

Evaluation of the CEFR framed English language curriculum in primary and secondary schools in Turkey: teachers' perspectives

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Ethical Approval

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Statement of Informed Consent

All subjects participated voluntarily and provided a written informed consent to the researchers

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ABSTRACT

The current English language curriculum in primary and secondary schools in Turkey has been framed by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in an endeavour to bring in a more communication-oriented perspective on language education. This study aimed to evaluate the CEFR framed curriculum from the perspectives of teachers who apply it in the classroom. An exploratory sequential mixed method research design, which encompassed a 40-item questionnaire (100 participants), a 25-item semi-structured interview (6 secondary and 3 primary school teachers), and document analysis, was employed in primary and secondary schools in Sultanbeyli, Umraniye, and Besiktas districts of Istanbul. The results showed that lack of knowledge about the CEFR and the contextual factors such as overcrowded classrooms and limited class contact hours greatly affected the implementation phase of the curriculum. It was also revealed that there is a remarkable mismatch between the language education policy (communication-oriented) and the classroom practices (exam-oriented). The findings of this study implied that teachers need ongoing in-service training about the CEFR framed curriculum to enhance their understanding of the implementation of its principles in the classroom. The implications of the study, most notably the need for well-tailored in-service training, are also discussed.

KEYWORDS

CEFR; English language curriculum; primary and secondary school; teachers' perceptions; language policy; curriculum evaluation

1. Introduction

In the two decades after its first appearance in professional circles, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment (henceforth CEFR) has brought significant changes in language education all across the world. The CEFR has provided a complete, yet flexible, framework for teachers, course designers, administrators as well as teacher trainers to design language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, textbooks and language assessment (Karagoz & Cobanoglu, 2022). The language education programs have been redesigned in conjunction with the principles of the CEFR to bring in a fresher and more communication-oriented perspective on language education. Since becoming a member of the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1949, the Turkish Republic has closely aligned its educational policies with those of its European counterparts, stressing proficiency in English as the ultimate goal in language education (MoNE, 2018). In light of that, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Turkey embedded the CEFR in language curriculum in the early 2000s to be able to initiate a paradigm shift: from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness, and from a focus on grammatical competency to a focus on communicative competency.

Despite the policy changes to enhance the quality of foreign language education in Turkey, considerable problems still remain at the implementation stage. Even though the preliminary focus of the CEFR framed curriculum is to position learners as ‘the users of language’ rather than ‘students of the language’ (MoNE, 2018), the exam-driven nature of the Turkish educational system (e.g., Highschool Entrance Exam at the end of Grade 8 and University Entrance Exam at the end of Grade 12) (Kaya & Ok, 2016; Basok, 2017), overcrowded classrooms (Topkaya & Kucuk, 2010; Erdem & Toy, 2017), limited class contact

hours for English (Yuce & Mirici, 2019) as a subject pose the risk of deviating from the core principles of the aforementioned policy change. Kirkgoz (2009, p. 681) asserts that “Turkey needs to resolve existing incongruence between the idealized macro policy objectives and their realizations in practice at micro level teaching situations”. This shows that in spite of its popularity, reputation and widespread approval, CEFR-based English language teaching in Turkey is far from effective (Tilfarlioglu & Ozturk, 2007; Kizildag, 2009; Topkaya & Kucuk, 2010; Yuce & Mirici, 2019).

Although the CEFR framed curriculum has a lot to offer to ameliorate the language teaching practices, the implementation phase is definitely not problem-free. As suggested by Diez-Bedmar and Byram (2019), there is a clear need for comprehensive studies that would provide a greater understanding of the factors affecting the successful implementation of the CEFR principles in language education. The relevant literature has primarily focused on particular grades in primary (Celik & Kasapoglu, 2014; Alkan & Arslan, 2014) , secondary (Yanik, 2007; Aksoy, 2020) or high school levels (Zorba & Arikan, 2016; Yuce & Mirici, 2019) which clearly indicates that there is a need for more comprehensive studies employing multi-level, multifaceted designs, which can better capture the intricate picture. Therefore, the overarching aim of this study was to evaluate the CEFR framed English curriculum used in primary and secondary schools in Turkey and to reveal the potential issues (if any) by investigating teachers’ perceptions of current teaching practices on the basis of the CEFR framed curriculum. To do so, the study delved into the existing knowledge of the teachers about the CEFR framed curriculum and the extent to which the core principles of the CEFR framed curriculum is successfully applied in language teaching practices. A group of English teachers (three primary school teachers and six secondary school teachers) who work in three different

socio-economic zones in the city of Istanbul in Turkey formed the sample of the qualitative phase of the study. The quantitative phase, on the other hand, involved one-hundred English teachers who worked in either primary or secondary schools in forty-seven different cities all across Turkey.

The following research questions were addressed in this research study:

1. Do teachers have a clear understanding of the CEFR and its impact on the language teaching process?
2. What are the perceptions of the teachers pertaining to:
 - a) the goals and objectives;
 - b) the curriculum content and materials;
 - c) the language teaching practices/course conduct;
 - d) the assessment and evaluation practices;
 - e) and the overall perceptions of the application of the CEFR framed English curriculum in language education?

2. Literature Review

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed to provide “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (Council of Europe, 2001). It encompasses a descriptive scheme of language use and competence along with proficiency scales for the different parameters of this scheme. It embodies chapters on curriculum design, alternative methodological options for language learning and teaching, which has affected the design of the educational programs as a whole (Read, 2019), and principles of language testing and assessment (Holzknecht et al., 2018). CEFR describes six levels of proficiency for foreign

language learning (A1-A2 (Basic User), B1-B2 (Independent User), and C1-C2 (Proficient User)). The document includes a list of the expected competence and skills for each level that language learners should possess or be able to perform.

Although the CEFR originated in Europe, it has become significantly influential in language curriculum design and assessment practices not only in Europe but around the world (Read, 2019). It is recognized in more than 40 countries all across the world and is now used in countries beyond Europe, including Mexico in the southern part of North America, Canada on the continent of North America and in some Eurasian countries such as Turkey, Japan, China, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

2.1. The CEFR framed Curriculum in Turkey

Since the CEFR was embedded in the English language teaching curriculum in Turkey, three radical changes have been experienced at the outset of this process, namely designing the new curricula, redesigning the textbooks, and finally organizing in-service training programs across the country to familiarize language teachers with the framework (Cakir & Balcikanli, 2012). The CEFR was first piloted by the MoNE during the 2001–2002 academic year, which was followed by seminars about the CEFR document with participating teachers. In the 2006–2007 academic year, the piloting phase was expanded and eventually a decision to gradually put the program in practice throughout the country was made.

In designing the new English language curriculum for the primary (Grade 2 to Grade 4) and the secondary schools (Grade 5 to Grade 8), the principles and descriptors of the CEFR were closely followed. Thus, the curricular model was divided into three distinct learning stages with respect to the age range of the target learner group (6 to 13 years old). At the earliest stage, Grade 2 through Grade 4 (A1- Basic user), the preliminary focus was on listening

and speaking while this was gradually enhanced by the introduction of short texts and controlled writing activities from Grade 4 through Grade 6 (A1- Basic user), which constituted the second learning stage. The final learning stage encompassed Grade 7 and Grade 8 (A2- Basic user) in which the learners were introduced to reading and writing skills as an integral aspect of language learning in line with the theoretical approach of the CEFR (MoNE, 2018). In this CEFR framed curricular model, the approach adopted to meet the needs of the learners encompassed an eclectic mix of instructional techniques and a learner-centred approach together with an emphasis on an action-oriented perspective that views language as a tool for communication, not just as a subject (CoE, 2001).

2.2. Evaluation Studies on the CEFR in Turkey and Other Countries

Martyniuk and Noijons (2007) conducted a research study in 2006 which aimed at identifying the extent of CEFR's use in 46 member countries in EU. The majority of the participating countries considered the CEFR as "very useful" in their program development practices: 87% referred to it as "very useful" in developing the assessment and evaluation tools, and 78% as a "very useful" program. The study conducted by Faez et al. (2011), on the other hand, highlighted the promotional impact of the "Can Do" statements in the CEFR on learner confidence as well as self-awareness. Likewise, Nakatani (2012) pointed out the same directions and addressed the positive impact of the CEFR on EFL learners' proficiency. The study conducted by Ustunluoglu et al. (2012) in the Turkish context revealed that the course objectives chosen based on the CEFR were found to be relevant and appropriate. For this reason, it is considered that designing a new English teaching program based on the CEFR will lead to a sound and well-grounded syllabus.

On the other hand, the literature on the CEFR also shows that teachers' knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the CEFR and its principles play a key role in the successful implementation of the framework in language education (Diez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Faez et al., 2011; Ngo, 2017; Moomen et al., 2013). The studies conducted in Finland (Jaakkola, 2000), Malaysia (Khair & Shah, 2021), and Turkey (Unlucan Tosun & Glover, 2020) clearly showed that the success of the CEFR depends significantly on the teachers' awareness of the key aspects of the CEFR framework. However, Morrow (2004) asserted that educators and students are not conversant enough with the reference tool. As Baldwin and Apelgren (2018) assert, the CEFR descriptors are hard to utilize in the evaluation process owing to the fact that the descriptors are difficult to comprehend. In the same vein, the CEFR is a descriptive framework and has been criticized to be too theoretical, not offering tangible examples for the practitioners to comprehend and help them to employ the framework (Mison & Jang, 2011). In conjunction with all these, the studies conducted in Turkey also divulged that a common issue with the implementation of the CEFR principles in language education was the practitioners' lack of knowledge and understanding of the CEFR document (Yanik, 2008; Kirkgoz, 2008; Alih et al., 2020). In the meantime, factors such as overcrowded classes, overloaded curriculum content, and limited class contact hours in schools in Turkey were put forward as the underlying reasons for the inapplicability of the principles of the CEFR framed curriculum (Topkaya & Kucuk, 2010, Yuce & Mirici, 2019). In addition, lack of learner interest in the subject (Yanik, 2008) and the physical environment (Kirkgoz, 2008) were identified as precluding the implementation of a learner-centred approach.

3. Method

3.1. *Design of the Study*

A convergent parallel mixed method research design was applied in this study. First of all, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. While the quantitative data were collected via an online survey tool, the qualitative data were collected via face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Next, both data sets were analyzed separately. Then the results from the analysis of both data sets were compared. Finally, the results were interpreted to find out whether there was convergence or divergence between the two sources of information (Creswell, 2014).

3.2. *Participants*

The questionnaire was sent to a total of 120 teachers, out of whom 112 teachers (primary and secondary schools combined) responded. The response rate was 93.3%. Of the 112 teachers who completed the questionnaire, 12 teachers were excluded from the analysis due to missing data, ending up with a total of 100 teachers from 47 different cities in 7 different geographical regions in Turkey. The teachers were teaching in primary and secondary schools at the time of the study. The diversity in terms of origin not only contributed to the representativeness of the sample but also it made it possible to extract quantitative data from such a sample, which would otherwise have been logistically impossible in the current study. A simple random sampling method (Cohen et al., 2007) was utilized to ensure that equal chance was given to the members of the target group (primary and secondary school teachers). Participation was on a voluntary basis. Table 1 outlines the background of the questionnaire participants.

Table 1. Background information

Gender	Female 65%		Male 35%			
School Type	Primary School 44%			Secondary School 56%		
Education Level	Bachelor 82%		Master 14%		PhD 4%	
Program Graduated	ELT* 77%		ELL** 17%		Other Languages 6%	
Teaching Experience	Less than 1 Year	1-4 Years	5-9 Years	10-14 Years	15-19 Years	20+ Years
	4%	23%	22%	25%	16%	10%

* *ELT (English Language Teaching)*; ***ELL (English Language and Literature)*

For the semi-structured interviews, convenience sampling method (Kothari, 2004) was utilized to pinpoint the participants in the randomly selected primary and secondary schools in three districts (Sultanbeyli, Umraniye, and Besiktas) in Istanbul. The interview participants selected, a total of nine participants (six female and three male teachers), were actively teaching in primary and secondary schools at the time of the research study. The nine participants had varying degrees of experience: one to five years (five participants), six to ten years (two participants), and eleven to fifteen years (two participants). Six of them were secondary school teachers while three were teaching in primary schools. Therefore, the participants were coded with a corresponding letter (i.e. 'P' for primary and 'S' for secondary school teachers). Additionally, different codes were used to distinguish the participants based on the grades they teach (i.e. 'A' for primary, 'B' for secondary and 'C' for both primary and secondary school). In the same way, the participants were coded as X (who took a seminar/course on the CEFR) and Y (who did not take any seminar/course on the CEFR).

3.3. Research Context

The qualitative phase of this research study was conducted in primary and secondary schools in three different socio-economic zones in Istanbul (Turkey) as it is the city that attracts domestic migration from all socio-economic regions in Turkey. The criteria that were set to identify the suburbs were as the following: population and population density per household, level of education which incorporates the ratio of literacy/illiteracy, rate of higher education commencement/completion, life quality, and the economic status. The data extracted from different sources pinpointed Besiktas as the high socio-economic district, Umraniye as the medium socio-economic district, and Sultanbeyli as the low socio-economic district in Istanbul (Yilmaz et al., 2017; Turkiye Gazetesi, 2014; REIDIN, 2016; Ingev, 2017). The schools in these districts were randomly selected by the researchers.

On the other hand, the quantitative phase of the study required accessing a greater number of participants. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed to the potential participants via an online survey system. The ultimate aim was to include participants who worked in primary and secondary schools in different socio-economic parts of Turkey.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

For this study, a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a document analysis scheme were developed and pilot tested with validity and reliability checks prior to the actual study. The following table outlines the steps taken:

Table 2. The process followed in developing the data collection instruments

The instruments were: Step 1. drafted by the researchers; Step 2. presented to 3 experts (one professor and two assistant professors) in the field for preliminary review; Step 3. redrafted based on the experts' feedback; Step 4. translated into Turkish (forward translation, back translation, and back translation with decentering); Step 5. pilot tested (the questionnaires with 36 participants, the semi-structured interviews with 8 participants); Step 6. revised based on the results of the pilot study; Step 7. rechecked by experts; and Step 8. finalized by researchers based on the expert opinion.
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The questionnaire aimed to explore the perceptions of the participating teachers about the CEFR framed English language curriculum. Thus, the categories were extracted from the document entitled “English Language Teaching Program” (MoNE, 2018) that outlines the goals and objectives of the curriculum, course content and materials, course conduct, assessment and evaluation, and application of the curriculum. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part was about the participants' background information. The second part consisted of 40 items on a five-point likert scale and aimed to delve into the teachers' knowledge about the CEFR framed English curriculum and the opinions about the goals and objectives of the curriculum, course content and materials, course conduct, assessment and evaluation, and the application of the curriculum. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was .94, with alpha values for sub-scales ranging from .78 to .85 (as shown in Table 3 below), signifying high internal consistency.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha values

Subscales	Cronbach's Alpha
Knowledge about the CEFR framed English Curriculum and its Goals and Objectives	.84
Course Content and Materials	.84
Course Conduct	.85
Assessment and Evaluation	.83
Application of the Curriculum	.78

The semi-structured interview comprised two parts: the first part aimed to elicit the background information of the participants while the second part consisted of five sub-sections in line with the content of the second part of the questionnaire with a total of 25 open-ended questions.

The document analysis scheme was based on a detailed analysis of the curriculum document (MoNE, 2018); its language teaching philosophy, approach, methodology, techniques, and other aspects related to the allocated class time for different grades, teaching resources, and assessment and evaluation techniques recommended, which embodied the content of the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The questionnaire data were collected from 100 participants and the interview data were collected from 9 teachers working in three districts of Istanbul (i.e., Besiktas, Umraniye, and Sultanbeyli, three participants from each, respectively) in the 2019-2020 academic year. A number of official documents were also subjected to analysis: the CEFR document (CoE, 2001), the CEFR framed English language curriculum (also called the English Language

Teaching Program-ELTP) (MoNE, 2018), the coursebooks, and the assessment tasks used by teachers.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 26. Before conducting any statistical analysis on the quantitative data, it was indispensable to peruse the normality of distribution. Thus, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test of normality was run to check the normality of data. The results indicated that Items 3, 4, 5, 23, 37, and 39 displayed a normal distribution as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality

Item Number	Statistic	df	Sig.
Item 3	.239	100	.09
Item 4	.322	100	.06
Item 5	.223	100	.42
Item 23	.252	100	.07
Item 37	.301	100	.21
Item 39	.316	100	.054

According to Ghasemi & Zahediasl (2012), if the p values of the variables are smaller than 0.05, the data are not normally distributed. Since the p values were larger than .05, it could be concluded that the distribution of data had been normal. Therefore, it was safe to proceed with a parametric test (i.e., One-way Analysis of Variances (henceforth one-way ANOVA) and the Independent Samples t-test). On the other hand, two major non-parametric tests were also used: Mann-Whitney U test (a non-parametric test used to compare the differences between two independent groups) and Kruskal-Wallis test (a non-parametric test used to determine the statistically significant differences, if any, between two or more groups of an independent

variable). The standard range used to interpret the average scores in the scale was adopted from Yuksel and Demiral (2013), and Munoz (2005).

1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree
1.81-2.60	Disagree
2.61-3.40	Not Sure
3.41-4.20	Agree
4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree

The qualitative data obtained through the semi-structured interviews and document analysis were categorized. Content analysis technique, which is considered as an attempt to reveal the consistencies and meanings of the qualitative data (Patton, 2014), was used to unveil the hidden facts within the data (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). The answers in the semi-structured interviews were examined, similar opinions were coded and grouped into categories. Likewise, data extracted from the documents analyzed (e.g., the curriculum document) were coded and grouped. Direct quotations were included in order to reflect the opinions of the participants. While giving direct quotations from the interviews, certain codes were used. For instance, the letters “P” and “S” represented primary school teachers and secondary school teachers, respectively, while numerical codes such as 1, 2, 3... were used for the order of the participants in the interviews.

4. Findings

The research study aimed to answer six questions with regard to the participating English teachers’ perceptions. These questions focused on the teachers’ awareness of the CEFR framed English curriculum, goals and objectives of the curriculum, course conduct and the

materials used, assessment and evaluation practices, and the overall application of the curriculum. Presented below are the results.

4.1. Awareness of the CEFR Framed English Language Curriculum

The first aspect of this study was to explore the extent to which the participants were aware of the CEFR framed curriculum. Hence, the participants were asked about their opinions of the CEFR document, how the CEFR has impacted the language curriculum and how the CEFR framed curriculum has enhanced the language teaching practices for them. The data are summarized in the following table.

Table 5. Knowledge about the CEFR framed English language curriculum

Items	N	M	SD
1. I have a clear understanding of the CEFR document.	100	2.67	1.08
2. I have a clear understanding of how the CEFR has impacted the English language curriculum that is in use now.	100	3.46	1.13
3. I have a clear understanding of how the CEFR framed English language curriculum has enhanced the English language teaching practices for me as a teacher.	100	3.56	.94

The participants had positive opinions in their understanding of the impact of the CEFR on the curriculum ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.13$) and how the language teaching practices had been enhanced ($M=3.56$, $SD=.94$). However, it was also reported that a majority of the participants did not know much about the CEFR document itself ($M=2.67$, $SD=1.08$). Indeed, 72% of the participants indicated that they had not had a course/seminar on the CEFR. The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the scores of Group X (the participants who took a seminar/course on the CEFR) and Group Y (the ones who did not) scores on items 1 and 2 which followed a non-normal distribution. Accordingly, an Independent Samples t-test was conducted on item 3 which followed a normal distribution.

Table 6. The Mann-Whitney U test for Item 1 & 2

		Mean Rank	Z-Value	2-tailed Sig.
Item 1	Group X	70.37	-4.45	.000
	Group Y	42.80		
Item 2	Group X	63.77	-2.96	.003
	Group Y	45.34		
	Group Y	47.61		

The results in Table 6 indicate a statistically significant difference at the $p \leq 0.05$ level ($p = .00$) in item 1 and ($p = .003$) in item 2. However, the Independent Samples t-test conducted to compare the scores of Group X ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .86$) and Group Y ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .96$) teachers revealed no statistically significant difference at the $p \leq 0.05$ level in item 3; $t(98) = 1.74$, $p = .08$. Therefore, while both groups had a different level of knowledge about the CEFR document, they demonstrated similarities in their level of understanding of its impact on the curriculum and teaching practices. All of the nine teachers interviewed reported that they had attended an in-service training in 2017 which was not specifically on the CEFR, but on the new curriculum and covered the changes that took place such as the coursebooks and the units added or omitted. Teachers' knowledge about the CEFR stemmed from their "personal effort to learn about it (P1, P3, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6)" which indicates that their perceptions about the current curriculum framed by the principles of the CEFR were formed around this accumulated knowledge. In light of this, the interview participants referred to the CEFR framed curriculum as "more communication-oriented (P1, P2, & P3)", "less grammar focused (S5 & S6)", "unlike the old ones, containing plenty of listening and speaking activities (S2)", and "promoting learner independence through self-study activities and projects (S1, S3, & S4)."

To me, it is quite obvious that the curriculum aims to promote communicative language teaching compared to the ones we used to have. Even the coursebooks include a lot of listening and speaking activities as well as self-study ones. (S1)

The most striking aspect of the English curriculum is the emphasis placed on the productive skills. I remember my secondary or high school years when we had a heavily grammar-based curriculum plus coursebooks. (S5)

4.2. Goals and Objectives of the CEFR framed Curriculum

The second part of this research study explored the participants' opinions about the curriculum goals and objectives. The data are summarized in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Goals and Objectives of the CEFR framed Curriculum

Items	N	M	SD
4. The CEFR framed curriculum enables students to work towards achievable goals.	100	3.59	.92
5. The CEFR framed curriculum has increased the student interest in the subject (English).	100	3.33	1.02
6. The curriculum provides aspects of cultural awareness.	100	3.52	.91
7. The objective statements in the curriculum are consistent with the CEFR levels (A1, A2, B1, etc.).	100	3.41	.87
8. The CEFR framed curriculum promotes communicative language teaching (CLT).	100	3.68	1.06
9. The use of English is emphasized in classroom interactions of all types, supporting learners in becoming language users, rather than students of the language.	100	3.70	.96
10. The Communicative Language Teaching approach recommended in language teaching by MoNE is applicable in my context.	100	2.67	1.21
11. The CEFR framed curriculum promotes learner autonomy; the ability of studying independently in the process of language learning.	100	3.33	1.02
12. The curriculum objectives are in accordance with the daily lives of the learners.	100	3.29	1.11

As seen in Table 7, teachers had positive opinions on certain aspects of the curriculum such as promoting cultural awareness (M=3.52, SD=.91) and enabling students to work

towards achievable goals ($M=3.59$, $SD=.92$). In terms of goals (learning outcomes), the interview results provided better insights. While five of the interview participants indicated their unconditional agreement, others highlighted their concerns as: "... appropriate for their level, but learners at different levels are in the same class (S1 & S5)" and "lack of time to fully achieve the outcomes (S2 & S6)." A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the perceptions of teachers working in primary schools (Group A), secondary schools (Group B), and of those working in both primary and secondary school levels (Group C) on item 4. There was no statistically significant difference among the three categories of participants at the $p \leq 0.05$ level ($F(2-97)=2.58$, $p=.08$). Group A ($M=3.75$) and Group C teachers ($M=3.87$) who work in secondary schools expressed their concern about the time constrain and the curriculum overload.

The curriculum offers clear and achievable goals, but within a very limited time. We have students at different level of proficiency and we need to ensure that they get the most of what we give them. Meanwhile, there are ten units that we need to cover and the High School Entrance Exam that the students take at the end of Grade 8. This places more pressure on us. (S2)

I teacher Grade 6 and 8 this year. I could very well say that if I did not have the exam pressure, I could have focused more on the communicative aspect of the target language. However, I need to make sure that all topics are covered before the end of second term, multiple choice tests are conducted in class to familiarize the students with the exam format and so on. This gives me little, if none, time to focus on communication. (S5).

As for the consistency between the curriculum objectives and the CEFR levels, the participants had positive opinions ($M=3.41$, $SD=.87$). The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted for the participants who took courses/seminars on the CEFR (Group X) and the ones who did not (Group Y) with regards to their viewpoints on the consistency between the

curriculum objectives and the CEFR levels. The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference, $U(N_{\text{Group X}}=28, N_{\text{Group Y}}=72)=773.50, z=-1.92, p<.054$.

Meanwhile, the participants reported positive opinions on the use of English in classroom interactions ($M=3.70, SD=.96$) and believed that the curriculum promotes CLT ($M=3.68, SD=1.06$), but they were unsure about the applicability of CLT in their context ($M=2.67, SD=1.21$). The interviewees pinpointed three major reasons: overcrowded classrooms (67%), limited class contact hours (89%), and physical conditions (56%). In the meantime, four out of six secondary school teachers indicated that the exam-oriented nature of teaching in secondary school is another reason why CLT is neglected in language education.

I used to teach Grade 6 and 7 in a secondary school, but now I teach Grade 2, 3, and 4. I can say that I feel more like an English teacher now. As there is no exam pressure on us and the curriculum is more focused on listening and speaking, we can embrace communication in the classroom. Yet, class contact hours are not obviously sufficient. If we had more time, we could make better progress bearing in mind the fact that these kids have no contact with English outside the classroom. (P3)

I would really love to see my students using the target language in the classroom and have that ideal communicative atmosphere, but the reality is that we have tons of units (10 units) to be completed in a short time, and exam (HSEE) ahead of us and so on. Another issue is the size of our classrooms. I have classes with 35 students. How could I implement a communicative approach in such a class? I do not really know. (S6)

As for learner autonomy, the questionnaire data revealed that the participants were doubtful ($M=3.33, SD=1.02$). Indeed, the secondary school teachers considered their students as more dependent on their teachers because of the High School Entrance Exam (henceforth HSEE) ahead of them. In exploration of the learner interest in the subject from teachers' perspective, descriptive statistics showed that the mean score of Group A (primary school teachers) ($M=3.45$) was slightly higher than Group B (secondary school teachers) ($M=3.23$).

Further, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the differences in the perceptions of Group A ($M=3.50$), Group B ($M=3.23$), and Group C ($M=3.41$) teachers on item 5. There was no statistically significant difference among the three categories of participants at $p \leq 0.05$ level ($F(2-97)=.61$, $p=.54$). The interview data highlighted the underlying reasons as “more streamlined and focused content (P1)”, “fun content: games and songs (P2 & P3)”, and “age-appropriate content (P2).”

4.3. Course Content and Materials

Another important aspect of this study was related to the teachers’ opinions regarding the course content and the materials used. Hence, the participants were given statements extracted from the English Language Teaching Program (MoNE, 2018) and asked to express their opinions. Table 8 outlines the data collected.

Table 8. Course Content and Materials

Items	N	M	SD
13. The curriculum content and the CEFR levels (A1, A2, etc.) do match.	100	3.21	.94
14. The curriculum content is in accordance with the daily lives of the learners.	100	3.29	1.03
15. The content of the curriculum is relevant to the language learning needs of the learners.	100	3.35	.94
16. The materials selected are authentic.	100	3.10	1.04
17. The curriculum equally combines all four language skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening).	100	3.08	1.08
18. The curriculum incorporates the themes/ topics that are familiar to young learners.	100	3.70	.84
19. The material (coursebook) used allows the students to achieve the learning outcomes in the curriculum.	100	2.96	1.11

The questionnaire results revealed that the participants were unsure about the alignments of the curriculum content and the CEFR levels ($M=3.21$, $SD=.94$), the relevancy of the content with the daily lives of the learners ($M=3.29$, $SD=1.03$) and the relevancy of the content to the language learning needs of the learners ($M=3.35$, $SD=.94$). The Kruskal-Wallis Test conducted to compare the opinions of the primary (Group A) and secondary school teachers (Group B) as well as the ones who teach both levels (Group C) on the relevancy of the content to the language learning needs of the learners revealed that there was a statistically significant difference ($H(3)=9.73$, $p=.008$). Group A was considerably more positive about the content relevancy with a mean rank of 65.68 than Group B ($M=44.12$). Group C which comprised of teachers who teach both primary and secondary school levels had the mean rank of 52.75. A look at the interview data showed that one of the major concerns of the secondary school teachers was the HSEE which unavoidably shapes the language learning needs of the students.

In my opinion, the most obvious discrepancy between the curriculum and our educational system is what each one aims to achieve. The curriculum aims to promote communicative competencies, but the system dictates an exam (HSEE) which is a multiple choice test. (S4)

As I taught both primary and secondary grades, I can compare. We had exam pressure in secondary school, but now I have no such concern. My students can enjoy learning the language. The coursebooks at both levels are very well organized, but the circumstances (e.g., HSEE exam) dictate the direction you go. (P3)

As for the sufficiency of the materials to allow the learners to achieve the learning outcomes, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to explore the opinions of primary and secondary school teachers as well as the ones who teach both levels. The results indicated a statistically significant difference ($H(3)=8.02$, $p=.01$) among the three categories of participants. This clearly indicated that the primary school teachers considered the course

material (coursebook only) more adequate to achieve the learning outcomes compared to their secondary school counterparts. However, secondary school teachers pinpointed “limited resources (coursebook only) (S1 & S6)” as well as “time constraints (S1, S2, S3, & S5)”, “large class size (S1, S2, S3, S5, & S6)”, and “exam pressure (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, & S6)” as the leading reasons for perceived incapacity to achieve the learning outcomes in the curriculum.

4.4. Course Conduct

The implementation phase of the curriculum was significant so as to see how the theory was put into practice in classroom. Therefore, the participants were asked about their opinions on aspects of the course conduct. The data accumulated are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Course Conduct

Items	N	M	SD
20. The curriculum is applicable in general.	100	3.53	.98
21. Communication is carried out in English as much as possible.	100	3.14	1.11
22. Student-centred rather than teacher-centred approach has been adopted in the curriculum.	100	3.43	1.04
23. The learning/ student-centred approach that the program proposes can be applied effectively in the classroom.	100	2.66	1.12
24. The Communicative Language Teaching method can easily be used in the classroom.	100	2.72	1.17
25. A range of different language teaching techniques can easily be used in the classroom.	100	3.08	1.03
26. The curriculum promotes active use of technology.	100	3.81	.98
27. Communicative competencies are promoted in the classroom teaching activities over grammatical competencies.	100	3.68	1.06
28. The curriculum offers engaging learning environments for the learners, taking into account the diverse needs of the students at different developmental levels.	100	3.23	1.13

The questionnaire results indicated that the participants had positive opinions on the overall applicability of the curriculum ($M=3.53$, $SD=.98$). As for the language teaching techniques recommended in the English Language Teaching Program (MoNE, 2018), the questionnaire data clearly revealed that the participants were doubtful about the applicability of different language teaching techniques ($M=3.08$, $SD=1.03$) and the CLT in classrooms ($M=2.72$, $SD=1.17$). The Kurskal-Wallis test conducted to explore the impact of the classroom size on the practical application of the CLT in classrooms showed a statistically significant difference at the $p \leq 0.05$ level ($H(3)=12.61$, $p=.05$) based on the class size. In Table 9 below, a detailed account of group based mean scores were provided. It could easily be inferred from the data that there is an inverse ratio between the class size and the perceived applicability of the CLT in classrooms. Indeed, class size was mentioned by the interview participants on multiple occasions to highlight its detrimental impact on curriculum implementation and the attainment of the learning outcomes.

One of the biggest problems in language education in Turkey is the number of students we have in classrooms. We have overcrowded classrooms which is obviously not ideal for language education. The curriculum implies communicative competencies, but, in an average class, each person has approximately one minute to talk, including the teacher. Then the 40 minute lesson would be over. Sad, but true. (P2)

The questionnaire data also indicated that the participants were positive about the learner-centred nature of the curriculum ($M=3.43$, $SD=1.04$). However, they expressed rather negative opinions on its applicability in the classroom ($M=2.66$, $SD=1.12$). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of class size on implementing a learner-centred approach in classroom. Table 10 clearly demonstrates that the teachers who had smaller class sizes were substantially more positive about the learner-centred approach in classrooms. Another questionnaire item which was directly proportional to the class size was the use of

English in classroom communication. The Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out to explore the relation ($H(3)=11.39$, $p=.077$). It is evident in Table 10 that the participants' perceptions were negatively affected by the increase in class size.

Table 10. Teachers' opinions on the application of CLT, learner-centred approach, and the use of English in classroom communication based on class size

Questionnaire Item	Class size (Number of Students)	Number of Questionnaire Participants	M	SD
Application of CLT in the classroom (Item 24) ($H(3)=12.61$, $p=.05$)	10-15	14	3.14	1.35
	16-20	7	3.42	1.51
	21-25	15	2.60	1.12
	26-30	34	2.52	1.16
	31-35	16	2.12	.80
	36-40	9	3.00	1.00
	41+ above	5	3.60	.54
Learner-centred approach in the classroom (Item 23) ($F(6-93)=2.12$, $p=.058$)	10-15	14	3.21	1.25
	16-20	7	3.14	1.46
	21-25	15	2.66	.97
	26-30	34	2.44	1.21
	31-35	16	2.37	.71
	36-40	9	2.22	.83
	41+ above	5	3.60	.54
Communication carried out in English (Item 21) ($H(3)=10.43$, $p=.005$)	10-15	14	3.71	.91
	16-20	7	3.28	1.38
	21-25	15	2.60	1.05
	26-30	34	3.11	1.14
	31-35	16	3.06	1.12
	36-40	9	2.77	.97
	41+ above	5	4.00	.00
TOTAL: 100				

As for the use of English in classrooms, the Kruskal-Wallis test conducted to compare the perceptions of the primary (Group A), secondary school (Group B), and teachers who work at both levels (Group C) revealed a statistically significant difference ($H(3)=10.43$, $p=.005$) among the three categories. Group A ($M=3.60$) was seemingly more positive about using English in the classroom compared to Group B ($M=2.82$). The interview data indicated that out of nine participants, three referred to “the language level of the learners (S1, S4, & S6)” as not being sufficient to comprehend English when used in classroom instructions. Meanwhile, all interview participants pointed out ‘class contact hours’ as a potential reason for using L1. Two interview participants reported that because of having limited class hours, they prefer to complete the curricular content rather than spending “extra time explaining things in English (S2 & S5).” Furthermore, the interview data obtained from the secondary school teachers (6 out of 9) also pointed out their mutual concern about the exam (HSEE) and clearly showed that as the teachers feel obliged to complete the curricular activities on a timely manner and allow enough time to do practice to prepare for the exam, they tend to place less emphasis on the communicative competencies.

4.5. Assessment and Evaluation

In this section, the participants were requested to give their opinions about the assessment and evaluation component of the curriculum. The results are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11. Assessment and evaluation

Items	N	M	SD
29. The objectives identified in the curriculum are measurable.	100	3.45	1.18
30. Various types of assessment and evaluation techniques are emphasized in the CEFR framed English language curriculum.	100	3.56	1.00
31. The explanations in the curriculum for the assessment and evaluation components are enough.	100	3.03	1.05
32. The assessment and evaluation instruments used are sufficient enough to assess the student achievements.	100	2.77	1.10
33. “One of the most important aspects of the program is to create positive and beneficial washback effect” (MoNE, 2018).	100	3.17	.99

The questionnaire data revealed that the mean score on the measurability of the curriculum objectives (learning outcomes) was 3.45 (SD=1.18). Although the mean value indicated an agreement on the questionnaire item, the standard deviation revealed significant variation in the data set. Therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to compare the teachers’ perceptions (Group A, B, and C) on the measurability of the learning outcomes. It revealed a statistically significant difference ($H(3)=11.01$, $p=.004$) among the three categories with a mean rank score of 65.50 for primary (Group A), 42.73 for secondary (Group B), and 56.13 for teachers who work at both levels (Group C). The primary school teachers were considerably more positive than the secondary school teachers, which was also evident in the interviews. The participants pointed out that “objectives are skill based, simple and achievable (P1 & P2)”, “objectives can easily be assessed (S3 & S4)”, “they are linked to the curricular content (P1)”, “they can easily be demonstrated by the students in the classroom (P2 & P3).” In contrast, two secondary school teachers expressed negative opinions highlighting two major

factors: “using paper-based assessment to assess the learners (S1)” and “overcrowded classrooms that do not allow the teacher to measure the learning outcomes for listening and speaking skills in the classroom (S3)”. The following extract from the document analysis of the English Language Teaching Program, on the other hand, showed that the CEFR framed curriculum promotes various types of assessment techniques for different core skills (MoNE, 2018).

The explicit philosophy of the curriculum toward testing is that all kinds of testing procedures, including summative and formative assessment techniques or product and process oriented tests are to;

- cover four language skills and implicit assessment of language components;
- vary in terms of learning styles and cognitive characteristics of the students;
- be in consistent with the learning and teaching methodology depicted in the curriculum;
- be in line with the students’ developmental characteristics;
- create positive and beneficial washback effect;
- include self-assessment, reflection and feedback and
- help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work. (MoNE, 2018, p.8)

The questionnaire data showed that the participants had positive opinions on the emphasis placed on the variety of assessments in the curriculum ($M=3.56$, $SD=1.00$). However, they had doubts about the adequacy of the explanations regarding the assessment techniques in the curriculum ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.05$). Likewise, the teachers also reported that they were unsure about the adequacy of the current instruments that they used in assessing the learner achievement ($M=2.77$, $SD=1.10$). One of the interview participants referred to a website (www.egitimhane.com) as “the source of assessment tasks” and added that “the tasks uploaded by other teachers can be retrieved from the website and used with minor alterations (S6).” The same informant also reported that the tasks chosen are determined by factors such as the class size and class contact hours. Thus, written assessment items in the form of question-answer, gap filling, and multiple-choice items are the suitable and common ones. To further explore

the content of the tasks used, samples were extracted from the specified website for different grades (only for Grade 4 through 8 as no formative assessment in Grade 2 and 3) and the content of the assessment tasks were analyzed using a rubric to reveal the types of items the tasks included. The outcome revealed that vocabulary, gap filling, question-answer, and reading comprehension were the most commonly used activities all across 50 samples (10 samples for each grade, respectively) examined. Another interesting finding was the inclusion of multiple-choice items in the assessment tasks. Fifty per cent of the samples from Grade 6, 7, and 8 included multiple choice items which was significantly more than Grade 4 and 5 (10%). The participants (S1, S3, S5, & S6) noted this as a strategy to familiarize the learners with the question types that they would encounter in the exam (HSEE). Informants expanded on this assertion, pointing out: “I do two exams with my students; one traditional and one multiple-choice exam. The students need to learn how to deal with multiple choice questions as they will have to do in HSEE (S2)” and “I tend to include more multiple-choice items for the 7th and 8th graders because they need to be familiar with these kinds of questions (S6).” The overall results indicated that the assessment techniques chosen were greatly affected by the needs of the learners as well as the variables in the immediate environment (e.g., class size, class contact hours, resources available, etc.).

4.6. Application of the Curriculum

The participants were asked about their overall impression pertaining to the CEFR framed curriculum and its implementation in classroom environment. The data obtained from the questionnaire are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12. The overall application of the curriculum

Items	N	M	SD
34. Students are continuously exposed to English through audio materials.	100	3.41	1.23
35. Students are continuously exposed to English through visual materials.	100	3.58	1.21
36. Enjoyment of language learning is fostered through arts and crafts.	100	3.28	1.23
37. L1 (first language) usage is employed only when necessary (i.e., for giving complex instructions or explaining difficult concepts).	100	3.25	1.15
38. The focus of language learning is on deepening communication, rather than on completing curricular items within a given period of time.	100	3.02	1.35
39. The class hours assigned to the level I teach (Grade 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8) are enough to achieve the learning outcomes.	100	1.96	1.26
40. Students develop communicative skills in English by “doing things with the language” rather than by “learning about the language”.	100	3.45	1.21

The CEFR framed curriculum places greater emphasis on the development of the communicative competencies. Thus, more activities around listening and speaking skills have been incorporated into the curriculum. Meanwhile, in order to make it more appealing for the target learner groups, more age appropriate visuals were also used in the coursebooks. The questionnaire participants were asked if the students are exposed to audio and visual materials enough. As Table 12 indicates, the participants had positive opinions on the availability of the audio ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.23$) and visual ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.21$) materials.

Another important aspect of the curriculum was the emphasis placed on the limited use of L1 in classroom instructions. A one-way ANOVA conducted to explore the opinions of Group A ($M=3.50$), Group B ($M=3.01$), and Group C ($M=3.58$) pertaining to L1 use in the classroom revealed no statistically significant difference among the three categories of

participants $p \leq 0.05$ level ($F(2-97)=2.67$, $p=.07$). Having said that, the interview results showed that secondary school teachers prefer to use L1 to “provide explanations, give complex instructions, and give feedback”. Out of nine interviewees, three stated “language level of the learners (S1, S4, & S6)” while two pointed to “the time limitation (S2 & S6)” as the underlying causes of L1 use. The English Language Teaching Program (MoNE, 2018) also highlights that the focus of language learning is on deepening communication rather than completing the curricular activities. The questionnaire results indicated doubts about it ($M=3.02$, $SD=1.35$). Indeed, the interviews conducted showed that all interview participants felt the pressure to complete the curriculum content within the given period of time. This is partly because of the spiral approach adopted in the CEFR framed curriculum. In other words, being unable to complete the curricular content in Grade 6 would be rather problematic in Grade 7 as the content to be learned in Grade 7 requires the prerequisite knowledge acquired in Grade 6. This problem was evident in the interview data as reported below.

We have 4 hours per week with Grade 7 and 8 whereas we have 3 hours per week with Grade 5 and 6. However they have 10 units at each level. I feel like I have to complete each one of those units, especially with Grade 8 students as they will take the exam (HSEE) and there could be exam questions from any of these units. It is the same with other grades. I have to complete Grade 5 units so that the students have the prior knowledge required in the next grade. (S3)

You can think of our curriculum content from Grade 2 to Grade 8 as a whole. That is how it is designed. A missing part in the puzzle could lead to further difficulties down the line. (P3)

The CEFR framed curriculum also aims to develop the communicative competencies of the learners by allowing them to experience the language rather than simply learning about it (MoNE, 2018). The research participants were asked about this aspect of the curriculum. The

questionnaire data revealed that the participants ($M=3.45$, $SD=1.21$) had positive opinions on the action-oriented nature of the curriculum. The document analysis data provided further supporting evidence. The content of the curriculum and the coursebooks incorporated significant numbers of activities to empower the development of the communicative skills (listening/speaking activities) and also activities (self-study, project, etc.) to encourage learners to “do things with the language”. The interview data also indicated that teachers considered the CEFR framed curriculum as being “a more communication-oriented curriculum” compared to the previous ones. All interview participants reported that the CEFR framed curriculum promoted the development of the communicative skills, but they also highlighted factors that hinder the application of such a curriculum: overcrowded classrooms (P1, P3, S2, S4, & S5), inappropriate physical conditions (i.e. traditional seating arrangement) (P1, P2, P3, S2, S4, S5, & S6), and lack of sufficient time (P1, P2, P3, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, & S6).

The assigned class hours in the curriculum were 2 hours per week (Grade 2, 3, & 4), 3 hours per week (Grade 5 & 6), and 4 hours per week (Grade 7 & 8) (MoNE, 2018). The participants were asked if the class hours were sufficient to achieve the expected learning outcomes. The questionnaire results revealed that majority of the participants ($M=1.96$, $SD=1.26$) considered the class hours as insufficient. A one-way ANOVA conducted to explore the perceptions of Group A ($M=1.15$), Group B ($M=2.17$), and Group C ($M=1.79$) teachers revealed no statistically significant difference at the $p \leq 0.05$ level ($F(2-97)=2.15$, $p=.12$). Thus, it can be said that neither primary nor secondary school teachers considered the designated class hours as sufficient. Two interview participants highlighted the inadequacy of the allocated time to “make learning permanent (P1 & S6)” which refers to the lack of time to practice what

is taught in the classroom while three participants stressed the difficulty to “complete the curricular activities and keep up with the syllabus (S2, S5, & P3).”

The findings of this research study were significant in the sense that, unlike its counterparts conducted to evaluate the curriculum in particular grades (e.g., Grade 2 or Grade 8), it approached the evaluation process as a whole, incorporating the primary and secondary school levels (from Grade 2 to Grade 8). This ‘wholistic’ approach allowed us to investigate the implementation of the curriculum at different levels based on the principles of the CEFR framed curriculum. With its wider scope, the research study not only allowed us to identify the strengths and the shortcomings of the curriculum in practice, but also to compare the implementation of the CEFR framed curriculum across different levels, namely, primary and secondary school levels. The primary school level where there is no exam pressure was compared to the secondary school level where the students and the teachers are under constant pressure of the high school entrance exam (HSEE). In addition, the design of this study made it possible for us to compare three groups of teachers (i.e., teachers teaching at primary, teachers teaching at secondary, and teachers teaching at both levels). Therefore, it could be clearly inferred from this study that when the process-oriented approach rather than product-oriented approach is taken while embracing the core principles of the CEFR framework in language education, there is a strong possibility that the implementation phase would be carried out more effectively to achieve the expected outcomes and the practitioners would be more positive in embracing the principles of the CEFR framework in language education.

5. Discussion

At the outset of the discussion, it should be noted that the majority of the participants had not had any in-service training on the CEFR. This, in return, caused certain inconsistencies

between the recommendations of the CEFR framed curriculum and its actual implementations in the classroom. Bearing in mind the fact that insufficient knowledge about the CEFR document and the CEFR framed English language curriculum had a significant impact on language teaching practices, it could be concluded that carefully planned (based on the needs analysis of the practitioners) and well-structured in-service training practices are a prerequisite for an effective implementation of the core principles of the CEFR framed English language curriculum. This basic finding is consistent with research showing that ongoing in-service training is vital to the successful implementation of the curriculum (Malderez & Wedell, 2007, Mohamad Uri & Adb Aziz, 2018). Parallel to the findings of previous studies, this study pinpointed a lack of teachers' familiarity and understanding of the CEFR document as the most common issue with the implementation of its principles in language education (Morrow, 2004; Elder & O'Loughlin, 2007; Faez et al., 2011; Moonen et al., 2013; Ngo, 2017; Diez-Bedmar & Byram, 2019; Kanchai, 2019; Alih et al., 2020; Nishimura-Sahi, 2022). Besides, the implementation of various language teaching techniques in the classroom, as recommended in the CEFR framed curriculum, was found to be rather challenging due to large class sizes and limited class contact hours. In conjunction with the studies conducted by Kizildag (2009) and Topkaya and Kucuk (2010), the results of this study stressed the importance of class size on the implementation of learner-centred teaching as well as communication-oriented language education. As for the use of English in the classroom, the findings revealed that the exam-oriented teaching practices in secondary schools forced teachers to concentrate more on the completion of the curriculum content in a timely manner rather than aiming to enhance the communicative competencies.

Regarding the assessment and evaluation practices, the findings of this study, which are in line with the findings of previous studies (Alkan & Arslan, 2014; Ozudogru & Adiguzel, 2015, suggested that even though the participants were aware of different “recommended assessment techniques” in the curriculum, they preferred to use certain types of assessment due to lack of knowledge, information of, and training in the assessment techniques suggested in the curriculum.). This study also made it clear that the HSEE has a remarkable impact on not only the assessment practices, but also the teaching practices in the secondary school. This dual effect of the HSEE results in an undesirable shift of focus – from one on meaning to one on form, or from learner-centeredness to teacher-centeredness. It is evident that there is a mismatch between the prescribed language teaching approaches in the CEFR framed curriculum and the assessment practices in use. This discrepancy does not appear to be specific to the Turkish context but has been reported to exist more internationally, namely in the Dutch secondary education context (Moomen et al., 2013), in the Vietnamese context (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015), in the Thai context (Kanchai, 2019), and in the Malaysian context (Ishak & Mohamad, 2018; Lo, 2018; Alih et al., 2020). As highlighted by Van den Branden “A shift toward a competence-based approach to foreign language teaching calls for a related approach to assessment” (as cited in Moomen et al., 2013, p.243). Therefore, it is particularly important that the alignments between the language teaching and the assessment practices are to be established in order to ensure that the process leads to the designated learning outcomes.

While the action-oriented nature of the curriculum was acknowledged by the participants, the allocated class time was considered as inadequate in achieving the learning outcomes by the majority of the participants. As indicated by Nunan (2003), in order for measurable progress to be seen in L2, learners need adequate exposure to L2 – at least 200

hours' instruction per year . With the present teaching hours in Turkey, Grade 2, 3, and 4 students receive 74 hours per year (2 hours per week) while this is 111 hours per year for Grade 5 and 6 (3 hours per week) and 148 hours for Grade 7 and 8 (4 hours per week), which is far below the minimum number of hours needed for significant progress in English. Such limited contact hours seem to be further curtailed by HSEE at high school level, remarkably reducing opportunities to use language communicatively.

6. Conclusion

This study evaluated the CEFR framed English curriculum that is in use in primary and secondary schools in Turkey from the teachers' perspectives. Since the studies previously conducted in Turkey and in other countries regarding the implementation of the CEFR and CEFR framed curricula have shown that the implementation phase is not problem-free, it is extremely important to allow the practitioners to make their voices heard. It turned out in this study that lack of knowledge about the CEFR, certain contextual factors, insufficient in-service training on the current curriculum, and the mismatch between the language education policy and its implementation caused the teachers to deviate from its principles and adjust their language teaching practices idiosyncratically.

The findings of this study indicated that the majority of the participants were unaware of the principles of the CEFR framed curriculum and its implications for language education due to the unavailability of formal training. Besides lack of knowledge about the CEFR and the curriculum itself, contextual factors such as class size, class contact hours, and materials seem to hinder the effective implementation of the CEFR framed curriculum in Turkey. As indicated by Moomen et al. (2013), it is a common practice that teachers adapt the CEFR to meet their specific needs as well as the contextual requirements. Therefore, this finding clearly

shows that the problems teachers face do not seem to be local (e.g., specific to Turkish primary and secondary education) but more global, applying to international contexts where the CEFR is adopted. The main implication here is that teachers are in dire need of well-tailored comprehensive in-service training to help them internalize the principles of the CEFR and apply them in language teaching practices. These in-service training practices would, in return, ameliorate the effective implementation of the core principles of the CEFR-framed curriculum in language teaching.

Another key finding stemming from the current study was insufficient training provided for in-service teachers. This was consistent with the results of a recent study conducted by Alih, Yusoff and Abdul (2020), which highlighted the impact of insufficient support on the implementation of the CEFR in language classrooms. Lack of such professional training or support mechanism seems to deprive teachers of sound knowledge of the CEFR principles impacting the classroom practices in the Turkish context. Such professional development activities for practitioners have the potential to enhance the implementation of the CEFR in language education if only they take into account the degree to which the CEFR is put into practice so that the support that is most feasible for their professional context is provided. Thus, teacher trainers should identify the needs of the practitioners and organize effective in-service training programs to address these needs. That is to say that, teachers are required to be equipped with practical knowledge bearing in mind the contextual factors that they deal with. In attempting to do so, it is vital to carefully identify external factors specific to individual contexts where the CEFR is applied, and to determine the extent to which such factors influence classroom practices. Therefore, evidence from this study should help raise decision-makers' awareness of the identification of in-service teachers' needs. Training based on needs analysis

would help teachers not only to embrace the CEFR and its core principles in language education, but also to learn how to overcome the limitations posed by the context in which they are required to teach. Bearing in mind the fact that teachers operate in different contexts constrained by various factors (e.g., lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms), these in-service training programs are required to be organized and delivered considering the realities of the contexts and the needs of the teachers. Meanwhile, it is equally important that such professional development activities are executed on an ongoing basis in line with the changing needs of the teachers and that the impact of such training practices are required to be closely monitored and evaluated by policy-makers at macro level (i.e., state level).

The final major finding of this study that needs utmost attention is the mismatch between the language education policy and its actual implementation in language teaching practices. The discrepancy emerges as the most significant cause of the deviation from the principles of the CEFR in language teaching practices. For policy makers, such evidence would be of immense importance in reviewing and revising macro level language education policies. In this respect, a decision at macro level needs to be taken as to whether to equip the learners with multiple communicative competencies in the most effective ways possible or to adopt a much narrower perspective in which learners are to be equipped with one particular skill (i.e., reading) and some specific vocabulary knowledge that they would require in the exams (e.g., HSEE). The conflict of interest between the exam-oriented nature of the education and the communication-oriented nature of the language education is a problem that needs to be addressed at the policy level. Thus, the policy makers are required to ensure that the educational system does promote the language education policy. This is a valid argument also for other contexts (e.g., Vietnam, Netherland, and Malaysia) where the CEFR is adopted to bring a more

communication-oriented approach in language education (Nguyen & Hamid, 2015; Moomen et al., 2013; Ishak & Mohamad, 2018).

The scope of the current study was limited to the evaluation of the CEFR-framed English language curriculum in primary and secondary schools in three different socio-economic zones/districts of Istanbul, Turkey. Though those socio-economic zones were purposefully chosen as representative of the population, the results may not fully represent the perceptions of the primary and secondary school teachers across the country. Further research on a larger scale is necessary to determine the extent of understanding (lack of thereof) shared by teachers concerning the content of the CEFR framed English curriculum and its implications for language education. This could lay the foundation of the in-service training practices and acknowledge their content. Besides, carefully designed longitudinal studies with multiple data collection techniques, particularly classroom observations, could yield significant insights into the implementation phase. Only then would we be able to have a good grasp of the challenges that practitioners face in curriculum implementation and produce effective solutions. In addition to the highlighted limitations, this study was not able to reveal how the implementation of the CEFR framed English curriculum would be like if the oppressing factors (i.e., time constraints and exam-pressure) were eliminated. For that purpose, one would need to conduct a quasi-experimental research study that employs a nonequivalent groups design, in which the curriculum is delivered to a group of students (control group) as usual while the other group (treatment group) receives the curriculum free of any of the aforementioned factors such as time constraint or exam-pressure. Findings of such a research study could lead to a better understanding of how effective the CEFR framed curriculum could be if a different approach at macro level language education policy was adopted.

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