AVOWED OBJECTIVES IN ELT CURRICULUM VERSUS GROUND REALITIES IN CLASSROOMS: HOW CONVERGENT ARE THEY?

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1. Introduction

Due to the rising importance of English around the world and its widening impacts on different sectors, educational reforms in English language teaching have been on the political agendas of the countries. Turkey, as a fast-developing and western-oriented country, is no exception in the trend towards introducing educational policies to better the level of English proficiency of its citizens. From a historical perspective on education reforms in Turkey, it becomes evident that each education reform has placed paramount importance on foreign language education policies, especially those of English. Take, for example, the introduction of English classes in the fourth grade with three hours per week in the 1997 education reform, the increase of the course hours to 10 at high schools with the transition to the compulsory four-year high school education in the 2005 education reform (Gürsoy, Korkmaz & Damar, 2013; Kırkgöz, 2007). Additionally, with the latest educational reform in 2012, the compulsory education extended to 12 years within the scope of the education model, known as 4+4+4, consisting of primary (4 years), secondary (4 years) and high school levels (4 years) (Gürsoy et al., 2013).

Alongside these changes in the English language teaching policies, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has started various initiatives to raise the quality of foreign language education in the country. One of such initiatives was the introduction of the DynED (Dynamic Education) project in 2007, courseware that supports computer-based language teaching, for students at all levels of education. The DynED-embedded classes were found to contribute to the success of learners in the act of learning English with greater levels of motivation towards English (Baş & Kuzucu, 2009; Baş, 2010) and to have caused language teachers to hold favourable views about its use in language classes (Yiğit, 2013). Similarly, another project that drew on the use of technology intending to enhance opportunities in education was put into effect in 2010, which came to be known as FATIH (Turkish: Fırsatları Artırma ve Teknolojiyi İyileştirme Hareketi) project, i.e. *Movement to Increase Opportunities and Technology*, within the scope of which, classrooms were supplied with interactive boards and both students and teachers were distributed tablets to align their practices with technological advances; however, as reported in some studies, FATIH project appeared to cause a dilemma among teachers due to its perceived advantages (e.g. easy access to knowledge, enriched materials) and disadvantages (e.g. technical problems, lack of required computer skills) (Akıncı, 2017; Çiftçi, Taşkaya & Alemdar, 2013; Güven & Akar Vural, 2017).

The MoNE has also worked on numerous programs for improving students' overall language proficiency, especially oral skills. However, many initiatives of the MoNE have not been able to be put into effect due largely to financial issues. One of these programs was on the employment of 40.000 foreign teachers, "imported teachers", (Saraç, 2011, p. 263) at Turkish schools in 2011 who were schemed to accompany language teachers as language assistants and offer courses at English cafes and take part in extracurricular activities in order to make

students speak better English (Barrack, 2016). The project merely remained on paper and was not implemented most likely owing to its considerable costs and severe criticisms of the educational bodies and pre- and in-service language teachers against the project and its wider impacts for unassigned and pre-service teachers, as was verified in empirical studies (e.g. Coşkun, 2013).

Both the general educational reforms and projects on the teaching of English at schools have had a direct influence on the curricula for English language teaching at primary, secondary and high schools levels. This influence is considerably evident in the MoNE's attempts to regularly update the content and principles of such curricula in accordance with the changing linguistic needs of the students, the requirements of the technological advances and more importantly, the factors related to politics, contexts and pedagogy (Kırkgöz, Çelik & Arıkan, 2016). Albeit the renewal of such policy documents at regular intervals by the relevant authorities, the extent to which these policy-related curricular reforms have been translated into actual classroom practices so far and how successful they have been in terms of improving learners' English skills are still an understudied subject in Turkey. The investigation of the current curricula for English from a policy (official statements) and practice (ground realities) perspective is crucial to identify how convergent and divergent policy statements and classroom practices are. Besides, through this investigation, it may be understood whether the potential convergence and divergence between desired goals and classroom realities is a factor that plays a role in the reported low quality of foreign language education and Turkish people's overall low level of English proficiency (Çakır, 2017; Işık, 2008; Özen et al., 2013).

2. Theoretical Foundations

As this research is concerned with foreign language education policy, its theoretical foundations are informed by the relevant notions of language policy framework, especially that of Spolsky (2004) and that of Shohamy (2006). From a broader perspective, language policies can be taken as "an officially mandated set of rules for language use and form within a nation-state" (Spolsky, 2012, p. 3). If this broad definition is narrowed down for educational domains, it might mean officially determined rules to regulate language teaching within a specific context, in our case the Turkish one, with all of its constituents within the scope of language education policies in a nation-state (Language Education Policy, 2020). The materialization of language education policies with respect to foreign language education occurs at two levels: macro-level policies and micro-level policies (Wang, 2006). The design of the policies at the macro level is made by (supra)national organizations, such as the MoNE and its affiliated boards (i.e. The Board of Education and Discipline) in Turkey whereas the micro-level issues are concerned with the implementation of the macro-level decisions, such as designing language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, decisions on textbooks, supplementary books, class hour schedules and so forth. The following figure illustrates the foreign language education policymaking process and the interconnection between macro and micro-level policymaking.
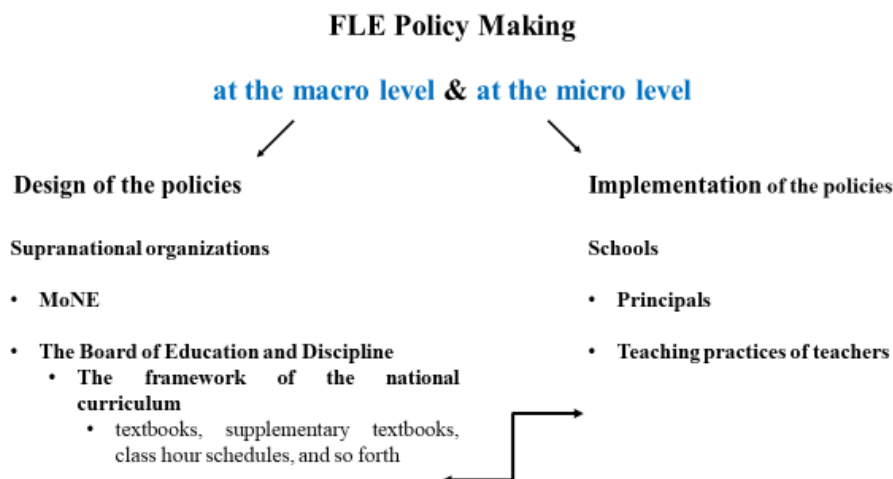
FLE Policy Making

at the macro level & at the micro level

Design of the policies

Supranational organizations

- **MoNE**

- **The Board of Education and Discipline**
  - **The framework of the national curriculum**
    - textbooks, supplementary textbooks, class hour schedules, and so forth

Implementation of the policies

Schools

- **Principals**

- **Teaching practices of teachers**

Figure 1: Foreign language education policy at two levels

Language policy researchers often resort to Spolsky's (2004) three-componential model of language policy while exploring language-policy related issues. His model consists of three interrelated components: language beliefs (ideology), language practices and language management. These terms are named differently by other scholars. Ball (2006), for instance, prefers to call language beliefs 'policy as discourse' and language management 'policy as text' and Bonacina-Pugh (2012) calls language practices 'policy as practice'. Language beliefs refer to the cognitive assumptions about how language should be taught and used; language practices are about what people (in our case teachers and students) are prepared to do in terms of language teaching, learning and use while language management is concerned with "decisions made about languages and their uses in the society" as well as in classrooms (Shohamy, 2006, p. 45). The following figure shows Spolsky's (2004) language policy framework:
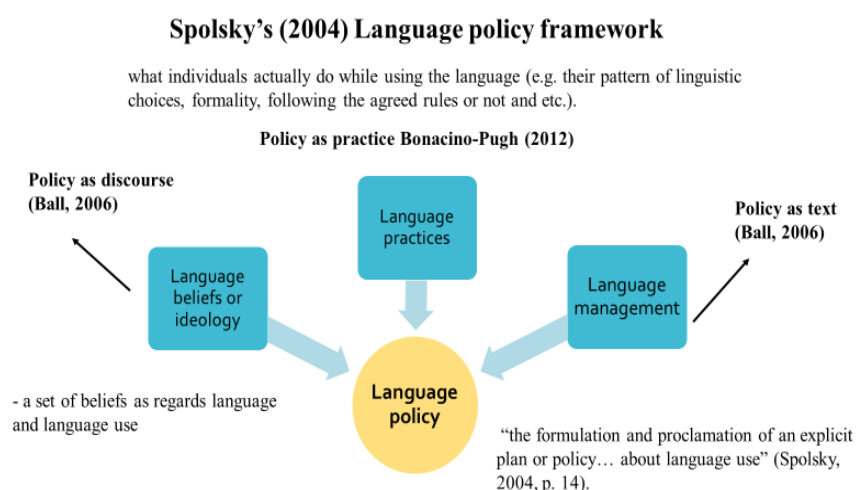
Spolsky's (2004) Language policy framework

what individuals actually do while using the language (e.g. their pattern of linguistic choices, formality, following the agreed rules or not and etc.).

Policy as practice Bonacino-Pugh (2012)

Policy as discourse (Ball, 2006)

Policy as text (Ball, 2006)

Language practices

Language beliefs or ideology

Language management

Language policy

- a set of beliefs as regards language and language use

"the formulation and proclamation of an explicit plan or policy… about language use" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 14).

Figure 2: Spolsky's language policy framework

Since this study's focal attention is on curricular documents, i.e. high school English language teaching curriculum, "the overall plan or design for a course and how the content for a course is transformed into a blueprint for teaching and learning which enables the desired learning outcomes to be achieved" (Richards, 2013, p. 6), it is also vital to attend to language policy mechanisms which might affect the de facto or real (intended) language policies. As noted by Shohamy (2006), the study of language policy documents "should not be limited to the examination of declared and official statements. Rather, the real policy is executed through a variety of mechanisms that determine the de facto practices. There is a need, therefore, to examine the use of mechanisms and study their consequences and effects on de facto LP, as it is through these mechanisms that the de facto language policy is created and manifested" (Shohamy, 2006, p. 54). With respect to curricular decisions, such mechanisms might encompass the materials selected, approaches and methods used by practitioners, and tests administered to assess learners' progress. Thus, particular emphasis will be placed on such mechanisms in the investigation of the curricular documents in the study reported here.

3. Research on Curricular Documents in Turkey

A vast array of research has been carried out on curricular documents, especially on Turkey's national English language curriculum for primary, secondary and high schools. The existing studies address several issues around English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum, including the comparison of Turkish EFL curriculum with those of other countries (e.g. Indonesia) (Sari & Wardani, 2018), scholarly attempts to design a present-day curriculum for primary schools based on new theoretical grounds and practices (Kırkgöz, 2008; Kırkgöz, Çelik & Arıkan, 2016), weaknesses and strengths of the primary school EFL curriculum (Erarslan, 2018), evaluations of the second grade EFL syllabus (Erarslan, 2016) and the fifth grade ELF syllabus from the perspectives of EFL teachers, students as well as administrators (Yolcu & Dimici, 2021), the elements that influence the implementation of the primary EFL curriculum (Erarslan, 2019) and teacher and student attitudes towards the high school EFL curriculum (Ayaz, Özkardaş & Özturan, 2019). The overall results pointed to participants' reservations about the effectiveness of the curricula due to regional differences, shortage of teachers and the added class hours of other subjects (Yolcu & Dimici, 2021), the inefficiency of the primary EFL curriculum for equipping students with communicative skills (Erarslan, 2018), lack of satisfaction with the coursebooks, crowded classes, limited class hours and unenthusiastic students (Ayaz et al., 2019) and the role of previous teacher training, inadequate instructional support and shortage of resources as barriers to curriculum innovation and the probable source of the gap between curricular objectives and novel implementations of these objectives (Kırkgöz, 2008).

Additionally, recent research has also investigated the extent to which the EFL curriculum can help students reach curricular objectives. Take, for example, the study of Elgün and Yağcı (2021) who explored how operational the second grade EFL syllabus was in terms of realizing speaking objectives stated in the policy document, with results pointing to low levels of success among students. Behind the failure of reaching the curricular objectives, regardless of their being of relevance to primary, secondary or high school levels, as put forward in several studies, lie several reasons, for instance, the problems that stem from instruction, socio-economy and institutions, e.g. poorly planned curricula (Kızıldağ, 2009), unsustainable

coursebook development and curriculum implementations (Çetintaş, 2010) and the failure to integrate technology into EFL classes (Aydın, 2013). It is evident from these results that even though "lots of decisions have been made, new methods and approaches have been implemented, many course books and curriculum revised through trial and error in teaching and learning English language in Turkey", as put by Solak and Bayar (2015), "it has not been possible to reach the desired objectives in the field" (pp. 106-107). For this particular reason, this study aims to answer the following research question: To what extent can practitioners (teachers) translate curricular objectives into practices, in other words, how convergent and divergent are the stated objectives and classroom realities across Turkish schools?. Since much of the previous research reported findings obtained through perceptual or opinion-based interviews and questionnaires, they have remained rather context-dependent and could not offer unique and wider explanations. In this study, a broader and a narrower picture of language teaching practices across Turkey and in a particular city will be painted against the curricular objectives stated in the high school ELF curriculum with the use of small scale primary and large scale secondary data as shall be explained in the following section.

4. Exploring Curricular Objectives and Classroom Practices

The research design of this study is grounded in the qualitative case study approach in which the major purpose is to explore the high school EFL curriculum statements with first-hand data against a larger data set of secondary research into the present status of English language teaching at the state sector with the observations of 80 classes at secondary and high schools levels at 48 schools across 12 cities (Özen et al., 2013). The primary research rests on the observations of 20 EFL teachers at all levels of education in a small province in southwestern Turkey. The observational data on teachers' practices are matched with the curricular objectives in the high school EFL curriculum (MoNE, 2018).
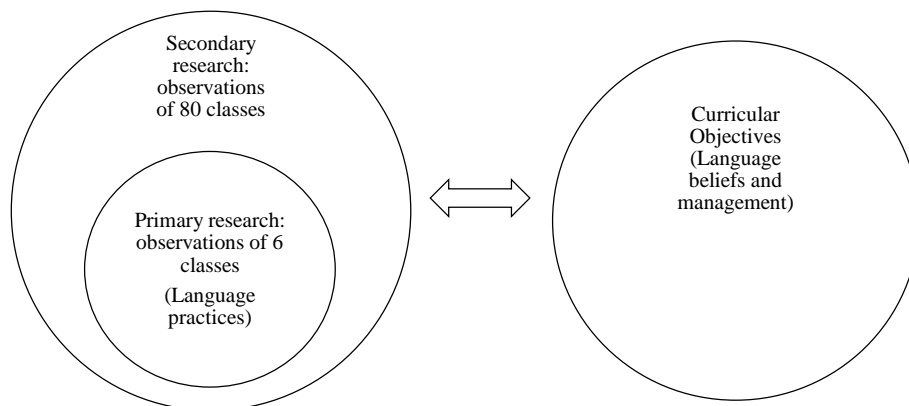

Figure 3: Spolsky's language policy framework mapped on data sources

The mixture of secondary and primary research methods was a practical decision to gain deeper insights into the research interest, i.e. the local and nationwide implementations of the curricular objectives in Turkey. To analyse the documentary and observational data, qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) and negative analysis (Pauwels, 2012) were utilized in combination so that both the covert and overt statements can be disclosed and compared against the curricular objectives. The data analysis procedures underwent four stages: "finding, selecting, appraising (making sense of), and synthesising data contained in

documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). The primary and secondary research data were carefully read and categorized into themes in line with the multiple readings of the high school EFL curriculum.

5. Convergences and Divergences between Curricular Objectives and Practices

In the presentation of the findings, a thematic approach is adopted according to the categories that emerged from the analysis of the secondary and primary data and documentary analysis. The following areas regarding curricular objectives and practices were determined at the end of the coding process: Approaches to language teaching, teaching language skills, error correction, classroom interaction, suggested materials and assessment and examinations.

5.1. Approaches to Language Teaching

To unearth what approaches and methods are mentioned among the curricular objectives in the high school EFL curriculum, a keyword search technique was utilised throughout the curriculum and it was found that as noted below, the curriculum (MoNE, 2018) appears to support a communicative approach to teaching English in classes.

> The new 9 -12 Grades English Curriculum was designed to take all aspects of communicative competence into consideration in English classes by addressing functions and four skills of language in an integrated way and focusing on "How" and "Why?" in language rather than merely on "What?" (p.5)

To further strengthen their stance on the implementation of the communicative approach, it is stated in the curriculum that activities that might foster students' communicative competence, interactional skills and learning autonomy should be part of teaching practices.

> … students are encouraged to be involved in task-based, collaborative, and project-based language activities that would empower learners by increasing their self-esteem, autonomy, and language skills (p. 6)

However, a closer inspection of the primary data and secondary data demonstrates that teaching practices are largely guided by the conventional approaches and methods which fail to address the communicative dimension of the language teaching process. The following extracts from the secondary data (British Council and TEPAV report by Özen et al., 2013) evidence these inferences about overall teacher practices at state schools in Turkey.

> In all classes observed, students fail to learn how to communicate and function independently in English (p.16)

> Almost all classrooms observed had a furnishing/layout where students sit together, in pairs on bench seats. However, teachers fail to use this seating arrangement to organise students into pairs and groups for independent, communicative language practice in everyday classroom contexts. This was identified as the third factor regarding the failure of Turkish students to speak/understand English. (pp. 16-17).

The first-hand classroom observations also support these generic practices at the micro-level in the observed classes in which teachers did not allocate enough talk time to their students by adopting a fairly teacher-fronted teaching and deductive approach with particular emphasis on the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical items. The following observation report summarises the normative practices of such a teacher.
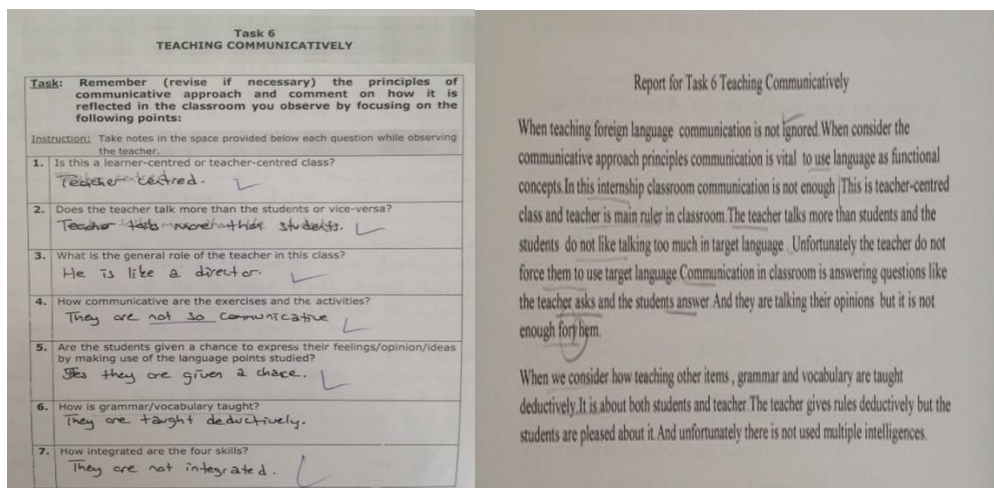
Figure 4: Observation notes on teaching communicatively

5.2. Teaching Language Skills

In connection with the teaching approaches, another theme that appeared frequently in the EFL curriculum was about statements on how to teach certain language skills at different levels. Supporting the previous objectives related to communitive language teaching, the integration of skill-based teaching, primarily speaking and listening, is prioritised for communicative purposes over teaching linguistic structures of English. It also seems that vocabulary teaching is desired to have a communication focus rather than traditional conventions of teaching a list of words in isolation. Some of these curricular objectives stand in the curriculum as follows (MoNE, 2018):

> In the integration of the four skills, an emphasis is given to speaking and listening skills to enable learners to practice communication and real-life use of language (p. 13)

> …limited focus on language structures as well as some focus on explicit pronunciation are included in each unit (p. 13)

> Special focus on sample vocabulary items are not given in the 9th-12th grades English curriculum to avoid the use of long word lists isolated from real-life use contexts… (p. 13)

However, the findings from the secondary and primary research point to the divide between the policy statements and classroom practices as most teachers were reported to heavily rely on teaching grammatical points at the expense of functional and useful speaking or listening skills. Similarly, in contrast to curricular objectives, while teaching vocabulary, almost all teachers were observed to make use of

> the de-contextualised lists of vocabulary and grammar structures in students' notebook – the bare walls of almost every classroom, reflect the fact that the learning of English as a (personal) tool of communication is not taking place across Turkey in Government Schools" (Özen et al., p. 74).

Similar observations were recorded in relation to the heavy emphasis on teaching grammar in the observational data.

> … they [students] are repeatedly learning about the same selection of grammar points each year without making progress in functional/useful speaking or listening skills (Özen et al., 2013, p. 57)

> …all teachers observed teach about English (and most were observed talking for more than 90% of class time), there were few identifiable useful 'outcomes' in terms of students speaking/listening in

any of the lessons observed … instead of 'using' English, students are completing de-personalised exercises 'about English' in a textbook or on the board (Özen et al., 2013, p. 73)

5.3. Error Correction

The curriculum provides almost no curricular objectives and information concerning error correction practices. However, a few suggestions are offered to teachers as to how they should act against student mistakes and what techniques to apply in order to channelize students' attention to correct language use. One of the recommendations for teachers about error correction in the curriculum (MoNE, 2018) suggests that teachers

overlook students' mistakes or slips of the tongue during speaking activities and model the correct use of language instead or take notes to work on the mistakes later on as a whole class without referring to students' identities (p. 10).

It becomes evident from the above explanation that there is no explicit and immediate error correction on form, especially when students are engaged in speaking tasks. However, the form-focused error correction seems to be also favoured as teachers are advised to jot down the errors to be later corrected by themselves through modelling. It can be concluded based on these policy statements that both form-oriented and meaning-oriented error correction techniques are deemed appropriate for classroom practices. These curricular objectives on error correction seem to be actualized by most teachers in classroom practices. The following observations on teachers' error correction indicate the match between curricular objectives and classroom practices (Özen et al., 2013).

Errors are 'marked down' or formally corrected (p. 72).

Teacher allows 'errors', only correcting them as a whole class activity at end of the exercise (p. 76).

However, the observational data from the primary research show that teachers tend to give much weight to form-oriented error correction although enough wait time is given to students. One of the observation forms demonstrates a teacher's error correction practices as follows:

Figure 5: Observation notes on error correction practices

It is also reported that there was no consistency among teachers in terms of their error correction techniques. Unlike the observation reported above, some teachers were reported to ignore the errors with a 'let it go' principle, especially in speaking exercises, without taking any measures to correct the errors committed, as shown in the following extract.
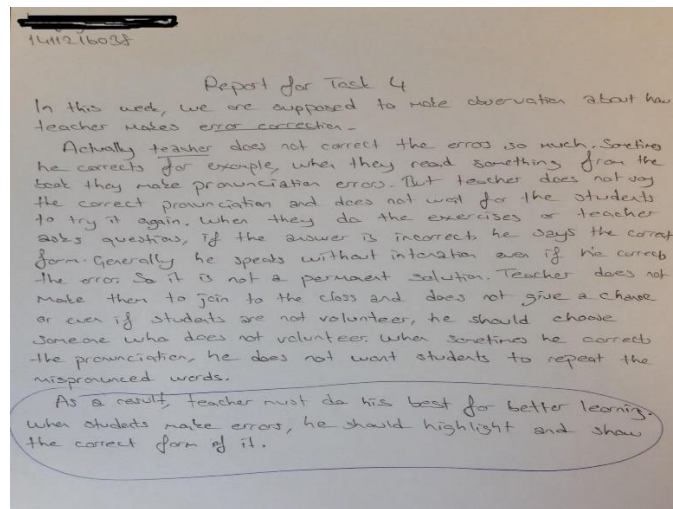

Figure 6: Field notes on error correction practices

5.4. Classroom Interaction

In accordance with the curricular objectives towards teaching English for communicative purposes with functional language use, teachers are recommended to make use of activities and tasks that foster interactive language use among students. For students, the expectation is set to make them use English as much as possible in classes so that they can get maximum exposure to the language. The expectations on teachers' and students' classroom interaction stand as follows in the curriculum (MoNE, 2018):

Teachers…

use a variety of interaction types (individual work, pair work, group work, whole class) during the lessons.

Students…

communicate in English in the classroom at all times.

are active participants who also provide input to each other during communicative activities (p. 10)

Nevertheless, the report on teacher observations across 80 schools displays a different case where most teachers were reported not to benefit from the seating arrangements in a communicative manner in their classes. This reality is considered to be among the main failures of the teachers to foster students' speaking competence. The extracts highlighting these issues are given below:

Almost all classrooms observed had a furnishing/layout where students sit together, in pairs on bench seats. However, teachers fail to use this seating arrangement to organise students into pairs and groups for independent, communicative language practice in everyday classroom contexts. ..This was identified as the third factor regarding the failure of Turkish students to speak/understand English (Özen et al., 2013, p. 53)

The primary research findings backed the findings of the larger scale of observations on teacher practices in that many teachers adopted teacher-fronted teaching and students were not satisfactorily active and responsible for their learning. The following observation report summarizes the typical classroom interaction patterns in the classes observed in the small province.
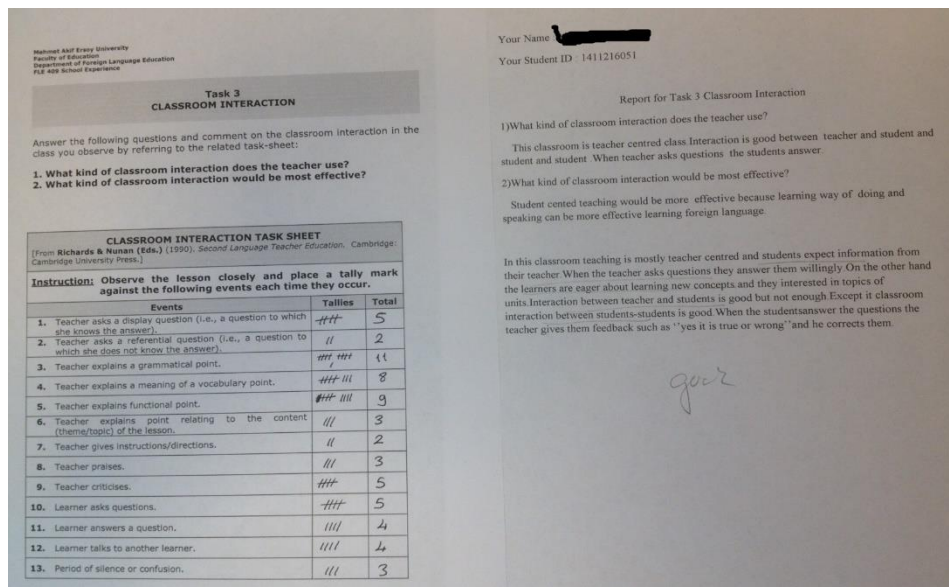

Figure 7: Field notes on classroom interaction practices

In terms of the interactional events in classes, teachers were inclined towards explaining the form and function-related issues as well as vocabulary items with a high number of different types of questions. However, there is no mention of whether the interaction occurred in English at all times or in the form of switches between English and Turkish.

5.5. Suggested Materials

As noted earlier with reference to the approach to language teaching with an emphasis on taking language as a means of communication rather than a mere school subject, the curriculum suggests the use of realia, i.e. real-life objects which have not been created for language teaching purposes in the first place, the presentation of materials via online and offline tools with the combination of diverse content forms, such as audio, images, texts, animations and video. In this regard, the following statement takes place in the curriculum (MoNE, 2018).

> Use of authentic materials is strongly recommended in all grades. In addition, most materials given can be presented both online or offline. Some materials can also be both presented with multimedia and in print (p. 23)

Unlike what is considered ideal for classroom practices, the observational data on teachers' practices as to the use of materials draw a fairly different picture as most teachers did not benefit from multimedia tools to a satisfactory level with the use of course books as the main teaching resource followed by smartboards. Nevertheless, the use of smartboards was not in line with the curricular objectives since these tools often reflect the overall content of the coursebooks in a digital format through transferring content into PowerPoint slides. The

following figure from the British Council and TEPAV report display the amount of time spent on the use of various resources during a typical class week (Özen et al., 2013).
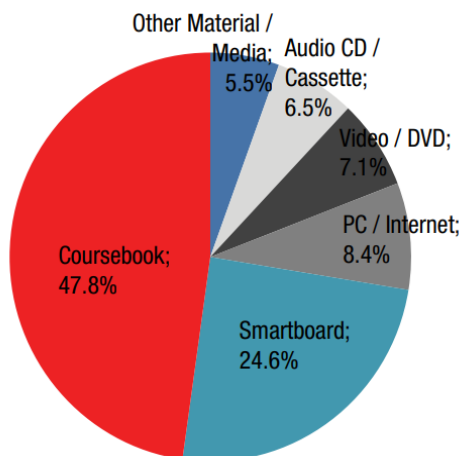
Figure 8: Field notes on the materials used by teachers

From the task analysis observation notes, it also became evident that as was the case with most teachers across Turkey, the teachers in the local context were reported to largely draw on textbooks as the major teaching aid and did not benefit from authentic or teacher-made materials.
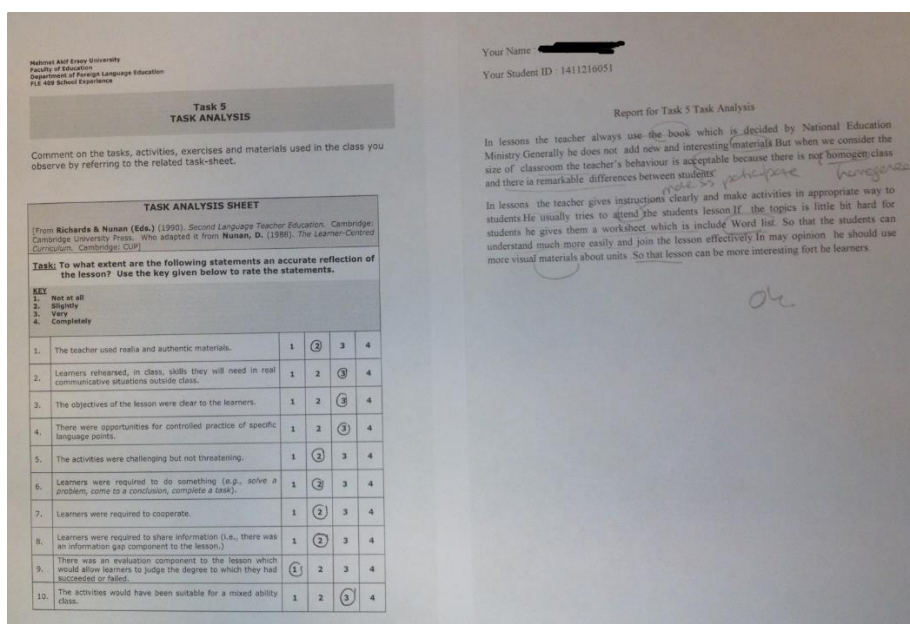
Figure 9: Field notes on the tasks conducted in classes

From the field notes, one can notice the teachers' failure to use challenging but non-threatening activities, performance-oriented and cooperative tasks as well as real-life objects that are in the immediate world of the students. Further to these observations, it became apparent that there was no component in teachers' practices for improving students' self-assessment skills

5.6. Assessment and Examinations

The examination of the content of curricular objectives relating to assessment and examinations points out that teachers are anticipated to utilize diverse assessment tools, ranging from traditional techniques to electronic ones. Again, in keeping with the communicative approach adopted in the curriculum, the curriculum wants teachers to shape their assessment practices communicatively so that the focus of assessment could be student performance in different skills. The curricular statements (MoNE, 2018) regarding assessment and examinations are given below:

> The assessment in the 9th - 12th Grade English Curriculum is also a mixture of alternative, traditional, and electronic assessment types.

> …is strongly recommended that the emphasis is given to designing communicative assessment tasks and assessing the production of language in the implementation of the curriculum. Since the 9th-12th English program is mainly function and skills-based, it is important to assess learner performances via assessment tasks geared towards evaluating integrated skills (p. 11)

As opposed to the employment of communicative assessment practices in class, as observed in teacher practices, modern assessment tools, such as portfolios and peer assessment, were not preferred much by teachers while assessing students. The examinations appeared fairly form-focused rather than being communication-oriented. One observation in this regard shows that

> there was no evidence of continuous assessment, portfolios, self/peer assessment in any school visited. Instead, formal grammar-based exams drive the teaching and learning process from primary age range onwards' (p. 57)

To double-check this reality, some of the previous examination documents were requested from the teachers. The tests teachers prepared to measure students' English skills were observed to heavily rest upon measuring students' grammatical knowledge and vocabulary knowledge at the expense of assessing their language progress in a communicative fashion. Below are a couple of tests used by teachers at secondary and high schools.
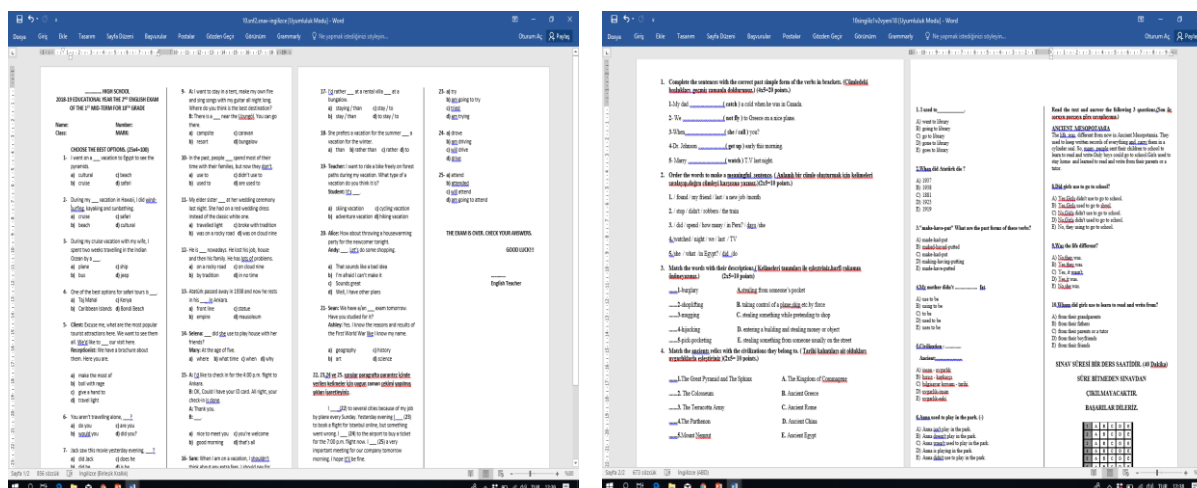

Figure 10: Sample tests administered to assess students

As is seen above, the tests are of multiple choice type, thereby limiting students' contribution to the assessment tools as the thing they are supposed to do is to mark the correct option.

However, such types of assessments do not enable students to exhibit their writing competence and reading comprehension, let alone using language for communicative purposes. It may be said that the curricular objectives for teaching English to students through a communicative approach and its principles cannot be achieved through such grammar-based tests that do not let students display their true linguistic performance.

6. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to exhibit the extent to which curricular objectives in English language teaching are transferred to actual practices in classrooms. Confirming Shahomy's (2006) argument that real policies cannot be derived from the explicit policy statements on the white papers and the divide between designated objectives in the documents and how they are actualized in practice is very probable, the findings of this qualitative research pointed to the wide gap between Turkish high school EFL teachers' teaching practices and the curricular objectives. Thus, it can be safely noted that current EFL practices in Turkey are far cry from meeting the objectives of English language teaching as stated in the curriculum. There may be several reasons lying behind the failure of achieving curricular objectives, such as problems originating from teachers' teacher training, inadequate institutional resources and support, shortage of qualified language teachers, as discussed in the literature (e.g. Çetintaş, 2010; Elgün & Yağcı, 2021; Erarslan, 2018, 2019; Kırkgöz, 2008; Kızıldağ, 2009; Yolcu & Dimici, 2021).

Another reason that has not been cited much in previous studies is the teachers' lack of knowledge about the curricular expectations related to their practices. Therefore, teachers must gain awareness about the EFL curriculum they abound to implement in the teacher education programs. In this regard, a step in the right direction seems to be taken by the Council of Higher Education's 2018 English language teacher education program (ELTEP), which has a field-specific course whose objectives are set as follows in the course description.
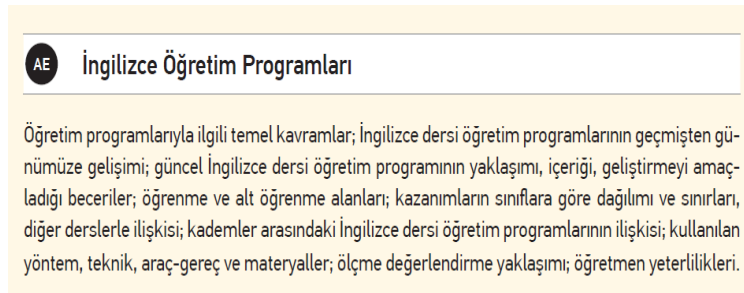
İngilizce Öğretim Programları

Öğretim programlarıyla ilgili temel kavramlar; İngilizce dersi öğretim programlarının geçmişten günümüze gelişimi; güncel İngilizce dersi öğretim programının yaklaşımı, içeriği, geliştirmeyi amaçladığı beceriler; öğrenme ve alt öğrenme alanları; kazanımların sınıflara göre dağılımı ve sınırları, diğer derslerle ilişkisi; kademeler arasındaki İngilizce dersi öğretim programlarının ilişkisi; kullanılan yöntem, teknik, araç-gereç ve materyaller; ölçme değerlendirme yaklaşımı; öğretmen yeterlilikleri.

Figure 11: Language teacher education course on ELT curricula

This course aims to familiarize student teachers with the relevant notions of curriculum and curriculum planning, the historical trajectory of curriculum development, the content, approach, objectives, philosophies of the current EFL curricular in practice at schools. Additionally, student teachers can gain insights into the differences as to learning gains across different levels of education as well as assessment tools, teaching resources and teacher competencies.

It is likely that teachers are externally bounded by certain factors that are beyond their capacity while endeavouring to implement curricular objectives, especially in terms of

running communication-oriented classes as expected in the curriculum. Research has shown that some of the challenges teachers have faced in their attempts to implement the principles of communicative approach generally stem from overcrowded classes, poorly trained teachers, shortage of communication-oriented teaching resources (Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004), unmotivated students and teachers to switch from traditional approaches to communicative ones as well as administrative and contextual factors (Sarıçoban & Tılfarlıoğlu, 1999). Not surprisingly, other external barriers to accomplish curricular objectives on teaching English for communicative and functional purposes include grammar-based in-class and national examinations, students' low level of English proficiency and limited class hours (Anderson, 1993; Karakaş, 2013).

Above all, Turkish EFL teachers are under strong pressure to 'finish the textbook' on time often with an approach to teaching English as a subject rather than as a vehicle of communication (Yan, 2012). Such perceived pressure on the shoulders of Turkish EFL teachers somehow drives teachers to take the easy way out by running grammar-focused classes, which are relatively easier and quicker in terms of assessment compared to assessment of communicative competence via alternative and contemporary assessment tools (Özen et al., 2013). However, certain measures can be taken at the micro and macro levels to overcome these challenges by teachers in their classes. From a macro level initiative, a change from top-down policymaking to bottom-up policymaking might help policymakers set realistic and achievable objectives. For this to happen, it is essential to include practitioners, i.e. EFL teachers, in the decision-making process as they experience first-hand what works and does not work in classes better than anyone else.

Similarly crucial is the need to reform the current teacher education program in accordance with the curricular objectives with a more emphasis on the practical side of teacher education. In this respect, it is apt that the 2018 ELTEP has an elective course, i.e. *Microteaching*, where the aim is to perk up student teachers' practical skills and transfer their theoretical knowledge into practices with the help of an experienced guide, e.g. often a teacher educator or/and an experienced teacher of English. Added to this, the MoNE should organise in-service teacher training programs to facilitate teachers' implementation of communicative approach in classes with little reliance on textbooks and improve their assessment and materials design skills. Part of these training programs might also strive for increasing teacher autonomy so that teachers become less textbook-dependent and grammar-oriented in their approaches to teaching English. It appears highly probable that the gap between curricular objectives in the policy papers and classroom realities can be narrowed through such measures even if it may not seem feasible in the very short future.

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