provide a record of the linguistic and cultural skills they have acquired (Little 2002; Mirici, 2008). It consists of three components; language passport, which provides an overview of the owner's linguistic identity in different languages, records foreign language qualifications and describes significant intercultural experiences in language(s) learning with self-assessment section; language biography, which describes and reflects upon learners' skills and knowledge as well as allowing learners' involvement in

planning and assessing their learning process and progress; dossier, which allows learners to collect materials that show their achievements and experiences (Little, 2002; Glover *et al*, 2005; Mirici, 2008). However, what is inherent in the ELP make the use of it in kindergartens highly problematic. Language passport and language biography parts require reading and writing, yet kindergarten learner are not literate learners. Besides, they are not able to fulfill such requirements of the ELP as self-assessment, involvement in planning of learning process, reflecting upon intercultural experience etc. However, portfolios for kindergartens should bear some of the aims and functions of the ELP. Little (2005) states that language portfolios give children a real sense of pride and achievement by providing a means of showing off their language competence to others. In other words, portfolios for kindergartens need to motivate learners, evoke sense of achievement and arouse interest in the target language.

Aim of the Study

The study has two-fold aim; (1) to reveal the advantages of using language portfolio in kindergartens and, (2) to put forward suggestions for how to enrich use of language portfolio and instructional materials in these schools as well as effective language learning. In this sense, three research questions raised;

- Does using portfolio have positive effects on a pupils' learning the target language?
- Does enriching the English courses with instructional materials and language portfolio affect pupil's attitudes towards English courses?
- What are pupils' (and their parents') views on the enriched English courses with instructional materials and language portfolio?

Method

Twenty-four pupils from "Süper Kindergarten" and "İlk Çizgi" Kindergarten participated in this study. All of them were 6 year-old children. Selected data gathering instrument for the study was nonparticipant observation. Since all of the participants are kindergarten students, instruments as questionnaire and interview were not used in the study. The observation process took place for fourteen weeks in the 2009-2010 school year. Ten hours of instruction in English was delivered to these learners every week (two hours per

day). During the observation process, the observer took field notes and recorded some courses.

Happy Hearts by Express Publishing was selected as a coursebook. At the very beginning of the term, children were reluctant to learn a foreign language and had very short attention span. Hence, the teachers in both schools not only developed different kinds of materials but also used some other materials and activities such as flashcards, songs, realias, games, storytelling etc to support their courses. In addition to these activities and materials, both teachers used language portfolio in their courses. They adopted Communicative Language Teaching and Natural approaches, employed TPR method, and just focused on listening as a receptive skill and speaking as a productive skill.

As for the Language Portfolio, the teachers presented the language portfolio to the class and discussed with them how it would be used pointing out that the language portfolio is their property. The teachers explained that they could use the language portfolio:

- to show off their best work;
- to demonstrate other people what they know;
- to keep an ongoing record of their work and progress;
- to help them see that they are making progress;
- to show to others when they change class or school.

Portfolio Assessment Procedure

At the very beginning of the term, the teachers shared the idea of having a language portfolio with young learners. The pupils were first warmed up to learn how to use a language portfolio. First, the teachers modeled every step from organizing a portfolio to selecting and evaluating work samples. Both teachers then gave scaffolding in order to support their learners through interaction while selecting materials to be put in their portfolios. There were some rules to be followed in materials selection. Firstly, the learners put the materials made either by individually or collaboratively in the classroom. Secondly, the materials about the topics of the courses put in the portfolios. Thirdly, as for homemade materials, they put the documents, which showed what they knew or could

do. And lastly, the teachers dated each item to be put in the portfolios. The portfolios were kept in the classroom, yet the learners were free to access them whenever they wished. Modeling and then scaffolding the selection procedure put them on the road to their independent selections. As the teachers wanted and expected their learners involve in the portfolio development and selection sample process, they let the learners make changes in their portfolios. Therefore learners both reviewed and revised their portfolios whenever they wished. Some materials which the learners put into their portfolios are;

- pictures-drawings-paintings
- photos
- audio or video recordings (by the teachers)
- posters
- art samples
- stencil works, puppets
- stickers etc.

At the end of the term, the teachers assessed the portfolios with the learners, demonstrated them their progress, and gave them feedback individually. Linse (2005) states that grade assignment to portfolios is an unmanageable work as it is difficult to maintain all learners' portfolios and the process is more often subjective. When considered that they were six-year old children, the teachers did not prefer giving marks to the portfolios so as not to discourage the learners.

Findings and Discussions

The findings of the observation process revealed that enriching English courses in kindergartens by using additional instruction materials and the language portfolio increased their motivation, incorporate them in the courses, and prolonged their attention span. Besides, these materials improved their interests in English courses and made the courses enjoyable for the learners.

It is also observed that the learners began to use the target language outside the classroom in their daily lives. Therefore, it can be assumed that the use of the language portfolio and

additional instructional materials increased the learners' capacity for reflection. Furthermore, the language portfolios showed the learner their progress in English language, and thus it evoked sense of pride, achievement and self-esteem.

In addition, the learners' involvement in the portfolio process, their reflections and appropriate use of the target language paved a way to the first step development of learner autonomy. Moreover, the use of the language portfolio raised their language and intercultural awareness. All of them clearly indicate that the development of autonomous learning can be achieved in kindergartens. Therefore, during these early years, it is essential to assist children to perceive themselves as the controller of their own learning. It is also observed that using portfolio is one of the applicable methods of assessment through authentic and natural observation which promotes the development of learners' independence, responsibility and decision making.

Suggestions

Kindergarten learners are both curious and willing to learn new things, and learn faster than adult learners. However, they easily get bored and their attention spans are very short. Therefore English courses for kindergarten learners should not adhere to only coursebooks; on the contrary, the courses should be enriched by the help of using additional instructional materials, activities and portfolios. Since fun is the key aspect for attracting young learners' attention, English courses should be supported by songs, reliaas, games, cartoons etc.

The use of language portfolio is an effective way to motivate learners. Portfolios should aim at enhancing learners' motivation, keeping records about language learning, and displaying how they progress in language learning. Therefore, giving grades to the portfolios should be ignored. Prospective English language teachers should be well educated about the CEFR in ELT departments. They should also be well-equipped with technological knowledge, highly motivated and enthusiastic in guiding students to use language portfolio.

In language education for kindergarten learners, the main objective of teachers should be raising language and intercultural awareness, encouraging them to continue their language education for the rest of their education, and evoking sense of achievement and self-confidence. Yolageldili & Arıkan (2010) state that teaching young learners requires special efforts and includes challenges. Therefore, teachers should be patient while teaching in kindergarten classrooms, and always be in pursuit of more suitable instructional materials for their students.

References

- Arıkan, A., Ulaş-Tarah, H. (2010). Contextualizing young learners' English lessons with cartoons: Focus on grammar and vocabulary. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 5212-5215, World Conference on Educational Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey.
- (2010). Using information and communication technologies (ICT) with young learners: Tools, and practical ideas. In D. Sahnısynoglu & D. Iliško (Ed.), *How do children learn best* (pp. 98-103). Ankara, Turkey: Tutkun Press.
- Cameron, L. (2005). *Teaching languages to young learners*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Damar, M. (2009). Okul öncesi eğitimde dil etkinlikleri. *Milli Eğitim Dergisi*, 38(182), 96-105.
- Drake, S. V. (1990). Why not an informal reading readiness inventory", *Academic Therapy*, 25(3), 315-319
- Ekşi, G. (2009). Multiple short story activities for very young learners with multiple tastes. *EKEV Akademi Dergisi*, 13(40), 51-68.
- Glover, P., Mirici, I. H., Aksu, M. (2005). Preparing for the European language portfolio: Internet connections. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 6(1), 84-98.
- Gonzales, J. A. (2009). Promoting student autonomy through the use of European language portfolio. *ELT Journal*, 63(4), 373-382.
- Halliwell, S. (1992). *Teaching English in the primary classroom*. New York: Longman.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- Kang Shin, J. (2006). The helpful ideas for teaching English to young learners. *English Teaching Forum* 44 (2), 2-13.
- Krashen, S. (1973). Lateralization, language learning and critical period: Some new evidence. *Language Learning*, 23, 63-74.
- Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Language, psychology and culture*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Larsen- Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Linse, C. T. (2005). *Practical English language teaching: Young learners*. United States: McGraw-Hill Publishing.
- Little, D. (2002). The European language portfolio: Structure, origins, implementations and

- challenges. *Language Teaching*, 35, 182-189.
- (2005). The common European framework and the European language portfolio: involving learners and their judgments in the assessment process. *Language Testing*, 22(3), 321-336.
- McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing young language learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Mirici, İ. H. (2008). Development and validation process of a European language portfolio model for young learners". *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 9(2), 26-34.
- Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. C., Rodgers, T. S. (2006). *Approaches and methods in Language Teaching*. United States: Cambridge University Press.
- Rixon, S. (1999). *Young learners of English: Some research perspectives*. London: Longman.
- Sert, N. (2004). Quality in early foreign language learning at pre-school level. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 12, 12-30.
- , Altun, S. A., Yavuz, K. (2011). Öğretmen ve yönetici açısından okul öncesi dönemde yabancı dil eğitimi. *Çağdaş Eğitim Dergisi*, 36(386), 15-22.
- Tomlinson, B. (1998). *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yolageldili, G., Arıkan, A. (2010). Effectiveness of using games in teaching grammar to young learners". *Elementary Education Online*, 10(1), 219-229.