

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN EFL TEXT BOOKS FROM ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Ekoeleştirel Açıdan Efl Ders Kitaplarında Doğa Bilinci

Lecturer. Filiz YÖRÜK ÇEVİK

Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, Kahramanmaraş/TURKEY

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4394-1743>

Lecturer. Şerife DURNA

Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, Kahramanmaraş/TURKEY

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3784-7072>

ABSTRACT

Textbooks have always been regarded as the main sources of input for the learners in ELT context. To provide learners adequately with what they need to acquire, it is important to design the textbooks appropriately. That is why evaluating the textbooks in terms of their sufficient coverage of the intended materials gains much more importance. Also ELT coursebooks are regarded as the most important tool for teaching culture or pointing out important issues. Ecocriticism is a term studying the relationship between the literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view with various sciences such as philosophy, sociology, psychology together to search for the environment and find out the best solutions for world. In an age where environmental destruction and crisis occurred due to the humanity's disconnection from natural world and as a result, they failed to understand the interconnection of all the things on earth. Many scholars have done studies to influence the society's perception about their connection with the outer world and they aimed to attract the humans' attention on this issue. As a result, ecocriticism emerged for enlightening the people's perception about their interconnectedness with their physical world. This study aims to investigate ecocritism in EFL textbook at pre-intermediate level to get deeper insight about how learners' perception is affected by the text in terms of environmental awareness.

Key Words: Textbook Evaluation, Ecocritism, Nature, Environmental pollution, Environmental awareness

ÖZET

Ders kitapları her zaman İngilizce Öğretimi bağlamında ana girdi kaynakları olarak kabul edilmiştir. Öğrencilerin kazanması gereken edinimleri yeterli bir şekilde sağlayabilmek için ders kitaplarını uygun bir şekilde tasarlamak önemlidir. Bu nedenle ders kitaplarının amaçlanan materyallerin yeterlilik kapsamı açısından değerlendirilmesi çok daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. Ayrıca ELT ders kitapları kültür öğretimi veya önemli konulara dikkat çekmede en önemli araç olarak kabul edilir. Ekoeleştirel çevre için araştırma yapmak ve çevre sorunlarına en iyi çözümleri bulmak için felsefe, sosyoloji, psikoloji gibi çeşitli bilimlerle disiplinlerarası bir bakış açısıyla edebiyat ve çevre arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyen bir terimdir. İnsanlığın doğal dünyayla bağlantısının kopması nedeniyle çevresel yıkım ve krizin meydana geldiği bir çağda, bunun sonucunda dünyadaki her şeyin birbiriyle olan bağlantısını anlayamadılar. Birçok bilim adamı, toplumun dış dünyayla olan bağlantılarına ilişkin algılarını etkilemek için çalışmalar yaptı ve bu konuda insanların dikkatini çekmeyi amaçladılar. Sonuç olarak, ekoeleştirel insanların fiziksel dünyalarıyla bağları olmalarına dair algılarını aydınlatmak için ortaya çıktı. Bu çalışma, orta seviyede EFL ders kitabındaki ekoeleştirel ve öğrencilerin algılarının çevre bilinci açısından metinden nasıl etkilendiğine dair daha derinlemesine bilgi sahibi olmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ders Kitabı Değerlendirme, Ekoeleştirel, Doğa, Çevre kirliliği, Çevre bilinci

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language means learning a new culture, a new life style and being a new person. So, it is not surprising to see the top trend topics from all over the world in EFL textbooks while learning English. In the 21st century, human beings face many serious environmental problems and these issues reflect on EFL course books. With the rise of global warming, we have to cope with some kind of natural disasters as a type of environmental issue. And this issue is especially reflected on EFL course books because they carry important messages for the young people or new language learners as a warning about the future world or as a precaution for the upcoming conditions in the coming years.

Ecocriticism is defined as a field that studies the relationship between the literature and the environment in a multidisciplinary frame such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, geography etc. As its name calls itself, ecocriticism is closely related with environment/nature-centered topics. It is highly probable that ecocriticism appeared as a lens to search the relationship between the human and the non-human in an age when many natural crisis and disasters occur, especially because of human unawareness or destruction. To behave the nature/environment as a non-living being or as an inferior is the main problem that human being should tackle over. As human beings, we are just a part of the eco-system and we should learn to live in harmony with the other living and non-living beings in this enormous structure.

There is an undeniable fact that the biggest reason of the devastation on the nature is human being. With the rise of technology and science, human being started to think that he can understand the hidden structure in the nature or ecosystem and began to behave as a superior who can dominate it. As Lynn White states, "surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order" (White 1996, 5). While trying to dominate the nature, human being misses the real point that he destroys his own world/habitat in fact. Almost all of the natural disasters and environmental problems such as global warming, deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, even earthquakes derive from the human's unawareness or the desire to dominate the nature. Keeping this situation in mind, human being should respect the outer world as a part of the whole universe. Barry Commoner's first law of ecology highlights "Everything is connected to everything else." (Commoner 1974, 21) and ecocriticism takes this as motto to generate its function, method or style. Encouraging ecological awareness and applying ecological consciousness to literary criticism, ecocriticism presents a holistic, interrelated and interdependent unity. Nature has always been essential factor in cultural artifacts, especially in literary texts. With the emergence of ecocriticism, nature finds the voice to raise consciousness about itself among the human.

To take attention to environmental issues, many people from all levels of society and institutions such as governments, non-government organizations, companies and media address green issues. Among academic publications, ELT course books have the highest number of readers since they are used all over the world. When course books' potential to make worldwide impact was taken into consideration, they should not remain indifferent to environmental issues (Akcesme, 2013). They can raise the public awareness by bringing environmental issues and problems to public attention with using the texts.

As a messenger to carry culture, learning a language has a noteworthy function and meeting the texts about the nature and environment does not surprise us. The texts, especially about the environment, environmental problems and natural disasters, are included in the EFL text books to attract the attention of the learners, readers, teachers etc. Based on the results yielded in literature, the present study aims to analyze an ELT textbook from ecocritical approach in terms of environmental awareness and environment issues. Accordingly, the following research questions were developed.

- ✓ How is nature presented in the texts?
- ✓ Do the texts raise consciousness about environment and environmental problems?
- ✓ Do the texts offer environmentally friendly, ecologically sensitive attitudes?
- ✓ Are there any texts which may be related with apocalypse?
- ✓ What are the functions of the texts related with the environment? Do they warn the people about the future? Do they scare about the end of the world?

2. DATA ANALYSIS

Pioneer, as a new age book serial which does not ignore environmental issues, was chosen for this study. In this paper, we will analyze Pioneer Pre-Intermediate level (180 pages) by focusing on the texts related with the nature, environment and environmental issues. In the book, we generally come across the texts rising environmental awareness and having an environmentally friendly approach. Throughout the analysis, we will present the related texts from the perspective of ecocritical theory.

From the first unit of the book, we encounter a text which pays attention to environmental issues. It is a text from a quiz comparing and contrasting the past and now about the production of electric cars:

In the past not many people bought electric cars but now, because of environmental issues, they are becoming more and more popular. However, long journeys are difficult because you have to charge these cars regularly. Nowadays, car manufacturers produce over 100,000 electric cars every year. But when did the first electric cars appear on the roads?

a. in the 1890s

b. in the 1920s

c. in the 1950s

(Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 1b 2015, p.10)

As it can be seen, the text drives the reader's attention towards the importance of electric cars in terms of environment. Electric cars are environmentally friendly vehicles and most of the car companies are busy with this topic for decades. And this trend is not ignored in the book.

In the third module, we find two paragraphs about the installation art. In the first part, we learn about Néle Azevedo's *Melting Men* installation:

In 2009, Brazilian artist Néle Azevedo created an installation called *Melting Men*. She created a thousand tiny ice sculptures of men and placed them in a sitting position on steps in a square in Berlin. They quickly began to melt and were soon just a puddle of water. The Melting Men installation has appeared in various cities, like Paris, Florence, Havana and Sao Paulo. Azevedo's installation is more than just art. She wants people to become aware of the melting ice caps at the poles and how this can cause water levels to rise. Her arts send a warning to humanity. (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 3c 2015, p.32)

It won't be wrong to call this paragraph as a kind of apocalyptic text. Apocalypse is a common saying that warns about the end of the world is coming. Apocalyptic texts function as a warning born after some kind of crisis. This saying roots back ages, especially about environmental situation: "Scholars dispute its origins, but it seems likely that the distinctive construction of apocalyptic narratives that inflects much environmentalism today began around 1200 BCE, in the thought of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster, or Zarathustra." (Garrard 2004, 85) And in *Melting Men* installation we visualize how the rise of water level affects our life if the ice caps melt at the poles.

The other paragraph about installation art is quite different from the previous one. It is about an artificial rain room:

In 2012, the contemporary art studio Random International turned one of the rooms at the Barbican Centre in London into a *Rain Room*. Rain fell from the ceiling of the room non-stop. Visitors could hear, see and even smell the rain, but when they walked through the room, they didn't get wet. Eight digital cameras followed each visitor and a computer stopped the rain above them. This made the people feel they were in control of the rain. Random International saw the installation as a social experiment and were interested in people's reactions. (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 3c 2015, p.32)

Maybe, the studio organizing this kind of installation aimed to see people's reaction when they were given the chance to control the natural events and dominate the nature. Although the book did not mention about the reactions of the visitors, it is highly probable that they liked it, because human beings like taking the nature under their control. And they can do that with the help of technology. In that artificial room, they can stop the rain with a computer signaling an idea for the visitors to adapt the same in the outer world. It raises curiosity in the human mind.

In the following module, we encounter a part which is about natural disasters. Natural disasters catch the attention of many disciplines from geography and science to sociology and ecology. Since the ancient times, natural disasters are taken as serious warnings from the Mother Nature or the gods or goddesses for the humanity. When a natural disaster occurred, ancient people used to think that they made something wrong to their Mother Nature or gods, and they were punished by them because of their fault. This opinion may seem ridiculous but it is not totally wrong. If we adapt it to our contemporary world, we can see the similarities. Most of the natural disasters happen because of the devastation of the nature, such as flood, forest fire, tsunami, landslip etc. In fact it is quite clear; nature reacts as the human beings destroy it. To attract the attentions of the readers and learners about natural disasters, four excerpts taken from newspapers or news bulletins are presented in the module 4c:

- ✓ The tsunami hit a town on the west coast. The huge wave caused serious damage to buildings and roads, and whole areas have flooded with water.
- ✓ Firefighters are still trying to put out the wildfire which broke out yesterday morning, and is still burning in one of the most beautiful forests in the country. You can see the cloud of black smoke from miles away.
- ✓ Many buildings collapsed during the earthquake last Friday. The ground was shaking for a whole minute and there have been lots of aftershocks since then.
- ✓ The strong winds and heavy storms destroyed several houses. Many people are now trapped and the authorities are doing what they can to rescue them. This was a category two hurricane. (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 4c 2015, p.42)

Following these small excerpts, a longer text titled as *Double Disaster in Japan* consisting of five paragraphs is given and in the last paragraph of the text Fukushima nuclear power plant is mentioned: "One of the main worries at the moment is the state of the Fukushima nuclear power plant. There are reports that the earthquake damaged the plant and experts are worried there could be a huge nuclear disaster." (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 4c 2015, p.42) Nuclear power is one of the most discussed environmental issues in the last decades. It has both advantages and disadvantages concerning with the production of electricity, safety precautions, environmental pollution, water pollution, destruction of nature etc. As it can be guessed, environmentalists do not support the nuclear power generally because of its risky situation for the environment. And by sharing a part about the nuclear power plant damaged by earthquake, the book raises the readers'

curiosity about what the nuclear power is and how it works etc. By this way, it provides a noteworthy input for environmental awareness in the learners.¹

When we come to the sixth module of the book, we come across totally nature/environment-centered topics. A text titled *Life on Earth A Hundred Years from Now...* is placed on the first page of the module. In the introduction part of the text, we see the awareness about the reasons of the natural or environmental problems: “Since the 1950s, we have destroyed more than a third of the natural world. Our way of life has caused many serious environmental problems. We use huge quantities of natural resources and produce too much rubbish. Pollution is affecting the climate and our planet is getting warmer.” (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 6a 2015, p.58)

Following the introduction part, it mentions about two futurologists’ opinions about the future of the world. While one of the futurologists is quite pessimistic, the other one is optimistic about the situation in the future. The pessimist one, Jake Davis, approaches the situation from an apocalyptic perspective:

- ✓ The global population will increase and reach approximately 16 billion. There won’t be enough food or resources for everyone.
- ✓ Temperatures will be higher than they are today. As a result, the Amazon rainforest will disappear completely and the area will turn into a desert.
- ✓ The ice at the poles will melt and sea levels will rise. As a result, some cities in coastal areas, as well as islands that are not very high above sea level, will flood and disappear.
- ✓ Air pollution will keep increasing and people will suffer from lung diseases because of the polluted air. (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 6a 2015, p.58)

All the items Davis listed warn the humanity about the hell-like end of the earth. The first item is one of the most serious problems being discussed for a long time. The unbalance between the population and food substance or other resources has attracted the attention of the ecologists and sociologists for ages. On the same side with Davis, problems caused by overpopulation. (See, Ehrlich Paul R. 1968) Not only the first item, but also the other ones signal about the apocalyptic approach to Thomas Malthus is one of the most known ecologists who wrote about this problem in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. Malthus foresees the problematic situation about population in the future thinking that it will increase to a dramatic point and the life resources, such as food and water will not be enough. (See, Malthus, 1978) Another ecologist who goes on the same path is Paul Ehrlich with his *The Population Bomb* written in 1968. His work is a new form of Malthus’s essay as it can be guessed from the title. He also warns about the increase of population and the possible environmental problems. Second and third items indicate the global warming and its ineluctable results. For the last item, it won’t be wrong to claim that it is the direct result of industrialization and deforestation.

The other futurologist, Nicola Brand, is much more optimistic than the previous one. Her approach is quite logical and pragmatist. It is also possible to call her point of view as post-apocalyptic. In post-apocalyptic narrative, we witness a society which experienced a catastrophic event, such as a natural disaster or war and that society changes its way to survive in post-apocalyptic narrations. Post-apocalypse provides the survivors to reorganize their lives and to get a new life style and alternative sources with the help of technology and science:

- ✓ People will use alternative energy sources, such as solar power and wind power, much more than they do today. However, most of the world’s energy will come from *cold fusion*, a clean, safe and free energy source.

¹ More detailed info about nuclear power can be taken from <https://nuclear-energy.net/what-is-nuclear-energy/advantages-disadvantages-nuclear-energy>.



- ✓ Scientists will control the weather. It won't be cheap, but they will use technology to prevent natural disasters in certain areas.
- ✓ Extensive desert greening will take place and most of the world's deserts will turn into forests. (Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 6a 2015, p.58)

And the last part to analyze in the book is a quiz about carbon footprint. Carbon footprint is "amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions associated with all the activities of a person or other entity." (<https://www.britannica.com/science/carbon-footprint>) It is closely related with environmental problems and the calculation of carbon footprint totally functions as a tool to raise environmental awareness. And in the quiz we see questions driving our attention towards the amount of carbon footprint that a simple action/activity causes:

- ✓ A flight from London to Hong Kong has the same carbon footprint as using...
 - a. 100,000 plastic bags
 - b. 200,000 plastic bags
 - c. 300,000 plastic bags
- ✓ When shopping, which packaging should you choose for a smaller carbon footprint?
 - a. paper
 - b. plastic
 - c. cardboard
- ✓ Which of the following increases your carbon footprint more than the others?
 - a. buying a flower out of season
 - b. buying locally produced food
 - c. buying 4 kilos of imported bananas
- ✓ What produces 1 kilo of carbon dioxide?
 - a. travelling in a plane for 4 miles
 - b. using a computer for 32 hours
 - c. both a and b

(Pioneer Pre-Intermediate Module 6a 2015, p.59)

After elaborating all the related texts, we can conclude that Pioneer is aware of the environmental issues and places the associated texts in Pre-Intermediate level, but it may not right to say that the number of texts is enough. The topics about the environmental issues covered in the book are absolutely to the point and outstanding. It would be more illuminating to read a few more texts about the different sides and affects of environmental issues or problems.

3. CONCLUSION

ELT course books as one of the most common books used all over the world have powerful impact and are often regarded as the main sources of linguistic and cultural knowledge of the target language in EFL context (Chen, 2000; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Huang, 2003). ELT course books should promote not only cultural issues but also clear environmental messages and ecological ethics. In global world, it is impossible to keep away from environmental issues as many serious problems emerge because of human beings' unawareness towards the nature. Language learning means not only learning the target language but also picking many cultural and global topics up, so environmental issues and awareness of nature also should be among the aims of language teaching and learning.

As Akcesme (2013) pointed out by addressing green agenda to foster environmentally friendly behavioral change, course books can make a difference with ecologically friendly and sensitive

coverage. They need to be designed to include reading and listening passages with speaking and writing activities about environmental issues to encourage environmental awareness and connectedness with our environment. The texts in course books should be used to develop not only linguistic level but also the consciousness level of the learners regarding environmental issues. Language learners can have a more holistic and inclusive vision of a universe with the emphasis on the idea that the human and the nature should coexist, cooperate rather than the separation.

Examining just one level of a book series can be regarded as limitation of this study and in further studies greater number of ELT course books can be examined from different levels and different book series. Moreover, an interview can be conducted to learn the learners' ideas about environmental issues in another study. Also an ideal text to raise environmental awareness among learners can be created as a subject of a further study.

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