

Navigating challenges, embracing benefits: Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions on the new assessment and evaluation system

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Abstract

Assessment and evaluation is an integral part of EFL learning and teaching. In the Turkish education system, the traditional assessment tools are generally used even though the current curriculum highlights the integration of skills. However, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) developed a new regulation on the assessment and evaluation (2023) along with a directive on the implementation of the written and practical exams, which made the assessment of four skills compulsory. Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to explore Turkish EFL teacher's perceptions on the new assessment system by focusing on their challenges and benefits in the process. The participants were 10 EFL teachers working at Turkish secondary state schools. The data was collected through interviews conducted via phone calls and online ZOOM meetings about their opinions on the effectiveness of the new system. The data was analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis procedure. Findings showed that most of the teachers were satisfied with the new assessment system which allowed them to test students' communicative skills although they faced some challenges due to the adaptation problems, large class sizes, and limited class

hours. Some recommendations are offered for the researchers and policy-makers for the effective implementation of the new assessment tools.

Keywords: EFL assessment; language assessment and evaluation; changing regulations; Türkiye; Ministry of National Education; challenges

1. Introduction

Language assessment and evaluation have always been an integral part of language teaching and learning. It can be defined as “the process of observing, analyzing, gathering, and measuring data about learners’ abilities, needs, difficulties, and achievements” (Boubris & Haddam, 2020, p. 241). This process has benefits for both teachers and learners. In the case of teachers, it provides opportunities for progress monitoring, checking the effectiveness of the currently used methods and approach, and identifying gaps in students’ knowledge (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Önalın & Gürsoy, 2020; Öz, & Atay, 2017). For students, it provides standards they can compare their proficiency level to and gives them essential feedback. (Ağaoğlu & Bavlı, 2023; Mirici & Şengül, 2020).

As assessment is a component of language teaching and learning, it revolves around the needs of students and the context in which it is used. This context includes the class size, class hours, and technological infrastructure (Han & Kaya, 2014). Another major influence on assessment is the changes in the curriculum (Hazar, 2021). Moreover, considering that language teachers serve as the bridge between the educational policies and classroom implementations of the assessment process, their involvement also impacts classroom assessment. This includes both teacher beliefs and language assessment literacy. While teacher beliefs influence which assessment methods will be used (Boubris & Haddam, 2020; Önalın & Karagül, 2018), the teacher’s language assessment literacy determines the range of methods that will be used (Hatipoğlu, 2015; Öz, & Atay, 2017).

In Türkiye, classroom assessment has always been defined by the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The most recent curriculum of 2018 created a theoretical framework for the assessment of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) based on the Common European Framework (CEFR) which is centered on alternative and formative assessment (MoNE, 2018). However, MoNE published a new assessment and evaluation regulation for classroom assessments (MoNE, 2023a). As studies (Çimen, 2022; Özüdoğru, 2021) have found a discrepancy between the curriculum and applied assessment methods, examining the teachers’ perceptions and attitudes toward the new assessment regulations can help to determine the potential educational impact of the new regulations.

In this study, the perceptions and attitudes of Turkish EFL teachers on the challenges and advantages of the new assessment and evaluation system implemented by MoNE (2023) are examined to inform the ELT literature and policy-makers about its impact on foreign language education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Assessment and Evaluation in EFL

Assessment and evaluation are sometimes used interchangeably as they are major components of language teaching and learning, however, they are not synonymous. Assessment encompasses all the tests, methods, and approaches used to track student development (Öz & Atay, 2017). Evaluation, on the other hand, is the process of interpreting the data collected through testing and other assessment methods to make judgments about things such as the student's progress and the program's effectiveness (Mahshanian et al., 2019). However, they are inseparable components of language teaching and learning. Since assessment includes collecting data and evaluation demands concluding from the data, they should be used together to make informed decisions, provide feedback, and measure overall effectiveness (Boubris & Haddam, 2020).

Assessment is commonly divided into assessment of learning (AOF) and assessment for learning (AFL). While AOF learning is also referred to as summative assessment, AFL is called formative assessment (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Öz, 2014). Summative assessment happens at the end of a unit or period to check students' learning (Mahshanian et al., 2019). In contrast, formative assessment happens throughout the learning process. The information that it provides about the current learning process is used to guide stakeholders to reach certain learning goals (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Öz, 2014). Formative assessment is favored by language teachers because it provides more beneficial washback (Acar-Erdol & Yıldızlı, 2018; Boubris & Haddam, 2020). In line with this, assessment can also be divided into traditional and alternative assessments. Traditional assessment is described as the teacher-centered test-based assessment that is used to determine whether students have reached a certain proficiency level (Tosuncuoğlu, 2018). On the other hand, alternative assessment is characterized as a student-centered, skill-integrated, communication-based assessment to provide feedback on the current proficiency level of the students and guide the learning process (Monib et al., 2020).

Assessment and evaluation are important in all educational contexts as they provide feedback for all stakeholders (Öz & Atay, 2017). In the EFL context,

teachers use assessment and evaluation to determine the student's needs and progress, the curriculum's effectiveness, and to reflect on their teaching (Swaie & Algazo, 2023; Önalın & Karagöl, 2018). Students, meanwhile, use it to set language proficiency goals and check their language learning progress (Önalın & Karagöl, 2018; Öz & Atay, 2017). While assessment and evaluation have different aims for different stakeholders, the beneficial washback they provide is important for all stakeholders in the EFL context.

2.2. EFL Assessment in the Turkish Context

The learning objectives set by MoNE define the curriculum, which in turn defines which assessment and evaluation methods and approaches will be used by teachers in the classrooms (Çakır & Genç, 2021). The ELT curriculum of 2018 recommends the use of formative and alternative assessments to assess all language skills of students (Tosun & Glover, 2020). However, multiple studies examining the EFL assessment in the Turkish context have found that classroom assessment shows an overreliance on summative assessment (Çakır & Genç, 2021; Tanyer & Susuz, 2018; Öz & Atay, 2017). For instance, Tanyer and Susuz (2018) found that in-service Turkish EFL teachers used summative assessment methods due to insufficient training on alternative assessment methods. Karagöl et al. (2017) concluded that factors such as insufficient technological infrastructure and lack of materials such as portfolios, rubrics, and checklists limit the possibility of using more authentic and interactive assessment methods. Dursun (2014) notes that large classroom sizes and excessive teacher workloads, coupled with the centralized exam system's influence in the Turkish education system, led to an increased reliance on traditional, test-based assessments, as highlighted by Arslan and Kartal (2018). This reliance is particularly evident in middle schools due to the LGS entrance exam in the 8th grade, which is multiple-choice (Başok, 2020).

As stated before, the curriculum defines the assessment methods; therefore, changes in the curriculum also change the methods used. Teachers are the ones implementing the curriculum and assessment and evaluation methods; hence, they should be informed about the changes in the curriculum. However, Yeni Palabıyık (2021) found that there was no in-service training for the Turkish EFL teachers regarding the integration of technology in classes which was one of the main objectives of the new curriculum of 2014. Moreover, Gürsoy and Eken (2018) found that there was no in-service training for Turkish teachers regarding the newly implemented curriculum in 2018.

2.3. New Regulations and Reforms

Although the Turkish educational system has witnessed important reforms in the field of EFL, the effectiveness of teaching and assessment practices has been still questioned by researchers and educators (Hazar, 2021). Taking into consideration the fact that changing regulations affect teacher beliefs, and eventually the teacher perspectives shape teaching and assessment practices (Arslan & Üçok-Atasoy, 2020; Han & Kaya, 2014), it is crucial to look into the recent developments in the Turkish educational system. In 2005, MoNE, started to significantly revise the EFL curriculum depending on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) principles in order to enhance communicative learning and bring alternative assessment approaches into the EFL classrooms (Acar-Erdol & Yıldızlı, 2018; Gürsoy & Eken, 2018; Han & Kaya, 2014; Özüdoğru, 2021). MoNE changed the policy to reach the European standards being influenced by the CEFR which is an international standard supporting the communicative use of the English language (Çimen, 2022; Mirici & Şengül, 2020; Taşçı, 2022; Tosun & Glover 2020).

In addition, in 2012, MoNE redesigned the EFL curriculum to regulate the compulsory education starting with the 2nd grades (Özüdoğru, 2021; Tanyer & Susuz 2018). The current curriculum (for 2nd-8th grade), shaped by stakeholder, researcher, and teacher input prioritizing communicative competence with effective assessment methods was put into practice by MoNE in 2018 (Hazar, 2021; Özüdoğru, 2021). According to MoNE (2018), the aim of the new model, based on CEFR, was to emphasize authentic language use for a positive washback effect on learners (as cited in Arslan & Üçok-Atasoy, 2020). Additionally, the issue of assessment complementary to teaching, learning, and testing guides the teachers' educational choices. In this regard, Güngör and Fişne (2020) emphasize a holistic approach to assessment of the new ELT curriculum which explores how learning, teaching, and testing interact to influence parents' attitudes, learners' learning strategies, and teachers' instructional preferences. On the other hand, MoNE (2018) emphasizes alternative methods including self-assessment, portfolio assessment, along with the integration of summative and formative assessment and the interactive use of four skills.

To this extend, researchers focus on the crucial role of language teachers who transfer the educational reforms to the classroom and determine the useful assessment methods based on communication, learner objectives and expectations (Arslan & Üçok-Atasoy, 2020; Hazar, 2021; Karagül et al., 2017; Tunçer & Merç, 2023). Although continuous curriculum development is considered as necessary to improve language learning by focusing on deficiencies (Özüdoğru, 2021), Arslan and Üçok-Atasoy (2020) propose assessing EFL teachers' practices to ensure alignment with learning outcomes. On this point, the Turkish educational system is criticized for its top-down approach, being centralized exam-oriented,

having unreliable assessment and evaluation systems and un-established regulations (Acar-Erdol & Yıldızlı, 2018; Arslan & Kartal, 2018; Başok, 2020; Güngör & Fişne, 2020; Önalın & Gürsoy, 2020; Yeni Palabıyık, 2021). In this context, there is a clear inconsistency between MoNE's assessment purposes and its implementation.

On the other hand, recent studies in EFL literature reflect the lack of coherence between MoNE's (2018) expectations and teacher practices in terms of integrated assessment of language skills. Ölmezler-Öztürk and Aydın (2019) found that language teachers neglected assessing listening, speaking, and reading skills because they lacked the professional ability to measure them and faced assessment difficulties. Conversely, Önalın and Gürsoy (2020) concluded that even though teachers can assess oral skills, they focus on reading, writing and vocabulary due to centralized exams. Furthermore, Başok (2020) and Çimen (2022) also emphasized the gap between policies and practices since language teachers neglect developing communicative skills, integration of the productive skills is lacking, and their exams focus mainly on grammar and reading. As Taşçı (2022) and Tunçer and Merç (2023) highlighted that assessment in Turkish education is outcome-focused, they suggested in-service training on process-oriented assessment methods so that teachers can guide the learners' development through feedback with practical implementations.

2.4. The New Assessment and Evaluation Regulation (MoNE, 2023a)

According to Özüdoğru (2021), curriculum development should be considered as an opportunity to implement better teaching and learning practices in an education system. As for Türkiye, apart from recent changes in the curriculum with the intensive focus on communication and alternative tools, MoNE has put into practice the Assessment and Evaluation Regulation (MoNE, 2023a). It introduced important principles intended mainly to improve summative testing practices. Except for practical exams, there is an emphasis on the common implementation of the written exams to enable teachers to perform standardized evaluations. In addition, questions for common written exams held in schools will be prepared according to the scenarios which are created in collaboration with class/field departments and the Measurement and Evaluation Center Directorate. MoNE also highlighted that it can conduct provincial and nationwide common written exams for the determined class levels and courses.

On the other hand, MoNE has also published the Written and Practical Exams Directive (MoNE, 2023b) which introduces the principles and procedures for the summative exams. The important issues for implementing the exams based on four skills are mainly concerning the language teachers. According to the directive, except for the common written exams to be held nationwide; all

exams conducted by schools should consist of short-answer and open-ended questions. Additionally, exams for the language courses will be conducted in two stages: written and practical. Practical exams for measuring listening and speaking skills are conducted by the course teacher and scored separately. Eventually, an exam score is calculated by taking 50 percent of the written exam, 25 percent of the listening exam, and 25 percent of the speaking exam.

Eventually, the new assessment and evaluation approach (MoNE 2023a, MoNE 2023b) in the Turkish educational system puts new responsibilities on the language teachers. Assuming that there has been no research on the EFL teachers' perceptions of the new system, teachers' actual use of the new regulation needs to be explored in detail in order to inform the EFL literature and policymakers about its impact on the foreign language education. Therefore, the aim of the study is to understand the views of the Turkish foreign language teachers in secondary state schools and to identify the challenges and benefits regarding the new assessment tools for the written and practical exams implemented by MoNE.

3. The study

In the present study, the perspectives of foreign language teachers in Turkish context regarding their experiences about the difficulties and advantages of the new assessment and evaluation system are explored based on the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of educators regarding the methods employed in the new assessment system?
2. What are the specific challenges and advantages of the new assessment approach?
 - 2.1. What specific challenges/concerns do educators encounter with the new assessment approach?
 - 2.2. What specific benefits/advantages do educators experience with the new assessment approach?
3. What changes have educators observed in students' academic performance and learning outcomes following the new assessment system?
4. How do educators perceive the compatibility between the content of textbooks/materials and the new assessment system?
5. How is technology integrated into the new assessment system, including any specific challenges or benefits?

To address the gap between policy and practice in Turkish EFL assessment, and to illuminate the potential impact of recent MoNE regulations, understanding

teacher perspectives is essential. This study will focus on teacher experiences with the new assessment system, investigating their perceptions, the challenges they confront, and any advantages they identify. Moreover, the present study is significant for providing crucial information to the researchers and policymakers since teacher opinions can give feedback about the new system and show (in)consistencies between the regulations and their implementation.

3.1. Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research provides a framework for the in-depth exploration of participants' thoughts and perceptions, thereby facilitating analysis that can uncover the implicit meanings and enhance our understanding of the participants' experiences. As the purpose of the current study is to explore the benefits and challenges Turkish EFL teachers encountered while implementing the new regulations, a qualitative research design was chosen.

3.2. Participants

The study had 10 participants, all of whom were selected based on the criteria of being in-service Turkish EFL teachers working at state lower secondary schools and having experience with the assessment system of lower secondary schools before and after the new regulations. The majority of the participants were female and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 24 years. Also, the majority of the participants taught crowded classes of more than 30 students. Detailed information about the participants and their teaching context can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 Data about the participants and their teaching context

	Gender	Teaching experience	Class levels	Class sizes
Participant 1	Female	9 years	6, 7	35-40
Participant 2	Male	12 years	5, 6, 7, 8	15-16
Participant 3	Female	5 years	6, 7	around 40
Participant 4	Female	3 years	5, 6, 7	around 35
Participant 5	Female	15 years	5, 6	32-36
Participant 6	Female	22 years	5, 7, 8	35-40
Participant 7	Male	8 years	5, 6, 7	15-20
Participant 8	Female	17 years	5, 7, 8	35-40
Participant 9	Female	24 years	5, 6, 7, 8	32-35
Participant 10	Female	18 years	5, 6	25-30

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The study used semi-structured interviews for the data collection. The questions for the interview were created by the researchers based on the research questions. The questions were translated into Turkish, to avoid misunderstandings. Semi-structured interviews were used because they allow the collection of both pre-determined and unexpected in-depth data from the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The first three questions of the interview were asked to collect data about the participants and their teaching context. The other 10 questions were the main questions that were used to collect the data for the current study. In addition to those questions, 20 possible follow-up questions were prepared to be asked of the participants if necessary.

3.4. Data collection procedures

Appropriate times for the interview with the participants were scheduled. Before the interviews started, it was communicated to the participants that the study relied on a voluntary basis, their identity would remain anonymous, and their consent was taken to record the interviews. To facilitate the data collection process, the interviews happened through phone calls and online *ZOOM* meetings. As semi-structured interviews were conducted, the researchers initially asked the predetermined interview questions and then based on the answers of the participants, asked some follow-up questions.

3.5. Data analysis

Creswell and Creswell's (2018) qualitative thematic analysis procedure was used for the analysis because it provides a framework for the systematic analysis of qualitative data. Moreover, the thematic analysis enables the researchers to uncover and interpret themes, which have not been pre-determined at the planning stage of this research. After the interviews, data was transcribed and codified into possible themes. Then, the codes and themes were compared and selected after being agreed upon by both researchers. This was done to establish inter-rater reliability as qualitative studies have a subjective nature possessing the risk of having low reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4. Findings

The findings of the present study are presented in the same order as the research questions were originally given. Besides, some quotations from the participants are given to support the summarized data presented in the frequency tables.

RQ1 – What are the perceptions and attitudes of educators regarding the methods employed in the new assessment system?

As shown in Table 2, while the majority of the participants (f: 6) have positive attitudes, the others are negative or neutral about the new regulations.

Table 2 Attitudes towards the new system

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
positive	1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10	6
negative	3, 6	2
neutral	5, 8	2

On the other hand, the EFL teachers' opinions about the new written and practical exams can be seen in Table 3. Many teachers found the new system challenging since they had difficulties in the process and students had some adaptation problems. Although they stated some positive views on participation, motivation and 4-skills assessment, they also expressed negative perceptions based on the time management with crowded classrooms, concerns for the low-level students, and subjective evaluations.

Table 3 General perceptions

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
Challenging	Labouring, stressful, difficulties with the practical exams, calculating the marks, unwillingness to speak	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10	7
Adaptability	Worries (open-ended, speaking), Top-down, sudden change, not ready, will take time, prejudices, not accustomed to	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10	7
Participation	More interest in lessons, positive change, self-expression, coming prepared, motivated, self-confident	4, 6, 5, 8, 9, 10	6
Limited time	Limited class hours, need extra time, intense curriculum, time loss, crowded classrooms	2, 3, 5, 6, 10	5
Skills assessment	Useful to test speaking and listening, communicative competence, opportunity, interactive use of 4 skills	2, 4, 7, 9, 10	5
Concerns for the low-level students	Tend to memorize, feel insufficient and unsuccessful, unwillingness to speak, prejudices	1, 3, 5, 6, 10	5
Subjectivity	Open-ended questions, speaking evaluation	3, 5	2

Here are some quotations to support the findings on Table 3:

"I believe that this new exam system contributes to the improvement of students, enhancing their proficiency in the four language skills by developing communicative skills. [...] In addition, I think I have developed professionally to use the language more effectively with new strategies." (P7)

"I believe that we face many challenges in the new exam system. Firstly, students were not accustomed to it, and they already had prejudices about the exam. Our classrooms are crowded. The determined scenarios, frankly speaking, restricted us [...] And while scoring the speaking exams, [...] I do not think I gave fair scores to everyone." (P3)

In Table 4, some suggestions of Turkish EFL teachers for the effectiveness of the new assessment tools are shown. According to the majority of the participants (f: 7), their class hours should be increased to cover the topics, administer exams, evaluate, and give students feedback.

Table 4 Suggestions for effectiveness

Theme	Code	Participant	f
More class hours	Opportunity to guide, give feedback, cover the curriculum, practical exams	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	7
No limitation for the question types	Difficult for the low-level, hard to ask easy questions, unwillingness, concerns, prejudices, not ready	1, 4, 6, 9, 10	5
Radical changes	Intensive-English for the 5th grades, teaching 4 skills separately, starting from macro-level, gradual transition,	1, 6, 7	3
Rubric	Objective evaluation, common rubrics	1, 4	2
Consistency	No match with the central exams, causing confusion	1, 2	2

The quotations below support the data on teachers' suggestions:

"I think many problems can be solved with more class hours. We can engage with students more and help them progress further, providing opportunities to address the needs of those who are struggling. [...] It also creates an opportunity for us to conduct practice exams more comfortably." (P10)

"The lack of rubrics, especially in the speaking exam, allows for subjective assessment, and its fairness can be questionable. [...] I also do not agree with restricting the types of questions so much. While having open-ended questions is good, I believe teachers and students were not ready for it." (P4)

RQ 2 – What are the specific challenges and advantages of the new assessment approach?

Based on the views of the participants, Table 5 summarizes the challenges of the language teachers who had the most difficulties (f: 9; f: 8) during the implementation

and evaluation process. Moreover, the subjectivity and open-endedness hindered fair evaluation, and they also posed challenges in the preparation and adaptation to the new system.

Table 5 Challenges and Concerns

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
Implementation	Limited time for the curriculum, practice exams take time, crowded classrooms, noise, unwillingness, hard to motivate the students	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	9
Evaluation	Open-endedness, subjective, not fair, listening assessment, no rubric, ignoring small mistakes, tiring, time consuming	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	8
Preparation	Hard to find listening texts, open-endedness, energy and time consuming	1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10	7
Others	Adaptation, Prejudices, worried students, need extra help, new system, difficult to plan	1, 2	2

The above findings can be supported with a quotation:

“While preparing the written exam, open-ended questions initially caused a bit of a challenge for me. [...] Also, after determining the topics for speaking exams and listening to the students, deciding where to give points became exhausting. [...] Preparing, evaluating, and creating documents with calculations required a significant amount of effort and dedication.” (P9)

As for the benefits and advantages, the participants expressed their opinions as in Table 6. According to the majority (f: 7), assessing four skills was beneficial with the guidance and feedback. Also, others think that the new system increased learner participation, interest, and communication.

Table 6 Benefits and advantages

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
4 skills assessment	Improvement, feedback, fair evaluation, opportunity to observe and guide	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10	7
Participation	More learner interest in listening and speaking, motivation, enthusiasm	2, 4, 7, 8, 10	5
Language use	Effective and productive use of language, self-expression, interaction	3, 4, 7, 8, 9	5
Procedures	Scenarios, advantageous limitations	3, 9	2
Selective	Distinction among high-level and low-level, advantageous for the successful	1	1

The above can be supported by a quote from one of the participants:

“If we think about it from the perspective of children, I believe they will pay more attention to speaking, writing, and listening skills. They will understand that they need to further develop in these areas and will be more attentive. [...] In the long term, I believe it will be beneficial for them.” (P8)

RQ 3 – What changes have educators observed in students' academic performance and learning outcomes following the new assessment system?

As it can be seen in Table 7, five participants thought that the new assessment system caused a negative change. Two participants, however, did not observe a noticeable change. This can be supported by the quote of participant 1: "I think it's too early to talk about overall academic success because it was only implemented for one semester".

Table 7 Academic performance and the new assessment system

<i>What kind of change did you observe in the academic performance and learning outcomes of students?</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
A negative change	2, 4, 6, 8, 10	5
A positive change	3, 5, 7	3
No noticeable change	1, 9	2

When looking at the reasons the participants mentioned for the changes they observed in the academic performance and learning outcomes of the students, it can be seen in Table 8 that the main reasons were the changed formats of the exams: open-ended questions and the implementation of the listening and speaking exams.

Table 8 Reasons for the change in academic performance and learning outcomes

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
Open-ended questions	Too difficult, no guessing possible	1, 2, 4, 8, 9	5
Listening exam	Too challenging, too confusing	1, 2, 4, 6, 10	5
Speaking exam	Too challenging, unexpectedly hard	2, 4, 6, 9, 10	5
Developed communicative skills	Improved speaking skills, improved language skills	7, 9, 10	3
Increased in-class participation	Participate more	1, 7	2

Here are two quotes that support the data about the changes in the academic performances of the students:

"In terms of achievement, I can say that it has led students to be more attentive in class. [...] Especially their interest in speaking and listening activities has increased; they have started to take them more seriously." (P1)

"For the speaking exam, I can say it influenced students negatively. There are some very shy students, especially when it comes to speaking in front of the public. They neither have the ability nor the desire, as they fear making pronunciation mistakes. They, for instance, directly said, 'I do not want to speak'." (P3)

With regards to how the open-ended questions influenced students' academic achievements, the majority of the participants said it influenced the achievements negatively. The main reason that open-ended questions influenced the achievements negatively is that students were unfamiliar with it and guessing was not possible. The quote of this participant shows how their students were influenced by the open-ended questions in the new assessment system:

"Having open-ended questions has revealed the difference between a high-level and low-level student. [...]When we look at the grades, it has been good for the students who can make interpretations, but for those who don't listen to the lessons, their grades may have been lower than before." (P9)

Concerning the feedback that the participants have received from their students, the majority of it was negative feedback with themes like "fear of failure" and "preferring the old system". The two themes that were positive were the "easy listening exam" and "improved communicative skills". Below is a quotation regarding received feedback:

"There were direct comments like 'I wish it were like before,' or 'Do we really need to do the speaking exam or listening?' In addition, there were many objections regarding the written exams." (P4)

As for the advantages and disadvantages for the students, there was a clear consensus among the participants that "successful students continue to be successful, unsuccessful students became even more unsuccessful with the new system" (P3). As it can be seen in Table 9, the main advantage of the new system for the students, according to the participants, is that they improved their language skills. Whereas, as shown in Table 10, the afore-mentioned disadvantages were the "increased prejudice against English" and "lowered grades".

Table 9 Advantages of the system for students

Theme	Code	Participant	f
Improved language skills	Separate skill exams, improved English	6, 7, 10	3
Overall assessment	Better assessment	6, 7	2
Motivation	More motivated	3	1

Table 10 Disadvantages of the system for students

Theme	Code	Participant	f
Prejudice against English	Crushed enthusiasm, more prejudiced	5, 10	2
Speaking exams	Speaking anxiety	3	1
Grades	Lower grades	2	1
Abrupt change	No gradual transmission	6	1

RQ 4 – How do educators perceive the compatibility between the content of textbooks/materials and the new assessment system?

The majority of the participants believed the content of the textbooks and the new assessment system are either compatible or partially compatible (f: 6, f: 4), while 1 participant believed it is incompatible. Table 11 provides the reasons why the participants believed the textbooks and new system were compatible.

Table 11 Reasons for compatibility

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
Writing	Useful enough, open-ended questions	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	7
Listening exercises	Enough listening exercises	5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	6
Speaking exercises	Enough speaking exercises, comprehensive exercises	3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10	6

Below is a quote that supports these findings:

"Yes, they are compatible. Because in the textbooks, there are generally speaking sections, listening sections, and writing sections." (P7)

Regarding the reasons for incompatibility, they can be found in Table 12. Most of the participants (f: 7) stated that they found the writing exercises incompatible with the new system as the textbooks mostly contained matching questions, but the new system requires open-ended questions in the exams.

Table 12 Reasons for incompatibility

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
Writing exercises	More open-ended questions, less matching questions	1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10	7
Listening & speaking exercises	Not enough, need more exercises	1, 3, 4, 8	4
Fun	Boring topics, boring exercises	1, 9, 10	3
Reading exercises	Too difficult	2, 5, 9	3
Up-to-dateness	Topics not up-to-date	2, 9	2

Below is a quote provided to support the data:

"Especially the 8th-grade textbook, we have been using it for about 9-10 years. That's why it's not up to date anymore. For example, there is a topic about the internet. The information about the internet from 10 years ago, and today's are very different." (P2)

With regard to how the participants adapted to the new assessment system, it can be said that, except for one participant, they all changed the way they teach their lessons. The majority of the participants increased the focus they gave on the newly assessed skills: listening and speaking. Moreover, they emphasized the open-ended question format of the exams in their lessons.

Below is a quote provided to support the data about how the participants adapted to the new assessment system:

“For example, when doing reading texts and activities, especially in open-ended questions, I ask them to form sentences rather than short answers. [...] I do not skip speaking and listening activities. For speaking, I try to ask questions related to the topics we use in class.” (P1)

RQ 5 – How is technology integrated into the new assessment system, including any specific challenges or benefits?

All participants stated they integrated technology in at least one stage of the new assessment system. As it can be seen in Table 13, most of the participants used technology in the application stage of the listening and speaking exams (f: 9, f: 7). Moreover, some participants mentioned the use of technology in the preparation and evaluation stages.

Table 13 Benefits of technology

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>f</i>
Application stage of listening exam	While-listening, smart board, YouTube	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
Application stage of the speaking exam	Recording the speech, smart board	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10	7
Preparation stage	Online forums, computer, teacher Facebook groups, teacher Instagram pages, Internet, Microsoft Word, preparing questions, finding questions	1, 4, 6, 10	4
Evaluation stage	Calculating mean scores, Microsoft Excel, Calculator application	1, 6, 7, 8	4

Below is a quote from the participants about the benefits of integrating technology:

“In the preparation phase, we use technology such as the computer and Microsoft Word program; we don’t write by hand. Additionally, when calculating scores, I can say that we benefit from technology by using the calculator application.” (P7)

5. Discussion

Language assessment and evaluation are fundamental components of the language learning and teaching process. While it can be influenced by many factors, the curriculum and regulations set by policy makers are the main factors that shape it. As the MoNE published new regulations on the assessment and evaluation

(2023), its implementation has changed. For this reason, the aim of the study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Turkish EFL teachers regarding the new assessment and evaluation system implemented by MoNE. Based on the analysis, the results indicate a consensus among the participants regarding their positive perceptions and attitudes towards the new regulations.

Regarding the first research question, "What are the perceptions and attitudes of educators regarding the methods employed in the new assessment system?", a significant discussion emerges. Although teachers faced difficulties such as time management, dealing with crowded classrooms, and motivating low-level students, they generally expressed positive attitudes towards the integration of four skills in the assessment and evaluation process. This finding is consistent with studies (Aliakbar et al., 2023; Önalán & Gürsoy, 2020) which found that language teachers are willing to use different assessment activities even though it is easier to manage crowded classrooms with traditional written exams by ignoring the oral skills. Although participant teachers understand the necessity of changing the assessment tools, they think that it will take time to adopt and effectively use the written and practical exams in an integrated way as it is suggested in the latest curriculum (MoNE, 2018). However, this finding is not consistent with the study by Özüdoğru (2021) which emphasizes the easy adoption and understanding of the new curriculum by the teachers.

In the EFL literature, many studies (Başok, 2020; Çimen, 2022) indicated a clear gap between language policies and teacher practices claiming that Turkish EFL teachers were neglecting the assessment of speaking, writing and listening skills contrary to the curriculum which highlight communicative competence. However, the present study added a new dimension to the product-oriented assessment system with its emphasis on oral skills. Moreover, language teachers were generally satisfied with the changes in the system since they could test the foreign language competency based on speaking and listening, and they also cared about learner development by means of guidance and feedback. On the other hand, some teachers were not satisfied with it, and they wanted to turn back. The reasons for this finding may be their traditional assessment habits which highlight the importance of outcome rather than the process, the limited class hours since they could not cover the topics in the curriculum, and the structure-oriented high-stake exams. This finding is in accordance with other studies (Önalán & Gürsoy, 2020; Taşçı, 2022), which found that centralized-exams which focus on grammar and vocabulary caused teachers to use conventional question types rather than open-ended assessment tools.

Considering the second research question, "What are the specific challenges and advantages of the new assessment approach?", the remarkable difficulties were related to the external factors such as crowded classrooms and

limited class hours which caused them to be reluctant to use different assessment tools as in other studies (Han & Kaya, 2014; Karagül et al., 2017; Tunçer & Merç, 2023). Furthermore, it can be inferred that the top-down regulation caused language teachers to be caught unprepared because they were just informed about the regulation after it was published. As a result, they were mostly challenged with the implementation and evaluation as teachers and students were not ready for the new system, low-level students demotivated the teachers with their unwillingness and insufficiency, and it was a stressful and time-consuming process to be objective while scoring the open-ended questions. On the other hand, the most challenging evaluation was the speaking exam. However, it is clear that the language teachers tried to be fair by using some rubrics and making voice-recording. The finding is similar with the studies (Han & Kaya, 2014; Ulker, 2017) which found speaking as the hardest to evaluate and highlighted the use of rubrics to make the learners feel fairly assessed with the objective and reliable criteria (Önalın & Gürsoy, 2020; Ulker, 2017). However, there were also a few teachers who evaluated students based on their own judgements and they were not fair, which is consistent with the study by Öz and Atay (2017).

As for the benefits and advantages of the current regulation, participants valued the effective testing of the language skills which gave them the opportunity to observe the learners' development and guide them by giving feedback on the weak points. To this extent, the importance of feedback was also highlighted in Önalın and Gürsoy (2020)'s study as a purpose of assessment. Other crucial advantages of the new implementation were the motivation and awareness to use the EFL in an interactive way for the self-expression and self-improvement of the learners. This finding is consistent with some studies (Arslan & Üçok-Atasay, 2020; Önalın & Gürsoy, 2020) that pointed to the development of communicative competence based on the harmony of four skills. On the other hand, language teachers had some recommendations for the effectiveness of the new assessment system. They disagreed with the limitations of the question-types claiming that low-level students could not be motivated as the open-endedness challenged them. Swaie and Algazo's (2023) study supported this finding, as it claims that the level of the learners should be considered to develop the assessment tools. Other suggestions of the study such as reducing the class size, increasing the class hours, and having some gradual changes based on the needs of the new system are also consistent with the findings of some studies (Alshammari, 2021; Arslan & Kartal, 2018) which recommended similar changes in the educational context.

With regard to the third research question, "What changes have educators observed in students' academic performance and learning outcomes following the new assessment system?", five participants observed a negative change, while three participants observed a positive change, and two participants none at all.

For the negative change, the teachers observed that the new system was too confusing and difficult for students. Moreover, they stated the main disadvantages for the students were lower grades and increased prejudice towards English. One reason for this could be the abrupt implementation of the new assessment system. This is in line with the literature on curriculum changes; these studies found that if a top-down change will be implemented, it should happen with in-service training, feedback from the stakeholders, and gradually (Çimen, 2022; Güngör & Fişne, 2020; Özüdoğru, 2021). On the other hand, for the positive change, the teachers stated that they observed the following advantages of the system for their students: developed communicative skills and increased in-class participation. These outcomes can be caused by the increased importance given to speaking and listening by the students as they have to improve those skills for the exams. This is consistent with the findings of the study of Başok (2020) who found that since classroom assessment mainly relied on grammar assessment, students did not develop other language skills even though they were part of the curriculum.

Concerning the reasons open-ended questions influence student achievements, the participants mentioned that as there is no correct answer, these questions encourage critical thinking and creativity. This is reinforced by Porter and Roberts (1981) who argue that open-ended questions have more benefits than multiple-choice questions. Moreover, some participants stated that they believed using open-ended questions negatively influenced students' achievement as students were not familiar with it and could not guess the answer. This is supported by the study of Cheng (2004), who found that students' grades are lower when open-ended questions are used rather than selected-response tasks. On the other hand, regarding the feedback that the participants received from their students, the main themes that stood out were "habits" and "fear of failure". It can be concluded that as the students were accustomed to the previous assessment and evaluation system, the new system caused an increase in fear of failure among the students. This is in accordance with the findings of Taşçı (2022).

In relation to the fourth research question, "How do educators perceive the compatibility between the content of textbooks/materials and the new assessment system?", most teachers believed they were compatible. As reasons for the compatibility, a minority of the participants stated that they believed the number of writing, listening, and speaking exercises in the textbooks was enough. However, when the main reasons for incompatibility were examined, the majority of the participants stated the low number of speaking and listening activities as an important reason. Moreover, they stated that the textbooks had a high number of selected response questions, whereas the assessment regulations explicitly state that no selected response questions should be asked. This is a similar finding to Han and Kaya (2014) and Tosuncuoğlu (2018) who also found that teachers

thought the textbooks were not sufficient enough for the EFL lessons. Moreover, the participants in the current study stated that the textbooks included outdated and boring topics, which agrees with the findings of Yeni Palabıyık (2021).

Regarding how the participants adapted to the new assessment system, the main finding was an increase in exam preparation during the lessons. The participants mentioned things such as including more speaking practice, asking open-ended questions, and using the smart board more for listening exercises. It can be said that these changes happened due to the new assessment system as they all correspond to a change in the assessment system. The fact that the way lessons are taught by the teachers changed due to the changed assessment system is in accordance with the findings of multiple studies which also found that the teachers adapted to the new curriculum by changing their lessons (Güngör & Fişne, 2020; Öz & Atay, 2017; Özüdoğru, 2021; Tanyer & Susuz, 2018).

Considering the fifth research question, "How is technology integrated into the new assessment system, including any specific challenges or benefits?", it can be said that the participants integrated technology mostly in the preparation and application stages of the assessment. In the preparation stage, the main reasons for using technology were finding exam questions and listening to audio files. This increased use of technology in assessment aligns with the literature on technology use in EFL assessment (Arslan & Kartal, 2018; Chen et al., 2023; Yeni Palabıyık, 2021). In the application stage, the participants mentioned using their smartphones to record the speech of students during the speaking exam. This corresponds to one of the main benefits of using technology in EFL classrooms (Yeni Palabıyık, 2021). Moreover, the participants stated that they benefited greatly from the smart board during the listening exams. This agrees with the studies of Güngör and Fişne (2020) and Yeni Palabıyık (2021) who also found that the smart board is a beneficial technological tool in EFL classes.

Moreover, as the new regulations are centered around summative classroom assessment, the participants only used traditional assessment methods with minimal integration of technology. This finding aligns with the findings of Acar-Erdol and Yıldızlı (2018). They observed that the teachers implemented assessment methods that were similar to the exercises in the textbooks. Since these exercises did not include technology, the assessment methods also did not include technology. On the other hand, regarding the challenges of integrating technology, one participant only mentioned that calculating and adding the scores of each student individually into the system was time-consuming. Therefore, it can be said that the participants of the current study primarily integrated technology into the new assessment system with minimal challenges.

6. Conclusion and weaknesses of the study

The present study aimed to understand the views of Turkish EFL teachers in lower secondary state schools and to identify the challenges and benefits regarding the new assessment tools for the written and practical exams implemented by MoNE. The results show positive perceptions and attitudes towards the new assessment system but are inconclusive on the observed academic achievements and learning outcomes of students. Specific challenges the participants encountered while implementing the regulations were time management, lack of assessment rubrics, trouble finding listening texts, and worried students. On the other hand, experienced benefits were increased in-class participation and improved language skills. Considering the MoNE textbooks, the majority of the participants believed they were either compatible or partially compatible with the new assessment system. Lastly, technology was primarily integrated into the preparation and application stages of the speaking and listening exams. While no specific challenges were mentioned, using the smart board for listening exams, making voice-recording with smartphones, and using the internet to find exam-questions were the mentioned benefits.

To enhance the transition to the new Turkish EFL assessment system, it is essential to consider the language teachers' perspectives. The findings of this study contribute valuable insight for researchers and policymakers about the teachers' opinions, benefits, and challenges regarding the new system's implementation. In this respect, some suggestions can be made for future researchers and policymakers. Firstly, to facilitate the implementation, more English class hours, smaller class sizes, new textbooks, improved technological infrastructure, and in-service training for teachers about the new regulations are recommended. In addition, allowing different exam question types and providing assessment rubrics are recommended. However, the limitations of the current study have to be acknowledged. Since a small sample was used, future studies should include more participants and higher secondary school teachers. Furthermore, the possible discrepancies between teachers' reported beliefs and actual assessment practices need to be considered, therefore classroom observations are recommended as they can provide a more accurate insight.

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