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## **EXPLORING EFL ASSESSMENT IN TURKEY: CURRICULUM AND TEACHER PRACTICES**

*Research Article*

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## **EXPLORING EFL ASSESSMENT IN TURKEY: CURRICULUM AND TEACHER PRACTICES**

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### **Abstract**

This study focuses on the assessment practices of EFL teachers in the upper secondary level in Turkey and explores how teachers' assessment practices and the assessment dimension of English language curriculum (for grades 9 – 12) match. In the study, teachers' purposes of assessing learners, which aspects of language they assess, and how they carry out assessment are examined by comparing the findings to the recommended assessment practices in the curriculum. Additionally, how EFL teachers feel themselves in their assessment practices is explored. The study employs qualitative design by using document analysis, an open-ended questionnaire, and semi-structured interview. The participants are teachers of English who work at upper secondary schools in Turkey. The findings of the study reveal that (1) some of the teacher practices match with the assessment dimension of the curriculum while there is a mismatch between some of them; (2) teachers have misconceptions about authentic assessment and there is a lack of use of authentic assessment, (3) teachers are the only feedback providers in the classroom, and (4) teachers are divided into three groups of feelings about assessment practices as positive, negative, and neutral.

*Keywords:* EFL assessment, high school teachers, teacher practices, national curriculum

### **1. Introduction**

Language education has three dimensions: teaching, learning, and assessment. Assessment has a central role in the process since it directly affects learning and teaching. Assessment shapes and constrains teachers' classroom practices and students' orientation in the learning process. In many contexts, teachers (have to) design their instructional activities according to the assessment policies employed. For instance, standardized/centralized exams to let the students get into the next level of education (e.g., upper secondary or tertiary level) play a major role in determining teachers' instructional purposes. In such contexts, teachers' main aim becomes preparing students for getting accepted in tertiary education or a higher quality school in upper secondary level. They focus their attention on improving their exam performance. As Phelps (2011) puts it, "standardized tests encourage teachers to teach to the tests" (p. 38). Likewise, students' learning orientation and study habits evolve accordingly and they can resist engaging in classroom activities to improve real life language skills and prefer the ones that prepare them for the exams. Additionally, individual schools can have different policies for assessment and they can also affect teachers' approach to language instruction. In such contexts, teaching serves assessment and research has shown that this 'negative backwash effect' has many drawbacks on language instruction. Therefore, assessment dimension of language education should be designed in the

way to serve teaching and learning. This can be realized by placing an emphasis on formative practices and carrying out assessment as an integral part of instruction and basing assessment more on students' coursework than on formal tests (Cheng, Rogers, and Wang, 2008).

Adopting the idea of 'assessment for learning' (AfL) is another way of reducing negative backwash effects of assessment and letting it support teaching. In assessment for learning, assessment is treated as a catalyst to learning, rather than the way of measuring success; and it is seen as a natural part of the teaching and learning process (Berry, 2008). Berry (2008) describes AfL in the following way:

The fundamental principle of assessment for learning is making a strong connection between assessment and learning. In the assessment for learning model, assessment should be used to promote, induce, and reinforce learning. Within the parameters of assessment for learning, students' involvement in the assessment activities is taken seriously, as they are the main players of learning. Teaching, learning, and assessment have to come together and work together if we are to raise students' standards of achievements (p. 19).

Assessment for learning, which has been an actively promoted approach to assessment, should be adopted in the curricula and it should also be given place in teachers' assessment practices.

Contrary to the constraints assessment imposes on teaching and learning, it also has considerable benefits for the process. The results of assessment function as a proof of students' progress and either provide the feeling of success or guide the process to enhance learning and teaching in case of any failure. Thus, "assessment has an essential role in teachers' decision making process; it goes with the teacher nearly in every step" (Öz & Atay, 2017, p. 26). It is a dimension of language education that requires informed policy making and practices.

The present study aims to contribute to a better understanding of EFL teachers' assessment practices in the upper secondary level in Turkey and how the national curriculum (for grades 9-12) deals with the assessment dimension. The study also identifies whether teachers' practices and the practices recommended in the curriculum match. A further observation of teachers' feelings of their assessment practices is included to have a deeper insight in the issue.

### **1.1.National EL Curriculum and the Assessment Dimension**

The National Curriculum for English was designed based on the principles of CEFR. The primary aim of the curriculum is to create a motivating, encouraging, and enjoyable learning atmosphere and a meaningful learning context in which learners/users can use the language actively, productively, and communicatively in line with their needs and expectations. The curriculum adopts action-oriented approach and takes developing learners' communicative competence with all aspects (which are grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence) as the basis of language instruction. The curriculum emphasizes addressing language functions and real life language skills in an integrated way. Other aims include developing learners' self-expression, communication, cooperation, and problem solving skills; improving their reading, writing, listening, and speaking

skills and vocabulary in the target language; fostering learner autonomy, and making them be aware of the target culture and values and respect them.

The assessment dimension of the curriculum reflects the philosophy in teaching dimension. It recommends the use of a combination of alternative, traditional, and electronic assessment types with an emphasis on assessing all four language skills in an integrated way via assessment tasks/tools that reflect the dynamic, communicative, and interactive nature of language use in real-life. Additionally, portfolios and projects that foster language production rather than memorization or mechanical drills are suggested to be used predominantly; and a systematic feedback mechanism should be incorporated in a way that includes multiple sources (as teachers, self, peers, or parents) and rubrics or checklists. Figure 1 summarizes language assessment in 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades EL curriculum (2018) by way of dividing it into three main parts as why, what, and how.

The ‘why’ part informs about the purpose of assessing learners and recommends that, in brief, assessment should serve language learning goals, it should promote and check learning; yet it should not be used as a negative reinforcement instrument. The ‘what’ part includes what aspects of language learning to assess and strongly recommends teachers assess understanding, production, and use of analytical skills; it highlights the need to assess language skills in an integrated way with a focus on speaking skill. However, the curriculum requires teachers to avoid from activities engaging learners in merely memorizing structures and vocabulary in their assessment practices. The ‘how’ part guides teachers on the type of assessment methods and tasks/tools that should be used in tracking learners’ progress in language. According to the curriculum, teachers should take the results of the paper and pen exams, teacher observations, and participation rate into consideration while assessing learners (EL curriculum, 2018, p.11). Moreover, teachers should place authentic assessment that reflects real life experiences at the heart of their assessment practices. There should be a harmony between learning/teaching and assessment aspects of language education and so techniques that reflect the learning/teaching methods should be employed. Instructional technologies can also be utilized in the assessment practices. The use of portfolios, projects, and communicative tasks for assessment purposes is encouraged. For grading the communicative work or other type of learner output, teachers should make use of rubric/checklists. Multiple parties should be involved in the feedback mechanism and teachers, peers, parents, self, and computer mediation should serve as feedback providers. Yet, paper and pen exams which include multiple choice, true-false, and fill-in-the-blanks activities are among the assessment tools that should be avoided.

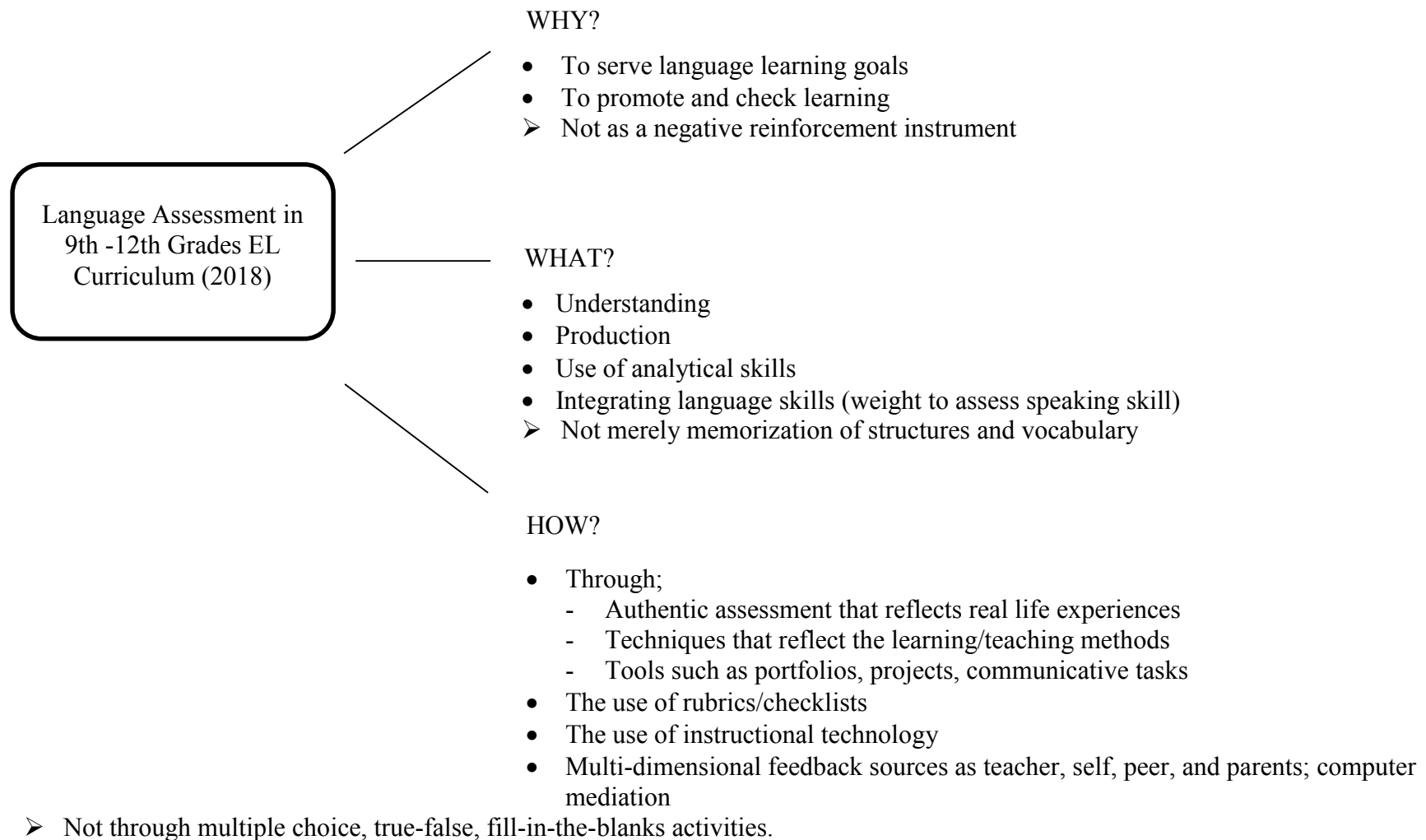


Figure 1. Summary of the assessment dimension in EL Curriculum for grades 9-12 (2018)

## 2. Literature Review

There has been an inadequate understanding of how English language teachers make their assessment decisions and what underlies their practices due to comparatively little research (Clarke & Gipps, 2000; Davison, 2004; Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009). Several factors may affect teachers' assessment practices such as their beliefs, the training they get and they do not get, national and/or institutional policies, etc.

There are studies examining teachers' beliefs/perceptions and their assessment practices, and the results that show a mismatch between the beliefs and practices dominate the literature. In their study, Widiastuti et.al. (2020) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs and their formative assessment practices and concluded that teachers' beliefs are not always in line with their practices. Correspondingly, Kim's (2014) study revealed that although teachers believe in the importance of testing oral skills, the formal exams they administer do not include speaking sections. Another mismatch between teachers' perceptions and practices is demonstrated in Öz and Atay's (2017) research. The study showed that though EFL instructors are, to some extent, literate in terms of in-class assessment, they have a difficulty in reflecting their knowledge in their practices. In a comparative study of the assessment beliefs, attitudes and practices of English language teachers in Hong Kong and Australia, Davison (2004) found that teachers in the two contexts have very different assessment approaches and assessment problems. However, in both contexts, Davison concluded that, there is an urgent need for teachers to develop an ownership and common understanding of assessment.

Another focus of research in the language assessment literature has been the reforms in language assessment and whether teachers employ the suggested assessment approaches and methods in their practices. For instance, in Iran, it was reported that traditional methods and materials for both teaching and assessing the English language are still in practice and no considerable improvements have been observed despite the continuous efforts (Farhady & Hedayati, 2009). In the context of Bangladesh, it was revealed that the emphasis on speaking and listening skills is far less than they are required to be taught and tested as stated in the recent syllabus (Das et.al., 2014). Carless (2005, p. 52) concluded that "all deep educational changes are challenging and assessment cultures seem to be particularly impervious to transformation" as a result of his analyses of Hong Kong school curriculum reform. In line with the above studies, Morris et. al. (2000) claimed that assessment is the most resistant dimension to change.

Furthermore, Inbar-Lourie et.al. (2009) looked at what underlies the lack of use of alternative assessment tools by teachers of English in Israel and found that 'technological matters', 'time', and 'the amount of education provided for the teachers' account for the situation. Another study that focused on teachers' testing skills produced similar results that teachers are not trained in testing and so they are not able to do the task of assessment effectively (Köksal, 2002). On the contrary, Wang (2017) carried out a case study on an experienced EFL teacher's classroom assessment practices in an oral English course and the study revealed that the teacher integrated formative assessment and summative assessment in a productive way that pushed her students to make progress. The researcher highlighted the teacher's implicit knowledge on formative assessment even though she had not had any specific training on it, and attributed this to the wisdom and expertise of experienced teachers.

### 3. Method

This study aims to explore how the assessment of EFL is implemented at high schools, how the national curriculum (for grades 9-12) deals with it in Turkey, and whether teacher practices and the curriculum match. Along with this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the upper secondary school EFL teachers' purposes of assessing learners?
2. What aspects of language do EFL teachers assess in their learners?
3. How do upper secondary EFL teachers assess their learners' progress?
4. How do EFL teachers' assessment practices and the assessment dimension of English language curriculum (for grades 9-12) match?
5. How do EFL teachers feel about their assessment practices?

#### 3.1. Research Design

The study is in qualitative design and has a systematic subjective approach to explore upper secondary school EFL teachers' assessment practices and how the national curriculum (for grades 9-12) deals with it in Turkey.

#### 3.2. Data Collection

The data for this study came from multiple sources. First, an open-ended questionnaire was developed based on the assessment dimension of the national curriculum. Besides the background (demographic) questions, the questionnaire included ten open-ended questions to explore EFL teachers' assessment practices and purposes in assessment. Of the questions, nine were *experience (behavior) questions* that “focus on what a respondent is currently doing or has done in the past” (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012, p. 453). The type of one question was *feelings questions*, which “concern how respondents feel about things [and] are directed toward people's emotional responses to their experiences” (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012, p. 454). The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms and fifty teachers of English from various cities in Turkey participated. The second set of data was collected through subsequent semi-structured interviews to have an in-depth insight about what teachers do for assessing EFL and how they feel about what they do. The interviews were carried out with ten teachers who responded to the questionnaire and volunteered for further contribution to the study. Interviews were realized via Zoom meetings and they were recorded upon teachers' consent for later analysis. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and they included ten questions. The questions were the same with the questionnaire but they were intended to expand on their responses to gain insight about their practices and feelings. Third, samples of paper and pen exams (n=10) were collected from the volunteering teachers, who also participated in the interview, to provide a check on the questionnaire and interviews. All three sets of data were collected and analyzed in a cyclical way. Purposive sampling was employed with the aim of reaching EFL teachers who work at upper secondary schools in Turkey. Snowball technique was also used to reach teachers from different cities.

### 3.3.Participants

The participants of the study were fifty EFL teachers who work at upper secondary schools in nineteen different cities, which is thought to represent the assessment practices of teachers across Turkey. The participant teachers work at four different types of upper secondary schools (general high school, science oriented high school, religion oriented high school, and vocational high school). Forty-one teachers had B.A. degree, eight teachers had M.A. degree, and one teacher had Ph.D. in English language teaching.

### 3.4.Analysis of the Data

The data of this study were analyzed along with the qualitative design traditions. As the first step of the analysis, the questionnaire data were subjected to content analysis. For the first cycle coding of the data, in-vivo coding was used, which is one of the first cycle coding methods. In-vivo coding was used to base the analysis upon the participants' perspective since in-vivo codes "use the direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases" (Saldana, 2011, p. 48). For the second cycle coding, similar codes were identified and assembled together to create pattern codes. "Pattern coding is a way of grouping those summaries (after pulling together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis) into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69.). After second cycle coding, frequencies were counted and coding was finalized. As the second step, content analysis of the samples of paper and pen exams was carried out and types of activities/tasks included in the exam samples were identified and frequencies were counted. As the last step, interviews were partially transcribed and related excerpts were taken to support or check the findings in the questionnaire data and paper and pen exam samples.

## 4. Results

### 4.1.Why? Purpose of Language Assessment

The questionnaire data and the interview data were examined to find out the purposes of teachers in assessing their learners. First, findings from the questionnaire data are to be presented. Table 1 shows the findings related to why teachers assess the learners.

Table 1. *Purposes of EFL teachers in assessing the learners*

Teachers' Purposes	<i>f</i>
To understand if/how much students learn	32
To get feedback about my teaching & to tailor my future practices	14
To help students improve in the target language	13
To grade the students	7
To make them get prepared for the centralized university exam	2

The findings reveal that, most of the teachers assess the learners *to understand if or how much they learn*. It is followed by *to get feedback about their teaching and to tailor their future practices*, and *to help learners improve in the TL* with nearly the same frequencies. Assessing



learners just *to grade them* and *to make the learners get prepared for the centralized university exam* are the purposes of less teachers.

Teachers' purposes reflected in the questionnaire data are in line with the findings in the interview data. Samples of teacher responses are given in the below excerpts.

*Actually, my main purpose is to see if I can teach effectively, how successful I am in teaching a language point. I think assessment is not only related to the learners' success but also to teachers, to evaluate teachers' way of teaching. There are different types of intelligences, different types of learners and I wonder if I can address all the intelligence types, learner types and teach every single student in my classes.*

*Unfortunately, the main purpose is to grade them, to give marks. If there was no such obligation, I would have 'to see the learners' progress' as my purpose of assessment 'to see how they improve in the process.' Because this is the enjoyable part in teaching...*

For instance, the teacher in the first excerpt expresses that she evaluates her own teaching by using the learners' assessment results and reflects on how much she can address students' learning needs; while the other teacher (in the second excerpt) expresses that her main purpose is grading. However, it seems that she feels restricted by the obligation of grading learners and so cannot be involved in the 'enjoyable' part of teaching as she states.

#### **4.2.What? Aspects of Language Assessed by EFL Teachers**

The language aspects that EFL teachers assess in learners are identified in the open-ended questionnaire. The findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Aspects of language assessed by EFL teachers as identified in the questionnaire*

Teachers' Practices	<i>f</i>
Four skills	10
Combination of two skills	10
Vocabulary & Grammar	10
Use of language	6
Progress in learning	4
Accuracy & Fluency	3
Communication skills	3

According to the teachers' self-report, the aspects mostly assessed are *four skills*, *combination of two skills*, and *vocabulary and grammar*. The second mostly assessed aspect is *use of language*. Some teachers report that they assess learners' *progress in learning* rather than stating a specific language aspect. *Accuracy and fluency*, and *communication skills* are assessed by less teachers.

To have a deeper insight into teacher practices in terms of what they assess, samples of paper and pen exams obtained from the teachers are examined. The findings reveal that teachers assess grammar, vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing all in an isolated way in the paper and pen exams. It is important to note here that, there is an incongruence between teachers' self-report and what is found in the samples of paper and pen exams. Teachers report that they assess four skills or combination of two skills. However, it is observed that the skills are assessed in an isolated way and the listening skill is not even assessed in the exams. Additionally, use of language and communication skills are other aspects that are not assessed in the exams.

### 4.3.How? Assessment Tools/Techniques Employed by the Teachers

First, teacher responses in the questionnaire were analyzed to see how teachers assess learners. Table 3 summarizes the findings related to the assessment tools and techniques employed by the teachers.

Table 3. *Assessment tools/techniques employed by teachers*

Teacher practices	<i>f</i>
Paper and pen exams	41
On-line games & On-line practice	14
Oral exams	8
The use of rubrics/checklists	6
Projects	6
Classroom observation	3
Presentations	3

It is observed in the table that paper and pen exams are employed by a great majority of teachers (41 out of 50) in this study. What follows it with a sharp decrease in frequency is on-line games and on-line practice as an assessment tool. Oral exams, rubrics or checklists, projects, classroom observation, and presentations are employed by a minority of teachers as assessment tools or techniques.

Next, to scrutinize the 'how' part of assessment in teacher practices, the types of activities and questions included in the paper and pen exams are examined. Table 4 shows the findings.

Table 4. *Types of activities and questions in the samples of paper and pen exams*

Types of activities and questions	<i>f</i>
Multiple choice	7
Fill in the blanks (for grammar and vocabulary)	7
Matching	4
Sentence/ dialogue completion	4
Open-ended questions	1
Translation (of vocabulary)	1
Grouping/Classifying words	1
Word formation	1

As the table illustrates, multiple choice, and matching are mostly included in the exams (in 7 exams out of 10).

As for how the language skills are assessed in the paper and pen exams, it is found that reading is assessed through comprehension questions (f=2) and true/false questions (f=1); speaking is assessed through multiple choice questions that include dialogue completion (f=1), and open-ended questions about the learner her/himself (f=1); and writing is assessed through an activity that requires learners to write about the given topics (f=2). As mentioned before, all three skills are dealt with in an isolated way and the listening skill is not assessed in any of the exams.

#### 4.4. How do teacher practices and the curriculum match?

To answer this research question, EFL teachers' assessment practices and the practices recommended by the curriculum are compared in three dimensions, that is why, what, and how. The first dimension includes the purposes of assessment (why) and Table 5 summarizes the results.

Table 5. *Comparison of assessment purposes recommended in the curriculum and teachers' purposes*

Purposes in the Curriculum	Teachers' Purposes
To serve language learning goals	To help learners improve in the TL (32)
To promote learning	To understand if/how much they learn (13)
To check learning	To get feedback about my teaching & to tailor my future practices (14)
	To grade them (7)
NOT as a negative reinforcement instrument	To make them get prepared for the university exam (2)

As seen in Table 5, the curriculum suggests teachers assess the learners to serve language learning goals, to promote learning, and to check learning. It is observed that all those purposes match with teachers' first two purposes in the list. Therefore, we can say that upper secondary EFL teachers meet all the curriculum expectations in terms of assessment purposes. Additionally, we see a majority of teachers (f: 14) who regard assessment as an opportunity for feedback on their teaching to tailor their future practices and this can be regarded as a sign of teacher reflection. We also see a minority of teachers (9 in total) diverging from the recommended purposes, who assess learners to grade and to make them get prepared for the centralized university exam.

Furthermore, the curriculum also specifies what should not be done in the assessment; and 'using assessment as a negative reinforcement instrument' is inadvisable in the curriculum. It is good to see that none of the teachers have it as their purpose of assessment. Their perspective is also reflected in the interviews as seen in the following excerpts:

*I never use assessment as a threat but I warn them to catch the deadlines for the assignments or for performance assessment or remind them of their responsibilities and requirements. I always encourage them that I believe they can do their best...*

*My main purpose in teaching is to encourage the students and to help them love learning a language. So, I always motivate them. Even when they get lower marks, I encourage them by appreciating their effort. I only warn them about their participation and tell them that their participation is also a part of the assessment.*

The excerpts here and the whole interview data show that teachers have a tendency in encouraging the learners rather than using assessment as a negative reinforcement tool.

The second dimension includes what is to be assessed as aspects of language learning. Table 6 shows a multiple comparison of the aspects of language learning to be assessed in the curriculum, in teachers' self-report and the real practices in paper and pen exams.

Table 6. *Comparison of curriculum and teacher practices in terms of language aspects to be assessed*

Curriculum	Teachers' Practices	
	Self-report	Paper and pen exams
Understanding	Four skills	Multiple choice
Production	Combination of two skills	Fill in the blanks
Use of analytical skills	Vocabulary & Grammar	Matching
Integrated language skills (weight to assess speaking skill)	Use of language	Sentence/dialogue completion
	Accuracy & Fluency	Open-ended questions
	Progress in learning	Translation (of vocabulary)
NOT merely memorization of structures and vocabulary	Communication skills	Grouping/Classifying words
		Word formation
		Reading, Writing, Speaking in isolation

As the results indicate, the curriculum suggests assessing understanding, production, use of analytical skills, and language skills in an integrated way. However, teachers' practices reveal a mismatch to a great extent between what the curriculum recommends and what the teachers do. The mismatch can easily be interpreted from the types of activities included in the samples of paper and pen exams. They are not the types of activities that can assess understanding, production, or use of analytical skills; rather they can assess learners' knowledge about the language. As for the language skills, no skill integration is found in the paper and pen exams. Reading, writing, and speaking are dealt with in an isolated way contrary to the curriculum. The

assessment of listening skill is not even realized. Additionally, there is an incongruence between teachers' self-report and their real practices in the paper and pen exams as mentioned before.

Furthermore, assessing merely memorization of vocabulary and structures is inadvisable in the curriculum. However, nearly all the activity types in the exams require mere memorization of structures and vocabulary except from the open-ended questions that assess creative use of language in one exam sample.

The third dimension to seek for a match between the curriculum and teacher practices is how to assess learners' progress. Table 7 summarizes the multiple comparisons between the curriculum recommendations and teachers' self-report and actual realization of assessment in paper and pen exams.

Table 7. *Comparison of curriculum and teacher practices in terms of assessment tools and techniques employed by the teachers*

Curriculum	Teacher Practices	
	Self-report	Paper and pen exams
Paper and pen exams	Paper and pen exams	Multiple choice
Teacher observations	On-line games, On-line practice	Fill in the blanks
Participation	Oral exams	Matching
The use of; authentic assessment, (e-) portfolios, projects, communicative tasks, rubrics/checklists, instructional technology, multi-dimensional feedback sources	The use of rubrics/checklists	Sentence/ dialogue completion
	Projects	Open-ended questions
	Teacher observation	Translation (of vocabulary)
	Presentation	Grouping/Classifying words
NOT through multiple choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blanks types of activities.		Word formation

As shown in the table, nearly all of the teacher practices including paper and pen exams, teacher observations, the use of rubrics/checklists, projects, and instructional technology correspond to the assessment tools/techniques that are recommended in the curriculum. However, when the types of activities in the paper and pen exams are examined, the situation lends itself to incongruence. In the curriculum, assessing learners through multiple choice, fill-in-the-blanks, etc. types of activities are inadvisable. The reason is that they do not measure learners' creative use of language and communication skills, yet they measure memorization of vocabulary and structures and the knowledge about language at the recognition level.

What is more, authentic assessment is observed to be a method that is not included in teachers' assessment practices although it is strongly recommended in the curriculum. To gain an insight about the situation, teachers were asked whether they use authentic assessment in their practices both in the questionnaire and the interviews. In this paper, authentic assessment is conceptualized as a method of assessment in which student learning is measured through tasks

that enable learners to connect their learning to real-world issues and problems. “Authentic tasks replicate real-world challenges and standards of performance that experts or professionals (in this context language users) typically face in the field” (Wiggins, 1989, p. 703 (my parenthesis)).

The findings of the questionnaire data reveal that thirty-one teachers (out of fifty) responded that they do not employ authentic assessment in their practices. Some of the teachers explain the reason as the focus of teaching in their context is to help learners get prepared for the centralized university exam and some explain that they use authentic materials during the classes but not the authentic assessment. On the other hand, nineteen teachers state that they employ authentic assessment and some of their responses in the questionnaire are as follows:

*Yes, at least once a term. We do role play or students prepare for a speech on a specific topic and I evaluate them according to a checklist.*

*Yes, we do performance presentations, role plays, and portfolios.*

*Yes, I use reflection paper. (...) At the end of each session, I want them to write a short paragraph about what they have learnt.*

*Yes, I assign a reading passage to hear their pronunciation and fluency in language. They record their voice and send me.*

In the responses above, it is obvious that teachers have misconceptions about authentic assessment. Role plays, preparing for a speech, presentations are elements of performance assessment, not authentic assessment. It is worth to note here that, literature suggests that there is a need to differentiate performance assessment from authentic assessment (Koh, 2017) since not all performance assessments are authentic. And, in the last two responses, it is clear that teachers are totally confused about authentic assessment. Therefore, we can say that some teachers carry out assessment activities and think that they are doing authentic assessment although they do not. Finally, the teacher in the below response uses authentic assessment in the right terms.

*Yes, I try to use authentic assessment. I usually prepare some tasks to check if they can transfer grammar knowledge and vocabulary knowledge to the given real-life situation.*

As for the interviews, each teacher first wanted the researcher to define authentic assessment. After the clarification of it as an assessment method, nearly all of the teachers responded in the following way:

*I tried to use this kind of tasks in my classes but as a learning task, not for assessment purposes. But now... I can see when I talk to you about this... I have never used authentic assessment so far. When I used such tasks, only one or two students are interested, but their level of English is not appropriate for the task, they don't know what to say. So, it didn't work in my context, it was not applicable.*

*Well... I can say that I have never used it because to be able to use it I need to talk in English, and students need to understand what is said in English, they need to talk in English but it is not somehow possible.*

It is clear from the above extracts that teachers do not employ authentic assessment in their practices. One of them says that she tried it as a learning task but found it inapplicable regarding the students' lack of interest in the task and their proficiency level. Another teacher has not tried it because he has concerns about talking in English and being understood by the learners.

Only one teacher has positive thoughts about employing authentic assessment in her future practices. She made a reference to the national curriculum and considered authentic assessment as a convenient method.

*Actually... when I was listening to your explanation, I asked myself why we haven't used such tasks for assessment... and first thing next term I will focus on it... I will try it, I liked the idea very much... and I believe that I will get positive feedback from students... In fact, our curriculum emphasizes problem solving skills and experiential learning so I see that authentic assessment is convenient for it. I will definitely try it.*

Another point that is examined in the 'how' dimension of assessment is providing feedback. When asked in the questionnaire, thirty-seven teachers (out of fifty) responded that they provide feedback after the assessment practices. A majority of the teachers (n=30) stated that they give feedback by showing the paper and pen exam sheet and letting them see their mistakes. Some teachers (n=5) expressed that they take notes of the common mistakes in the paper and pen exams and then clarify the problematic points in the class. And few teachers (n=2) reported that they provide written feedback individually for writing tasks. The rest of the teachers (n=13) stated that they do not provide feedback due to the crowded classes they teach.

In the curriculum, employing multi-dimensional sources as teacher, self, peer, parents, and computer-mediation is recommended to provide feedback. However, in teacher responses it is obvious that teachers are the only feedback providers in their classes. Therefore, this issue is scrutinized and teachers were asked to provide insights about the reason for not employing various feedback sources in the interviews. Their responses are as follows:

*When peers give feedback to each other, the other student feels himself/herself as unsuccessful so we don't use peer feedback. Students don't want to be corrected by their classmates; they don't like it.*

*Feedback is kind of neglected by the students; they just focus on the grades they get. They don't think about their mistakes, they don't reflect on them, they don't regard them as an opportunity to learn (...) once I tried to employ peer feedback; but they were so harsh to each other, they don't know how to give feedback, they just criticize each other in a discouraging way. What is more, school administration warned me about the situation. The case is the same for self-assessment. (...) So, learners need to learn how to do this constructively. (...) But if we train them how to do it for peer feedback and self-assessment, I believe they can do it.*

In the extracts, teachers complain about the way learners give feedback to their peers and explain the negative experiences they had. One teacher has a further comment that learners do not care about receiving feedback and reflecting on their mistakes. She also believes that if they are trained about peer feedback (and self-assessment), they can do it successfully.

#### **4.5.EFL Teachers Feelings and Ideas about their Assessment Practices**

The last point that is examined in this study is teachers' feelings and ideas about their assessment practices. Among fifty teachers, nineteen teachers state that they have positive feelings about what they do for assessing learners. Teachers explain their positive feelings as follows:

*I try to design assessment tools that are applicable in class, that are reliable and valid. I try my best and I'm happy about that. I think there's no best assessing tool or technique; but the best way of contributing to students' language progress is giving feedback after each assessment, it helps them to see their strengths and weaknesses.*

On the contrary, fifteen teachers have negative feelings and express their feelings with the key words 'not satisfied, really sorry, don't like, feel worn out, feel worried.' The following extracts exemplify the situation:

*I feel really sorry about assessment. I have the knowledge and I think that I should be able to transfer what I know to my practices. However, my context hinders me from applying what I know and also the levels of students are very low. I make effort on my side but I can't do anything, Then I feel worn out.*

*I don't like the assessment practices in my country. I can't assess students' writing and speaking skills sufficiently. Students can be good at traditional exams but they are not good at real life communication.*

They also explain that their negative feelings are due to learners' low level of proficiency, lack of time/limited time, heavy workload, class size, and learners' lack of interest in learning English.

Additionally, sixteen teachers feel neutral about what they do for assessment. They express their feelings in the following way.

*I do it traditionally and it is ok for me.*

It can be said that those teachers are neither contented nor feel discomfort about what they do.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This study focuses on the assessment dimension of English language curriculum for grades 9-12 and upper secondary school EFL teachers' assessment practices, and explores the correspondence between the curriculum and teacher practices. Additionally, the study examines teachers' feelings and ideas on their assessment practices. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Purpose of assessment, the use of rubrics/checklists, and the use of instructional technology are the points that the curriculum and teacher practices match.
2. However, what is assessed (the aspects of language & language learning) and how it is assessed (types of activities/tasks included in the exams) in teacher practices reveal a



mismatch with the curriculum. Even though teachers' self-reports show a correspondence with the curriculum, sample paper and pen exams uncover a mismatch.

3. In terms of the use of authentic assessment, teachers' self-report reveal that they are confused about the concept; exam samples and interviews reveal that teachers do not use authentic assessment as a method.
4. Teachers are the only feedback providers. Other feedback sources as peers, parents, self, and computer mediation are not involved in the assessment process.
5. Teachers are divided into three groups in terms of their feelings about assessment practices: They have positive feelings, negative feelings, and they are neutral about what they do for assessment.

The results of the study are supported by the previous research in the literature. For instance, a mismatch between teachers' assessment practices and the curriculum or education reforms is dominantly observed in other studies as well (Carless, 2005; Das et. al., 2014; Farhady & Hedayati, 2009; Kim, 2014; Öz & Atay, 2017; Widiastuti et. al., 2020). More specifically, Köksal (2004) found a mismatch between what is taught and what is assessed, and indicated that tests only focus on recognition but not production. Parallel to the findings of this study, Kim (2014) revealed that although teachers believe in the importance of testing oral skills and think that they assess speaking and listening skills, the paper and pen exams they administer do not include sections assessing those skills

In terms of the results regarding the lack of use of authentic assessment, the existing literature highlights the importance (Brown, 2019), need (Koh et. al., 2012), and benefits (Finch, 2002; Koh, 2017) of employing it. In the same vein, Aksu-Ataç (2012, p. 7) suggests that "it will be pedagogically useful to attach more importance to authentic assessment in curriculum and educational programs of language teaching" because "authentic assessment is 'a true test' of intellectual achievement or ability [which] requires students to demonstrate their deep understanding, higher-order thinking, and complex problem solving through the performance of exemplary tasks (Wiggins, 1989, p. 703).

This study attempts to contribute to a better understanding of EFL assessment in the context of upper secondary education in Turkey in three phases: First, the study presents the summary of the assessment dimension of the curriculum in three main parts as why, what, and how to assess EFL; second, it explores EFL teachers' assessment practices; and third, it seeks for the link between teacher practices and the curriculum.

### **5.1.Implications**

Some implications can be drawn based on the conclusions of the study. On the side of the curriculum, it needs to provide a wider and more comprehensive framework for assessment so that teachers' misconceptions (as in the case of authentic assessment in this study) and unfavorable practices (as the dominance of fill-in-the-blanks or multiple-choice activities in the formal exams) are eliminated. To this end, the assessment dimension of the curriculum can be re-designed with descriptors. On the side of the teachers, they need to be supported to catch up with recent trends in language assessment and gain assessment literacy. Furthermore, they need to be trained about designing integrated skills-based exams and authentic assessment, which are the recommended methods of assessment in the curriculum. This need of teachers - being assessment literate and competent in designing and using authentic assessment - is also essential for

supporting student learning and mastery of the 21st-century competencies. (Koh, 2017). Teachers also need support to develop in creating effective feedback mechanisms by using alternative ways and with multiple sources. Even though the study does not focus on the learners, some implications can be drawn on the side of the learners. Based on what interviews with teachers uncover, we can say that they need training on how to give peer feedback and how to do self-assessment as from lower grades to create awareness on this.

Moreover, future research can focus on how to create a comprehensive and effective framework for assessment in the curriculum, developing teachers' knowledge on assessment in general and on authentic assessment specifically and how to transfer their knowledge into classroom practices, and developing learners' understanding of peer feedback and self-assessment.

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