

High School Textbooks in Turkey from Teachers' and Students' Perspectives: The Case of History Textbooks

Ali Yildirim

Middle East Technical University
Turkey

This study investigates how teachers and students assess the textbooks they use in history courses at the high school level in Turkey. Through a survey questionnaire, teachers and students were asked their perceptions of the textbooks. Then a sub-sample of the teachers and students were interviewed to collect more in-depth data on their assessment of the textbooks. The results indicated that the textbooks assist the teacher in instructional planning and in preparing exams, and help the students deal with the content. However, both teachers and students point to problems in textbooks in terms of their physical aspects, content presentation and organization, language, teaching and learning aids, and their impact on students. The textbooks focus mostly on transmission of knowledge, and they are found ineffective in leading students to read the information with interest and develop an understanding of the content area. They are found ineffective in developing students' thinking skills and positive attitudes toward the subject.

Keywords: textbook evaluation, history textbooks, high school, Turkish education

Introduction

This study is part of a three-year-long research project supported by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. The project aims to investigate social studies teaching from many aspects such as curriculum, the teaching and learning process, textbooks and other instructional materials, student assessment, and the impact on students. This paper specifically focuses on the assessment of high school textbooks through teachers' and students' perspectives by using history textbooks as the subject for this case study. Two research questions guided the data collection and analysis: (1) How do teachers assess high school history textbooks in terms of their physical appearance, content selection and presentation, language, teaching and

learning aids, impact of students and assistance to the teacher? (2) How do students assess high school history textbooks in terms of their physical appearance, illustrations, content, language, flow, questions and impact on student thinking and interest?

Textbooks are probably the most frequently used instructional material in different levels of education. They communicate the course content to the teacher and the students, and become an important source in progressing toward the objectives of the course. In fact, in many elementary and secondary schools, a large part of the knowledge to which students are exposed comes from the textbook. In his report to American Textbook Council on History textbooks, Sewall (2000) indicated that textbooks are "the sole source of information about the subject for teachers and students alike (p. 9). This implies that students spend a great deal of time with the textbook both for classroom activities and homework assignments.

Ideally, textbooks should be resources for teachers to use

Ali Yildirim, Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ali Yildirim, Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Education, 06531, Ankara, Turkey. e-mail: aliy@metu.edu.tr

in designing instruction and for students to refer to in learning the subject matter content. Textbooks provide some degree of content expertise for subject matter issues, a logical sequence of content, and a variety of support activities like questions, test items, cases, and summaries. They may help make the teaching content-oriented and comprehensive, and allow more effective use of teacher time (Westbury, 1990). However, in many educational systems, textbooks have a controlling impact on what is taught in schools. Some researchers even argue that textbooks tend to be the primary influence on classroom instruction (Marker and Mehlinger, 1992).

Teachers organize their instruction around the textbook, and for many teachers, selection of the textbook is the most important curriculum decision they make (Patrick and Hawke, 1982). Textbooks provide an organized sequence of ideas and information, and provide the teacher with some security and content baseline in structuring teaching and learning systematically (Sewall, 2000). Although there are some curriculum guidelines produced by states and local school districts, and textbooks tend to conform to them, teachers take these guidelines into consideration at a general level and make their practical curriculum decisions based on the textbooks they use. Patrick (1988) argued that textbooks supply a substantial amount of content knowledge acquired by students (nearly 80%), and a substantial amount of student's classroom time (75%) and homework time (90%) is spent using the textbook. Similarly Crawford and Carnine (2001) referred to studies reporting that 75% to 90% of classroom instruction is organized around textbooks (p. 387). As a result, textbooks become an important indicator of the quantity and quality of content in the actualized school curriculum (Patrick, 1988).

Wittrock's (1983) claims that text comprehension is based on the reader generating two kinds of relationships: (1) relations between ideas in the text and the reader's previous knowledge and experiences, and (2) relations between parts of the text. Moving from these two principles, Steinly (1987) offers two concepts, "relating" and "organizing," to evaluate textbooks. Steinly states that textbooks can help students with comprehending the content by using certain rhetorical devices. The devices that would help students with relating skill include "good and frequent examples," "analogies when necessary," "a human voice behind ideas," "a good appropriate writing style," "vocabulary assistance and adequate explanations," and "good and useful illustrations" (p. 115). The devices to help students organize what they read include "proper headings and subheadings to help students construct hierarchical and logical relationships among ideas," "coherent sentences and paragraphs," and "properly located charts, graphs, and figures" (p. 115).

History is taught at all three grade levels in high schools in Turkey. The first two years cover Turkish history before the foundation of the Republic and European history. The last year covers exclusively the Republican Era (i.e., 1923 to 1960). A separate organization for social studies courses (history, geography, philosophy, sociology and psychology) has long been adapted at the high school level because of the belief that it allowed a rigorous and intellectually demanding focus during instruction. This approach allows the strict control of the process and content of subject matter, and textbooks serve as the major element of structure in curriculum. Especially in history teaching, content becomes the driving force for the teaching and learning process in high schools.

Textbooks can be written on the basis of commissions initiated by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) or by independent authors in Turkey. However, in any case all textbooks have to be examined and approved by the MONE's Board of Education before they can be used in schools. The Board of Education is responsible for developing guidelines and criteria for the review and approval of textbooks and for appointing members to textbook examining committees (Ministry of Education Regulations, 1993). These committees usually include teachers, university professors and the Board of Education consultants. The textbooks written by independent authors or textbook writing committees appointed by the MONE are examined by the textbook examining committees which report to the Board of Education's council of experts. The council makes the final decision for approval. The most important criterion in the approval process is the conformity of the textbooks with the subject matter curriculum guideline produced by the MONE. Because of this strict approval process, the textbooks are quite similar to each other in terms of the selection and organization of the content and the treatment of topics.

A textbook is inevitably the consequence of a variety of compromises that must be made to satisfy certain demands (Broudy, 1975) like curriculum guidelines and opinions of curriculum specialists, teachers, parents and students. Textbooks used in Turkish primary and secondary schools are influenced to a great degree by the curriculum guidelines developed centrally by the MONE whereas the opinions of teachers, administrators, and students are rarely taken into consideration. However, the usability and effectiveness of a textbook is very much dependent on a thorough analysis of audience (usable by whom?), purpose (for what purpose?) and context (under what conditions?) (Carter, 1985). A good analysis of these three aspects, and their reflection in the design of the textbook, are likely to make the textbook more

effective both for the teacher and students.

The majority of the schools sampled in this study (95%) used the history textbooks published by the MONE. In a typical MONE history textbook, there is an introduction explaining the units covered in the textbook, a table of contents listing the main topics and subtopics covered in the textbook, and finally a presentation of the topics as outlined in the MONE curriculum guideline. Each section in the textbook starts with a brief summary of the topic presented, and ends with study questions for students. Illustrations (e.g., maps, pictures and charts) are used to support the presentation of the knowledge. The cost is the most important criterion for teachers in choosing a textbook. Since the MONE textbooks are the cheapest, they are mostly picked by teachers as the main textbooks. Teaching aids like teacher manuals, test books, workbooks, transparency sets accompanying textbooks are not common in the textbooks used in Turkish schools.

The teaching and learning process in social studies involves four major goals: knowledge, skills, values and participation (Ellis et al., 1991). These general goals are highlighted in the High School history curriculum prepared centrally by the MONE as well. However, it is unclear to what degree history textbooks contribute to achieving the main goals stated above. It is also unclear how the textbooks are perceived, and used by both teachers and students. Relatively few researchers have examined the adequacy of textbooks in developing the major goals for teaching social studies, and teachers' and students' perceptions and experiences of these textbooks. In this sense, studying the perceptions of teachers and students about the distinctive characteristics of history textbooks, and the way the textbooks influence history teaching and learning process becomes important.

Method

The study design included 61 high schools in 23 provinces representing the seven geographic regions in Turkey. Of these, 50 were general and the remaining 11 were vocational high schools. Educational Research and Development Directorate of MONE selected the sample of schools representing the whole population based on the criteria given by the researcher. The criteria included proportional representativeness of seven geographical regions, of large and small cities, and of general and vocational high schools in Turkey. The main data sources were history teachers and students who were taking history courses at all three grade levels. While all teachers in the selected schools (in many

cases one or two history teachers in each school) were asked to participate in the study, a systematic sampling technique was used to select students representing all grade levels. Systematic sampling of students involved selecting the first five students (based on their ID numbers) in the first section of history course offered for their own grade level. This selection strategy was implemented for all three grade levels in 30 high schools randomly selected out of 61 schools nominated by the MONE for the study initially. Through this technique, a total of 450 students were identified to respond to the questionnaires for this study.

The questionnaires were mailed to one teacher in each sampled school. This person administered both teacher and student questionnaires and sent them back to the researcher. As a result, a total of 115 teacher questionnaires (a return rate of 79%) and 370 student questionnaires (a return rate of 82%) were secured for analysis.

Close to two-thirds of the teacher sample for the questionnaires (64%) were male. Half of the teachers (51%) had 11-20 years of teaching experience while one-fourth (24%) had 1-10 years, and one-fourth (25%) more than 20 years of teaching experience. The majority of the teachers (86%) had a four year undergraduate degree while 11% graduated from a three year teacher training institute. Only few (3%) had master's or doctoral degrees. Close to three-fifths of the teachers (58%) taught 26-30 hours per week, and one-fifth (21%) taught more than 30 hours per week, indicating the heavy teaching load on a typical high school teacher. Close to half of the teachers (49%) had 31-40 students in their class, and close to one-third (30%) had 41-50. Only 13% had less than 30 students in their class. Still there were some teachers (8%) who had more than 50 students in their class. These numbers indicate that a typical high school classroom has around 35-40 students, and the size of the student group differed greatly in different high schools.

Student sample (N=370) represented all three high school grade levels to some degree. First graders made up 29% of the sample, while second graders 44% and third graders 27%. Of these students, 55% were male and 45% female. More than one-third of these students (36%) stated that in their first midterm in history course, they received 1 or 2, which is below average (out of 5 which is the highest grade one may receive at high school level), while 13% received 3 (average), and 51% received 4 or 5 (good and very good respectively). This variation among students indicates that sample represents students with different levels of achievement in history.

Data collection methods included questionnaires for teachers and students, individual interviews with teachers and

group interviews with students. Two separate questionnaires were designed for teachers and students to explore their perceptions of teaching and learning in history in various aspects including instructional planning, teaching strategies, learning materials, student assessment, etc. Both questionnaires included a set of questions on the effectiveness of the textbooks used in history courses, which provided the quantitative data for this paper. These questions aimed to explore teachers' and students' perceptions on the distinctive characteristics of these textbooks (e.g., physical appearance, content, language, teaching aids), how the textbooks influence the teaching and learning process, and the recommendations to improve these textbooks. Interview questions were structured in line with the general framework used in the questionnaires.

After the questionnaire data were analyzed, a sub-sample of students and teachers were selected in one city (Ankara) for convenience to investigate the research questions more in-depth. Structured interview approach was used these interviews. In four high schools in Ankara, eight teachers (two teachers from each school) were interviewed individually, and 44 students (the first 5-6 students from the classes the teachers taught based on the class list) participated in the group interviews. Out of eight teachers, six were male. All had more than 10 years of teaching experience. The number of students in their classes ranged from 25 to 52. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

The questionnaire data were analyzed through descriptive statistics while the interview data were subjected to content analysis. Using the themes in the questionnaires as a framework, the interview data were coded to identify related phenomena, to explore their relations to arrive at themes and to describe the data as a meaningful whole (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this purpose, first the data were coded based on the general scales used in the questionnaires. Second, the coded data which fit together meaningfully were grouped. These groups allowed the researcher to identify the main themes present in the data. Finally, the coded data were presented in relation to the results of the questionnaire data. In this way the general trends reached in the questionnaire responses were described more in depth within the context of the descriptive data provided by the interviewees.

Results

The results which follow are organized in two sections.

The first section presents teachers' perceptions of the textbooks they use in teaching history are examined. Then, students' assessment of the textbooks is presented. In each part, both the questionnaire and the interview data are presented together. Interview results are presented in terms of general patterns explored among the interviewees rather than providing a tabulation of the frequency for each point made during the interviews.

Teachers' Perceptions of History Textbooks

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate their perceptions of the history textbooks they use through a number of items focusing on various aspects of the textbooks such as physical appearance, content selection and presentation, language, teaching and learning aids, impact on students and assistance to teachers. Table 1 presents teachers' responses to these items.

Physical Aspects. As Table 1 presents, teachers find cover pages of history textbooks attractive, typesize appropriate to some degree, indicating an average level of satisfaction with the textbooks in these aspects. With regard to page layout and illustrations, teachers seem to be even less satisfied. Only one-fifth of the teachers say the textbooks are satisfactory in terms of page layout and illustrations, while the majority (about 80%) are either undecided or not happy with these aspects of history textbooks.

The interview results indicate that teachers find the cover page quite dull, and predict that their students feel the same way. In addition, the illustrations are not attractive since pictures are old, and are not very clear. Teachers think that students do not find these illustrations interesting and useful, therefore, they bring in additional maps and photographs to class to supplement the ones in the textbooks. Complaints about the page layout in the textbooks are also common. One teacher said:

The textbook publishers try to use as much space as they can on a page to decrease the total number of pages. Most pages are full of text, illustrations are squeezed into small places devoted to them on pages in the textbook. Even encyclopaedias have a better page layout than the textbooks. The pages are not colourful and not engaging in format and design. Of course this causes students to get tired and to lose interest in a short time.

Table 1. *Teachers' Views of Various Aspects of History Textbooks*

ITEMS	Disagree (1)	Undecided (2)	Agree (3)	Mean	N
Physical Aspects					
Cover page is attractive.	25	40.7	34.3	2.09	108
Typesize is appropriate students.	25.9	40.2	33.9	2.08	112
Page layout is easy to follow.	28.2	52.7	19.1	1.91	110
Illustrations are attractive.	30.6	49.5	19.8	1.89	111
Content Selection and Presentation					
Topics are logically organized.	20.7	59.5	19.8	1.99	111
Content is clearly presented.	36.9	46.8	16.2	1.79	111
Provides sufficient coverage of course topics.	40.4	45.9	13.8	1.73	109
Language					
Uses appropriate terminology.	25	43.8	31.3	2.06	112
Reading level is appropriate for students.	27	47.7	25.2	1.98	111
New terms are defined clearly.	32.4	44.1	23.4	1.91	111
Teaching and Learning Aids					
Study questions are appropriate for student level.	18.6	46	35.4	2.17	113
Unit introductions are well prepared.	17.9	56.3	25.9	2.08	112
Illustrations are useful in understanding the content.	27.9	46.8	25.2	1.97	111
Impact on Students					
Leads students to search for additional knowledge.	39.8	50	10.2	1.70	108
Leads students to think about the content.	42.7	48.2	9.1	1.66	110
Helps students develop interest toward the course.	49.1	41.1	9.8	1.61	112
Students find the textbook useful.	53.7	39.8	6.5	1.53	108
Helps students apply the content.	55	37.8	7.2	1.52	111

Note. Numbers in the table indicate percentages. In addition, the N's are based on the number of responses given for each individual item.

Overall, the questionnaire and interview results indicate that the textbooks need to be made more attractive in terms of illustrations, colours, and the page layout. These physical aspects help increase the interest of students in reading the textbook, and make a better self-study resource for them.

Content Selection and Presentation. As Table 1 shows, teachers are satisfied with the textbooks to some degree or less with regard to content selection and organization. Only

one-fifth or fewer agree that the textbook they use provides sufficient coverage of course topics, organizes the topics logically and presents the content clearly while others (four-fifths or more) are undecided or do not agree with these statements at all. When the mean scores are taken into consideration, the statement 'the topics are logically organized' receives the highest mean score, while other content-related statements have lower mean scores, indicating that teachers find textbooks problematic more so with regard to content

coverage and clarity of content presentation than organization of topics.

Interview results indicate that teachers do not see much problem in textbooks in terms of covering the topics sufficiently. However, they find the content presented to be far too detailed. The topics are treated in an encyclopedic fashion. As a result, the reading becomes difficult and boring. Teachers think that textbooks do not help children distinguish what is important from what is not so important.

The interviewed teachers complain that the way the content is presented in the textbooks is not attractive for students. One teacher said:

Students find the textbook boring, and difficult to read. Since the textbook covers the topics in a detailed way, in-depth discussion is ignored. As a result, the topics are dealt with in a superficial way, leading to memorization of the topics, rather than thinking about them.

Some interviewed teachers think that the content is not organized in a logical sequence. The textbooks they use do not provide sufficient continuity between lessons, chapters and units. This creates problems for students since they find it “difficult to read the textbook from a holistic perspective, and see relationships among topics.”

These results show that the textbooks have problems in content organization and presentation. Although the content selected does not raise much of an issue, the amount of content covered, the way content is presented, and the coherence among the topics seem to present problems. The textbook writers need to pay attention to the order of topics, and the way they are presented in relation to each other, so that the student is able to establish connections among ideas and concepts presented in various units.

Language. As Table 1 presents, approximately one-fourth of teachers agree that the 'reading level' in the textbook is appropriate for students and new terms are defined clearly while others are undecided or do not agree with these statements. Similarly, close to one-third think that proper terminology is used in the textbook while others are undecided or do not agree with this item at all. These results show that only about one-fourth or one-third of teachers are satisfied with the use of language in the textbook while others are less satisfied or not satisfied at all.

Probably the reading level of a textbook is one of the most important criteria in judging the value of it for students' learning. Interviews indicate that teachers find the textbooks

difficult for students to read. That seems to be one of the reasons for decreased level of student interest in reading the textbook. Teachers think that the sentences are too "long" and "complex," the flow of ideas is not suitable to critical reading, the terms used are not very clear, and the way sentences are constructed is confusing for students. Teachers even say that "the textbook writers need to take some writing lessons."

Use of proper terminology seems to be an important issue. Teachers mention certain problems with regard to the use of terms as well. One teacher says that:

Old terminology is mostly used in the textbooks, and that makes the text for students more difficult to read and understand. New terms are not defined in the text, but definitions are presented at the end of the textbook. This is not very helpful since students do not like to go to the end of the book to look at the glossary, and simply skip that section without understanding the concept well.

These results show that most teachers assess the language of the textbooks as being problematic as well. They find the reading level difficult; the terms are not selected carefully, and new terms are not defined well. All these problems create difficulties for students in establishing an effective dialogue with the textbook.

Teaching and Learning Aids. As Table 1 displays, only one-fourth of teachers think that unit introductions are well prepared and illustrations are useful in understanding the content, while others either are undecided or do not agree at all with these statements. Similarly, a little more than one-third of teachers find study questions appropriate for student level while others are undecided or do not find them appropriate at all. These findings show that the limited teaching and learning aids in the textbook are either somewhat satisfying or not satisfying to most of the teachers.

Interviewed teachers mention that the textbooks do not include necessary aids to accompany the basic material. They say it would be quite helpful if they were provided with suggested readings, audiovisual aids and other library resources. The textbook is described as being full of text, leaving little room for illustrations by teachers. One teacher said:

Few in number, visuals like maps, photographs and graphics are not selected carefully. Sometimes it is difficult to find relationships between the text and the visual elements. The references to the visuals in the text are not provided adequately.

In addition, teachers do not find the illustrations appropriate for student interest and grade level. Some teachers complain that the pictures and maps used in the books are not up to date and they are separated from the related content; others are not referenced properly in the text. Half of the teachers interviewed argue that more visuals need to be used to help students learn the content more effectively. In these respects, the illustrations do not fulfil the intended overall purpose of drawing student interest and helping them learn the material more effectively.

The textbooks provide some test items at the end of the units. However teachers do not find them useful since they do not use objective tests in measuring student achievement. The open ended questions are used by the teachers to some degree in the exams. Teachers acknowledge that the end-of-chapter questions are mostly at the appropriate knowledge level even though they prefer analysis and application questions more.

These results show that the textbooks do not provide teachers and students with effective teaching and learning aids. The aids provided like illustrations, questions are not found to be sufficient in making the textbook an effective teaching and learning resource.

Impact on Students. As Table 1 presents, teachers are less satisfied with the textbook they use in terms of its potential impact on students than other aspects. Less than 10% of the teachers think that students find the textbook helpful, that the textbook helps students apply the content, that the textbook leads students to think about the content, and that the textbook helps students develop interest toward the course while others either are undecided or do not agree with these items at all. Similarly, 10-15% of the teachers agree that the textbook leads

students to search for additional knowledge while others are undecided or do not agree with this statement. These findings show that a great majority of the teachers do not comfortably say that the textbook has a positive impact on students' thinking, application of content, searching for new knowledge, and interest toward the course.

According to the interview results, teachers complain about the inadequacy of the textbook in leading students to research and independent learning in the content area. They say that the textbook tries to provide all the answers. Teachers suggest that the textbook should be a resource for students to organize their knowledge, and should make them feel a need to search for additional information on certain topics.

Teachers argue that the textbook does not motivate students to think about the content at all. Since students find the textbook boring and difficult to read, they force themselves to read and memorize. As a result, the knowledge gained by students does not become long-term and meaningful, according to teachers.

Students' Perceptions of History Textbooks

As Table 2 displays, more than one-third of the students agree that illustrations are helpful while others are undecided or do not agree with this statement at all. Again, the questionnaire findings indicate an average level of satisfaction with illustrations used in the textbooks. On the other hand, the interview findings indicate less satisfaction with the illustrations used in the textbooks. Students argue that the visuals are not selected well, they are not of good quality, and the connection between the visuals and the text is not made effectively. As a result, the illustrations do not serve the

Table 2. Students' Views of Various Aspects of History Textbooks

ITEMS	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Mean	N
	(1)	(2)	(3)		
Illustrations are useful.	19.7	43.3	37.1	2.17	356
I find the content difficult to understand.	38.6	41.4	20	1.81	355
I find the language clear.	10	35.6	54.4	2.44	360
I find it difficult to relate the topics to each other.	21.3	32.9	45.8	2.44	356
Study questions are useful.	12.2	24.4	63.5	2.51	353
The way the topics are treated leads me to think.	34.1	43	22.9	1.89	358
The textbook increases my interest toward the course.	36.3	37.7	26	1.90	358

Note. Numbers in the table indicate percentages. In addition, the N's are based on the number of responses given for each individual item.

intended purpose for the students. The difference between the questionnaire and interview findings might be due to the fact that the interview gave them the opportunity to qualify their responses whereas the questionnaire limited their responses to the three response categories provided.

Only one-fifth of the students find the content difficult to understand while two-fifths are undecided and others do not find it difficult at all. Similarly, more than half of the students find the language of the textbook they use clear while others are undecided or do not agree with this item at all. These results indicate that students experience some degree of difficulty in understanding the content even though most find the language of the textbook clear. Therefore, the difficulty in understanding the content may be the outcome of other features of the textbook. The group interviews explain some of these features. Students complain that the content is long and detailed, the ideas and events are not explored in depth. As a result, although students find the language of the textbook clear, the way content is presented creates some difficulties for students in understanding the content.

Another explanation for content difficulty may be students' perception of the connection among various topics in the textbook. Close to half of the students report that they have difficulty in relating the topics to each other. The group interviews also show that students do not see the topics presented in the textbooks in relation to each other. They say that the connection among these topics is not highlighted in the textbook, that the unit introductions and end-of-unit summaries are not very helpful in this regard. They place part of the blame on the way the course is taught as well. They say that their teachers do not highlight these connections properly in class.

Close to two-thirds of the students find the study questions in the textbook useful. Although teachers complained about the inadequacy of these questions in the responses they gave to the questionnaire and the interview questions, students seem to be satisfied overall with these questions. In the interviews, students say that these questions help them review what they read, prepare for teacher questions in class and for the exams. They say that teachers use similar types of questions in the exams, so they find it helpful to go over these questions before the exam.

Only a little more than one-fifth of the students agree that the way topics are presented leads them to think about the content while others are undecided or do not agree with that statement. This result shows that students are not motivated to think about the content as a result of their reading. Similar results were gained in the group interviews as well. Students

say that the topics are treated in a detailed way, and the textbook does not leave room for them to think about the topic. The topics are presented in an encyclopaedic fashion, and this leads them to passively reading and memorizing. Students find the presentation of the ideas and events "lifeless" and "static" and as a result they often find it difficult to concentrate on reading the text.

Finally students were asked whether the textbook increases their interest toward the course. A little more than one-fourth believe that the textbook increases their interest toward the course while others are undecided or do not agree with this statement at all. In the interviews, students are divided on this issue. Some say they have more interest toward the course as a result of their experience with the textbook, while others do not think so.

In addition, students indicate that the teacher determines how they will use the textbooks in class and at home. They do readings at home and make summaries as assigned by the teacher, and use the textbook as a reading source in class as well. The teacher assigns the topics and pages to read, tell students to answer certain questions at the end of units, directing students' relation with the textbook along the objectives of the course. In that sense, students feel passive in the learning process in so far as it relates to the textbook.

The students interviewed see the textbook as the most important instructional medium used in their classrooms, and accept that it has a strong influence on the way the classroom activities are carried out. They recommend that "the textbooks need to be more creative in presenting the subject matter, and should be more interesting and enjoyable to read."

Discussion

It is interesting to note that many of the teachers and students tend to choose the middle point 'undecided' for most items assessing various aspects of the history textbooks. Somehow, they avoid choosing the positive or negative ends of the continuum of the responses in the questionnaire. In the interviews, they seemed to be more open and descriptive of their perceptions of the textbooks. One other reason for the tendency to choose the middle response point in the questionnaires might be due to the three point response scale provided to the respondents. More options in the scale could have been helpful in decreasing the responses in the 'undecided' category. Therefore, this aspect of the study should be acknowledged as a limitation.

The results indicate that the physical aspects of history

textbooks are judged as 'average' or 'less than average' by teachers and students. They have problems in terms of attractiveness of the cover page, typesize, illustrations, and the page layout. Since cost seems to be a primary issue for the publishers, those aspects that would make a textbook attractive (e.g., illustrations, colours, page layout) are not given sufficient attention. Because of these problems, the textbooks are not interesting for students.

The history textbooks used in high schools cover too much information like encyclopedias, present the content in a way lacking a sound sequence of topics and ideas and avoiding in-depth discussions of important ideas and events, ignore the activities to develop students' capacities for critical thinking, and use little visuals.

Both the teachers and students indicate that the textbooks are designed for passive learning, transmission of facts rather than active involvement of learners in the pursuit of knowledge and development of big ideas. The superficial and abstract treatment of topics leads to memorization rather than exploration of critical issues. Although the textbooks are rich in covering a variety of topics, they are not treated in-depth resulting superficial and simplistic survey of many issues rather than understanding the core ideas. Treatment of topics tends to be uninteresting. Students find the presentation of the ideas and events "lifeless" and "static," and as a result, they often find it difficult to concentrate on reading the text. Furthermore, fragmentation of subject matter seems to be a problem since students and teachers agree that the connections between events and ideas are often ignored in the textbooks. This creates difficulty for students in relating the topics to each other, and in establishing a meaningful set of interconnected ideas in relation to history.

The textbooks are criticized heavily in terms of the language used. In particular, the interview results indicated that students find it very difficult to read and understand the content, and the teachers confirm that the reading level in the textbooks is not appropriate mainly because of the writing style adapted (long and complicated sentence structures, the flow of the ideas, etc.).

Risner, Nicholson and Webb (2000) argue that fostering students' thinking skills should be a major aim of social studies, and report that the cognitive level of the textbook often parallel the social studies instruction and ultimately students' thought. The results of this study show that the textbooks appear to be poor in terms of offering activities and questions for developing students' critical thinking skills, and improving a positive attitude toward history course. Textbooks make use of questions at the end of each section, but with very little

focus on the use of knowledge or generation of big ideas based on facts. They are mostly low-level cognition questions and ask for the recall of information in the text. Activities for using the knowledge learned are almost non-existent. The introductions to sections, guiding questions and the end of chapter summaries are found ineffective and unfriendly by both teachers and students.

The reportedly low quality in the textbooks may result in lowered expectations in teachers and students of the textbooks. Teachers may limit the use of the textbooks in the teaching process, and resort to a new format of teaching where copied materials from different sources and teacher's direct transmission of content through lecturing are put into practice more. This new format may lead to a potential danger of content deficiency and inconsistency among classrooms. Similarly Hirsch (1996) and Carnine (1991) have both warned against the danger of abandoning textbooks, and suggested redesigning them to make them more effective and efficient tools of instruction.

Both teachers and students seem to agree that the textbook is the most important instructional medium used in their classrooms, and they have an invisible influence on the way the classroom activities are carried out. Therefore, they recommend that the textbook writers need to be more creative in presenting the subject matter rather than simply covering the topics specified in the Ministry curriculum guidelines in a static manner. Some other recommendations include adapting an appropriate scope and sequence, in-depth exploration of important events and challenging activities and questions for students to develop higher order cognitive processes and skills like critical thinking and decision making. These suggestions concur with the recommendations presented in the report of the American Textbook Council (Sewall, 2000). The report argues that the "history textbooks should be accurate and interesting. They should record what actually happened, and to do so with some drama, conveying rich details, making an effort at objectivity, and making clear to children why a person, event, or geographical detail was of significance and importance" (Sewall, 2000, p. 40).

The low quality in the textbooks can be attributed to several reasons: First of all, textbook publishers cater to the pressure of the MONE for whom the textbook content is supposed to be a reflection of the centralized curriculum. They create books whose content is supposed to match the content of the curriculum exactly. Otherwise their books run into the risk of being rejected for use in schools by the MONE. Another pressure comes from the tight schedule the MONE has for the textbook publishers. The time between the

MONE's announcement of the textbooks to be written for the school subjects and the publishers' delivery of the books to the MONE for suitability assessment is no more than 5-6 months. This places a huge stress on the publishers, and as a result they are squeezed between making a quality textbook and meeting the deadline to be on the market.

The second problem arises from the traditional conception of what a history textbook is supposed to be. Traditionally, history textbooks present mostly declarative knowledge such as dates, facts, descriptions, and these declarations are closely watched for during the approval phase at the MONE. Different perspectives, explanations, implications and relationships may be risky areas for textbook writers due to the approval process. As a result, the textbooks are very much alike, and do not engage students in using higher cognitive levels of thinking. As Jitendra et al. (2001) indicate "textbooks that contained mostly factual information would be unlikely to model the manipulation of complex concepts or principles or provide sufficient practice to permit learners to generalize problem solving and thinking in real world contexts" (p. 154).

Finally, the lack of professionalism appears to be a problem in producing quality textbooks. The required conformity to the content and concepts of the centralized curriculum becomes the most valued by the publishers, and in turn this tends to ensure that creativity and difference in the textbooks is a risky proposition. The result is a boring similarity in the textbooks in terms of the way they deal with the content and the way they use visuals and supplementary activities.

In conclusion, this study provides an insight into the problems experienced with history textbooks at high school level through the perceptions of teachers and students as the primary beneficiaries of textbooks. It appears that the conformity to the centralized curriculum and the approval process by the MONE are not sufficient in providing schools with quality textbooks. More attention needs to be given to the making of clear, easy-to-read, accurate, interesting and appealing textbooks. This may require more creativity in presenting the content and visuals, and encouragement of the use of alternative approaches in textbook production.

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Ali Yildirim

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Received June 8, 2006
Revision received November 3, 2006
Accepted November 30, 2006