

# The Gap between Language Teaching Policies and Classroom Practices in the Turkish EFL Context: The Effects on Teacher Motivation<sup>1</sup>

Emre Başok<sup>2</sup>, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA

## Abstract

This qualitative study explores Turkish English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perspectives regarding current English Language Teaching (ELT) policies, ELT curriculum, assessment practices, and teacher motivation in the Turkish EFL setting. The study's participants in this study were three native Turkish EFL teachers, teaching at elementary, middle school and high school levels. Data in the present study were collected with semi-structured online interviews. The interview data were coded with a priori codes, and the data were analyzed according to thematic analysis. The focus of the study was to explore whether EFL teachers teaching at primary and secondary levels observed a gap between the language teaching policies and actual classroom implementation of these policies in the Turkish EFL context, and if there was a perceived gap, how this gap affected EFL teachers' motivation at different grade levels. The study found that teachers' classroom practices were inconsistent with the expectations of official language teaching policy. Even though the findings of this study are not generalizable, the findings of this study are transferrable to other educational contexts and can be used to deepen understanding of the policy and practice gap phenomenon in different EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

## Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo explora las perspectivas de los maestros turcos de inglés como idioma extranjero (EFL) con respecto a las políticas actuales de enseñanza del idioma inglés (ELT), el currículo del ELT, las prácticas de evaluación y la motivación de los docentes en el entorno de EFL de Turquía. Los participantes del estudio fueron tres maestros turcos de EFL, que enseñan en los niveles de primaria, secundaria y preparatoria. Los datos se recopilieron con entrevistas semiestructuradas en línea. Los datos de la entrevista se codificaron con códigos generados a priori, y los datos se analizaron con análisis temático. El objetivo del estudio fue explorar si los docentes de EFL que enseñan en los niveles de primaria y secundaria observaron una brecha entre las políticas de enseñanza de idiomas y la implementación real de estas políticas en el contexto de EFL de Turquía, y si se llegó a percibir una brecha, ¿Cómo afecta esta brecha la motivación de los profesores de EFL en los diferentes niveles de cada grado? Los resultados muestran que los maestros percibieron una brecha entre las políticas de enseñanza de idiomas y sus prácticas de enseñanza reales en el aula. Aunque los hallazgos de este estudio no son generalizables, los hallazgos de este estudio son transferibles a otros contextos educativos y se pueden usar para una comprensión profunda del fenómeno de la brecha de política y práctica en diferentes contextos de EFL.

## Introduction

When English was first taught in state schools in Turkey, traditional form- and translation-focused teaching methods were applied and this traditional way of language teaching still has effects on current English language teaching (ELT) practices in Turkey (Işık, 2008). The major focus of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) of language teaching is on reading and writing, and generally, no systematic attention is paid to the speaking and listening domains of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). After adhering to GTM approach to teaching English for almost 40 years, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) introduced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in 1997, bringing many fundamental changes to English teaching policies and curriculum. According to Kirkgöz (2005), the 1997 curriculum stands as a landmark in Turkish history as the CLT was introduced into ELT for the first time in Turkey.

With the latest reforms in English teaching curriculum in Turkey, students start taking English classes in second grade and continue until they graduate from high school (Bayyurt, 2012). The English curriculum in Turkey is determined by the Ministry of National Education (MONE) and teachers have to follow the centralized curriculum. Even though CLT was adopted as the language teaching method with the 1997 curriculum reform, most of the high school graduates in Turkey are not fluent in English, even though by graduation they have studied English for more than 10 years. Recent research (Education First English Proficiency Index, 2011, 2015, 2019) indicate that language education is not as effective as it should be in Turkey, even though CLT has been practiced for more than 20 years. In 2019, Turkey ranked 79<sup>th</sup> among

<sup>1</sup> This is a refereed article. Received: 1 August, 2019. Accepted: 25 February, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> [basok.2@osu.edu](mailto:basok.2@osu.edu)

100 countries in the world with very low English proficiency level. It also placed 32<sup>nd</sup> among 33 European countries in the same category (Education First English proficiency index, 2019).

These results led to the question of why Turkey ranked so low in the recent proficiency analyses, even though former grammar focused language teaching approaches had been replaced with more communicative methods. Even though the language teaching curriculum had changed over 20 years before, in reality, this change did not result in better English proficiency. Teachers are asked to implement CLT in their classrooms by MONE, but the standardized entrance exams still primarily test students' reading and grammar abilities, while failing to address their listening or speaking skills. These exams do not test communicative abilities of students, and teachers feel obliged to teach in line with these tests, resulting in a gap between policy and practice. According to Kırkgöz (2008) this gap stems from factors such as the curriculum itself, cultural factors, teacher-related factors and contextual factors. Even though the language teaching policies were changed a long time ago to improve the English proficiency of Turkish students, the policy was not implemented in practice due to both macro and micro factors that will be explored in this study.

This study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives regarding the introduction of CLT into the Turkish EFL context and its effect on teachers' classroom practices. Therefore, this study sought to examine the perspectives of Turkish EFL teachers about ELT policy implementation in terms of teacher motivation, curriculum, and teaching methods, as well as differences in perspectives among Turkish EFL teachers at the elementary, middle and secondary levels. The study also aimed at exploring the teachers' perspectives regarding CLT and its applicability in their classroom contexts. There has been ample research on the implementation of CLT and the problems faced in the application of CLT in Turkish classrooms, but there is a need for more research exploring the effects of the gap between policy and practice on teachers' motivation. This study will explore whether Turkish teachers observe a gap between policy and practice and its effect on their teaching motivation, and what factors, if any, restrict teachers from implementing the CLT oriented curriculum. The results of this study are expected to inform policy makers regarding the language policies and teachers' actual classroom practices in Turkish EFL context.

### Literature Review

Recent research on the implementation of language policies in the actual classroom contexts where policy is put into practice is scant (Menken & Garcia, 2010). Foreign language education policy involves macro-level policy, concerning the national curriculum, and micro-level implementation, which is related to language teachers' actual classroom teaching practices (Wang, 2006). A gap between language policy and practice poses instructional and motivational challenges for language teachers in educational contexts, especially in English as a Foreign Language teaching (EFL) contexts. Köksal and Şahin (2012) state that in Turkey, policy makers and authorities prioritize foreign language education policies and teaching methods, but their decisions are not consistent with the ways in which classroom teachers put language policies into practice. This inconsistency between the policies and actual classroom practices stems primarily from the high stakes tests that have a significant role in determining students' futures. Since the stakes are very high in these standardized tests, teachers feel obligated to teach in-line with these tests in order to avoid criticism of their teaching proficiency by different stakeholders, such as their principal or the students and their parents.

### Implementation of CLT in EFL contexts

CLT was adopted in many EFL contexts in the 1990's as a part of official language teaching policy with the goal of improving students' communicative abilities in English. Even though the principles of CLT aimed to improve students' communicative competence, in many EFL contexts, the implementation of CLT has received some resistance from English teachers. For this reason, exploring the EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT merits attention. The factors causing this resistance vary from grammar focused language tests (Asassfeh et al, 2012; Denkci-Akkas & Coker, 2016; Nichols & Berliner, 2008; Phipps & Borg, 2009), contextual difficulties such as large classroom sizes and heavy teaching loads (Hettiarachchi, 2010; Nishino, 2008), and teachers' worries concerning their own English proficiency or ability to lead a CLT-based class (Rahman et al., 2019; Segovia & Hardison, 2009).

Segovia and Hardison's (2009) study exploring Thai EFL teachers' implementation of CLT after curriculum reform in 1999 found that some of the teachers were concerned about their English proficiency and lacked confidence to lead a communicative language class. Similar to Segovia and Hardison's (2009) study, Rahman et al. (2019) exploring EFL teachers' use of CLT after the curriculum reform in Bangladesh found that

teachers had concerns about their own English proficiency on implementing a CLT-based curriculum. Tayjasanant and Barnard's (2010) study exploring Thai EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding application of CLT in their teaching found that administrative constraints, including the national curriculum and school policies, along with both parents' and students' exam-based expectations, prevented an effective CLT implementation. Similarly, a study of 50 English teachers in the Turkish EFL context found that CLT did not have the expected impact on teachers' classroom practices after the 1997 curriculum reform, since teachers still used traditional methods of language teaching and activities in their classrooms (Kırkgöz, 2007). In another study, Kızıldağ (2009) found that a busy curriculum and unsatisfactory placement tests were among the main instructional challenges in the Turkish EFL context.

As studies have shown, (Kırkgöz, 2007; Kızıldağ, 2009; Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Tayjasanant & Barnard, 2010), changing the curriculum from grammar-focused teaching to a CLT-oriented approach with macro-level policies does not always have the desired impact on actual classroom practices of teachers (Kırkgöz, 2007; Kızıldağ, 2009; Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Tayjasanant & Barnard, 2010). For macro-level policies to be implementable by classroom teachers at the micro-level, policy makers should consider the broader picture by addressing the contextual factors that are voiced by the language teachers in the relevant literature.

High-stakes placement tests, such as high school or college entrance exams, play a vital role in most EFL contexts. In EFL contexts where these exams have such a big effect on students' future education, teachers mostly feel obliged to teach in-line with the test questions on the standardized tests (Nichols & Berliner, 2008; Rahman et al., 2019). According to Nichols and Berliner (2008), teaching to tests leads to a narrowing of the curriculum, and it demoralizes teachers and bores students. They also state that due to the high stakes of standardized tests, both students and teachers focus more on the test content and getting high scores on these tests rather than actual learning. A study by Rahman et al. (2019) found that, due to the nature of the assessment system in Bangladesh, the participants in their study reported that they taught what was needed for the tests which led to a narrowing of the curriculum by excluding communicative practices. Asassfeh et al.'s (2012) study, exploring the applicability of CLT in the Jordanian EFL context with 1,525 EFL students found that middle school and high school level students preferred form-focused instruction to CLT due to the nature of language tests. They concluded that even though the Jordanian Ministry of National Education had made some efforts to implement CLT, and students had positive attitudes towards the approach, English Language Teaching (ELT) in Jordan still stressed memorization, grammar, and translation in order to meet the exam requirements. A similar study conducted by Phipps and Borg (2009) with three teachers of English in Turkey found that English language teachers tend to adopt a focus-on-form approach in their classrooms, for similar reasons to those addressed by Asassfeh et al. (2012).

Denkci-Akkas and Coker (2016) explored the perspectives of language students and Turkish EFL teachers towards CLT, and showed that form-focused language instruction was implemented by teachers who participated in their study because of the discrepancy between the curriculum and centralized tests. As shown by the findings of these studies, grammar-focused language tests constitute one of the major reasons for unsuccessful CLT implementation.

Other than high-stakes language tests, contextual factors such as large classroom sizes and the teaching loads of teachers play a major role in teachers' ability to employ CLT in English classes. In ESL settings, students have ample opportunities to practice their English skills outside of the classroom and gain communicative competence with more ease than the students in EFL contexts. However, in EFL contexts, students' access to English is limited to the class time and most English teachers in these contexts have high teaching loads and large classroom sizes that affect the implementation of CLT. Nishino's (2008) study exploring Japanese EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding CLT found that, in addition to language exams, teachers regarded large class sizes and heavy teaching loads as other serious problems impeding effective CLT implementation.

#### Teachers' Perceptions of CLT in Teaching English

Since it is the classroom teachers who implement language policies in their classrooms, it is important to explore their perceptions of CLT. Nikian's (2014) case study of 10 Iranian EFL teachers, found that the participants had a good understanding of the principles of CLT and they were satisfied with their application of CLT in their classrooms. Contrasting with Nikian's (2014) results, Rahimi and Naderi's (2014) study found that even though teachers had the skills to implement CLT in their teaching, they reported that the educational system prevented them from effective CLT implementation in the Iranian EFL context.

Rahmawati's (2018) study on Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT found that even though this approach has been a part of the English teaching curriculum for over 35 years, teachers perceived difficulties in implementing CLT in their classes. Contrary to Nikian's (2014) study, participants in Rahmawati's (2018) study had a misconception about CLT, believing it meant only focusing on speaking skills rather than integrating the four macro skills. Mason and Payant's (2018) case study on Ukrainian EFL teachers' English teaching practices and perceptions toward CLT found that even though teachers had a clear understanding of CLT, some of the teachers' classroom practices consisted of mostly grammar-based activities. Mason and Payant's (2018) study is unique since they triangulated the data with multiple data sources including classroom observations of interviewed teachers. Their findings are representative of most EFL settings, where EFL teachers have positive views toward the principles of CLT, but find implementing its principles difficult for various personal and contextual reasons addressed in the reviewed studies.

### Teacher Motivation in EFL Contexts

There has been a major increase in the quantity of literature on teacher motivation within the past decade (Han & Yin, 2016). However, many of these studies were conducted with teachers teaching subjects other than English. Studies in EFL/ESL settings regarding motivation mainly focused on learners' attitude and motivation without paying much attention to English teachers' motivation in teaching (Hastings, 2012). There is a bi-directional relationship between students' learning motivation and achievement and teachers' teaching motivation (Dörnyei, 2003), as shown by many studies in the teacher motivation literature (e.g., Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Bernaus et al, 2009; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Pelletier et. al, 2002; Radel et al., 2010).

Studies conducted on EFL teachers' motivation thus far have concluded that several factors ranging from personal, professional, instructional to physical challenges played a role in demotivating teachers. Factors that were found to de-motivate teachers in the few studies conducted were salary (Doyle & Kim, 1999; Karavas, 2010), inconsistencies in the teaching curriculum (Hettiarachchi, 2010; Johnson, 2000), a lack of teaching materials and a heavy teaching workload (Doyle & Kim, 1999; Johnson, 2000), teacher-administrator relationships (Doyle & Kim, 1999), a lack of cooperation among colleagues, and a general lack of enthusiasm towards teaching (Hettiarachchi, 2010; Johnson, 2000).

In the Turkish EFL context, there have been very few studies investigating EFL teachers' motivation (e.g., Aydin, 2012; Erkaya, 2012; Kızıltepe, 2008) out of which only Aydin's (2012) study focused on K-12 EFL teachers, while Erkaya, (2012) and Kızıltepe, (2008) focused on college level EFL teachers. Aydin's (2012) study found that personal, professional, and instructional challenges were factors in de-motivating his participant teacher. His study found that specifically, the English teaching curriculum, teaching methods, and centralized examinations were the main de-motivating factors for teachers in the Turkish EFL context.

The gap in the reviewed literature exploring second to twelfth grade Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions toward the official language teaching policies and factors affecting their motivation compelled the present researcher to conduct this current study.

### Research questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find out if Turkish EFL teachers perceived a gap between the CLT-oriented official language teaching policy and their actual classroom practices. Another goal of this study was to explore the effect of a possible gap on teachers' motivation at various educational levels, an area which has not been explored by previous research.

First, the study investigates the participant EFL teachers' perspectives toward CLT and its implementation in the Turkish EFL context and the challenges that they face in teaching CLT-oriented classes. Second, the study explores whether participants perceive a gap between the CLT-oriented curriculum and their teaching, and how this gap may affect their motivation at different grade levels.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions toward CLT and its implementation in their classrooms? Do they face any instructional challenges in terms of implementing CLT-based curriculum?
2. Do English teachers perceive a gap between the language teaching policy and practice in Turkey? If there is a gap, what are the reasons that cause this gap and how does it affect teachers' motivation at different educational levels?



## Methodology

In order to uncover teachers' perspectives, a qualitative research design employing online interviews was used in this study. Thanks to the developments in technology, online interviews have helped researchers overcome geographical dispersion, financial and time constraints, as well as physical mobility boundaries that have negatively affected face-to-face interviews in the past (Janghorban et al., 2014). Since the researcher was located in the U.S., and the participants lived in Turkey at the time of the study, online interviews were found to be a valuable data collection method.

## Participants

The data in this study was collected via semi-structured interviews with three female Turkish EFL teachers: One teaching at both elementary and middle school levels, one teaching at secondary school level, and one at the high school level. The reason for recruiting English teachers from three levels was to better explore the applicability of CLT in their classrooms and factors affecting their implementation of CLT. During the time when this study was conducted, middle school students were taking Transition from Primary to Secondary Education (TEOG) exams, and high school students were and still are taking college entrance exams, whereas elementary level students did not have any high-stakes tests.

All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

- Participant 1 was Ms. Ezgi. She taught both elementary (2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades) and middle school levels (6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>) at a public school in Antalya, Turkey. She had been teaching English for three years.
- Participant 2 was Ms. Yeliz. She taught at middle school levels (6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>) at a public school in Mersin, Turkey. She had been teaching English for four years.
- Participant 3 was Ms. Sijan. She taught at high school levels (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>) at a public school in Ankara, Turkey. She had been teaching English for 5 years.

As a researcher, I was aware that all three participant teachers in this study were females, but in Turkey, it is very common that females work as language teachers more than males, so this sample is representative of the larger population.

## Data Collection Procedures

Interviews with participant teachers were used to elicit data, using questions prepared by the interviewer. Lune and Berg (2016) describe interviews as formal, informal and semi-structured. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used, as they give sufficient freedom to interviewers to digress and also allow them to go far beyond the prepared standardized questions (Lune & Berg, 2016). Each participant was interviewed for 30-45 minutes and all three interviews were conducted in English.

## Data Analysis

To analyze the findings of the study, *a priori* codes in Table 1 were developed by the researcher based on the research questions. A priori codes that guided the analysis of the interview data were: GTM (+), GTM (-), CLT (+), CLT (-), Assessment (+), Assessment (-), Motivation (+), Motivation (-), Policy & practice gap (+), Policy & practice (-). Plus (+) showed that teachers liked GTM. CLT and had positive views on assessment methods including centralized tests, whereas (-) represented dislike and negative views. Motivation (+) showed that the teacher had high motivation, while (-) showed that the teacher had low motivation. Policy & practice (+) showed that the teacher perceived a gap between the language teaching policies and their actual classroom practices, while (-) represented that the teacher did not perceive a gap (see Table 1). Then the data were transcribed and coded. Any emergent codes during the interviews were added. If necessary, re-coding was applied. During the interviews, anecdotal memos were used to make the coding and data collection procedure easier.

GTM +	GTM -
CLT +	CLT -
Assessment +	Assessment -
Motivation +	Motivation -
Policy-Practice gap +	Policy-Practice gap -

Table 1. *A-priori* codes. These were the codes used to analyze the data set.

In Appendices 2 and 3, sample coded data is shown. Different colors were used for each *a priori* code to make the coding process easier. Data was coded by the researcher and checked by the principal investigator of the study. Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to analyze the coded data. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). In this study, themes were determined based on the important information they captured related to the research questions and their representation of patterned responses within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

After coding the interview transcripts for relevant themes, it emerged that a gap between the language teaching policies and classroom practices exists, and that teachers believe it is caused by the high-stakes tests that pressure teachers to teach to tests without giving them much autonomy in class. As can be seen from Appendices 2 and 3, none of the participants in this study had positive views of the current assessment practices or GTM, and none of the participants had negative views for CLT. The analyses of the collected data revealed some common themes demotivating the teachers such as the gap between the official policy and practice, a mismatch between the curriculum and assessment practices, and administrative pressures effect on teacher motivation.

The Inevitable Gap between Policy and Practice

One common theme that emerged from the teachers’ interviews was the inevitable gap between ELT policies and teachers’ reported classroom practices. All three teachers interviewed in this study stated that it was very difficult, if not impossible, to implement the imposed language teaching curriculum in their classrooms. Even though GTM was replaced with CLT with the curriculum reform in 1997, when the participants were asked about their perception of CLT and the role of GTM in the Turkish EFL context, they stated that GTM still played a big role in their teaching.

For example Ms. Sijan, a high school EFL teacher, stated that:

*The suggested teaching method is mostly CLT for the 9<sup>th</sup> graders that I’m teaching, but it’s not easy to apply in the classroom I think. Even if you use this method (CLT) you should return back to (GTM) before the exams. That’s a big problem. If I were at a primary school maybe my answer would be different but my students are already used to writing [memorizing] the grammar rules and practicing these rules [...], for those reasons I feel obliged to continue this routine. [Ms. Sijan, high school EFL teacher]*

The model national English teaching curriculum for the elementary and middle school levels, which is shown in Table 2 (Adapted from Kirkgöz et al., 2016), imposes that the teaching focus for the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades should be on listening and speaking skills.

Levels [CEFR*]	Grades (Age)	Skill focus	Main activities/ strategies
1 [A1] (2)	2 (6-6.5)	Listening and Speaking	
	3 (7-7.5)	Listening and Speaking Very Limited Reading and Writing	TPR/Arts and crafts/Drama
	4 (8-8.5)	Listening and Speaking Very Limited Reading and Writing	
	5 (9-9.5)	Listening and Speaking Limited Reading Very Limited Writing	Drama/Role-play
2 [A1] (4)	6 (10-10.5)	Listening and Speaking Limited Reading <sup>a</sup> Very Limited Writing <sup>a</sup>	
	7 (11-11.5)	<b>Primary:</b> Listening and Speaking <b>Secondary:</b> Reading and Writing	Theme-based
3 [A2] (4)	8 (12-12.5)	<b>Primary:</b> Listening and Speaking <b>Secondary:</b> Reading and Writing	

Table 2. Model English Language Curriculum (2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grades)

As shown in Table 2 above, grammar teaching is not even mentioned in the curriculum. However, when Ms. Ezgi, who teaches both elementary and middle school English, was asked about her perception toward CLT and the official curriculum, she stated that:

*I think CLT is the most effective one for our students. But the national curriculum should also be reasonable and useful. GTM has a very big role in Turkish education system because our exams are based on mostly grammar and we don't have enough time to use other methods instead of GTM. There are many different methods in our curriculum. But initially, we are obliged to teach English Grammar. When it comes to speaking or listening, the curriculum is entirely useless [Ms. Ezgi, elementary/middle school EFL teacher]*

Ms. Yeliz, addressed the instructional challenge that she faced in terms of applying CLT in her classroom by stating:

*If I would have [sic] much more time in the class and wouldn't be [sic] obliged to prepare my students to the written exams, I would use this method [CLT]. [Ms. Yeliz, middle school EFL teacher]*

As seen in her response, due to the time constraints of covering all the topics that students will be tested on, Ms. Yeliz could not use CLT in her teaching. Out of all three participants, Ms. Ezgi, (elementary/middle school English teacher), was the only participant who stated that she was able to implement CLT with her students. She stated that she used CLT with her elementary students, as they did not have to take any sort of language tests. However, as Ms. Ezgi taught both elementary and middle school levels, she expressed the difference in her perspective in teaching these two different levels by stating:

*Most of the time with my middle school level students, I have to use GTM because of the limited time. Otherwise, they don't have the time to get the knowledge which are questioned [sic] in the exam. [Ms. Ezgi, elementary/middle school EFL teacher]*

The gap between ELT policies and the reported classroom practices of language teachers was the first recurrent theme in this study. As can be seen from all three teachers' interviews, even though the MONE revised the English teaching curriculum with communicative methods more than 20 years ago, the mismatch between the curriculum and assessment practices leads to a gap between policy and practice. This gap, and the teachers' obligation to cover all the topics that their students will be tested on, created time constraints for teachers, impeding their implementation of CLT. As this study found, similar to the research conducted in other EFL settings (e.g., Tayjasanant & Barnard, 2010; Asassfeh et al, 2012, Nishino, 2008; Mason & Payant, 2018), implementing the language teaching curriculum with CLT did not translate into more communicative teaching practices in the Turkish EFL context. As figure 1 below shows, the ELT policy of MONE suggests implementing a communicative curriculum by employing CLT as the English teaching method. However, as this study found due to the grammar-based assessments that are also created by MONE, CLT oriented policy did not translate into practice and caused the gap between the policy and practice.

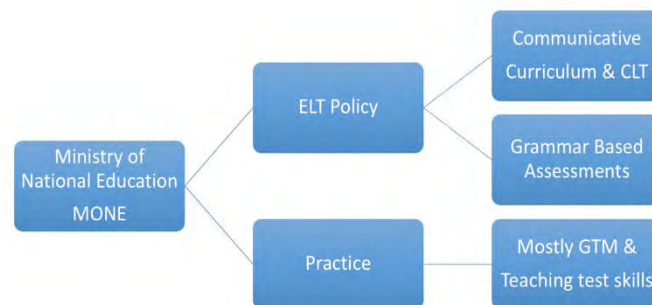


Figure 1. Policy-practice gap

### Factors demotivating EFL teachers

As seen in the previous section, even though Turkish EFL teachers had positive perceptions toward CLT, a mismatch between the curriculum and the assessment practices has made the application of CLT impractical in their teaching. This mismatch, along with pressure to teach to the tests, was the main reason behind the policy-practice gap that demotivated EFL teachers. For example, when asked about her perspectives on the high-stakes tests, Ms. Sijan stated:

*If I don't teach in line with these questions it's inevitable that I'm going to come across with grades that are under 50, besides the complaints of the students also maybe a warning from the principle unfortunately. [Ms. Sijan, high school EFL teacher]*

As seen from this excerpt, the test results were deemed very significant by both the students and the administrators, which could even lead to a warning by the school principal if expectations were not met. Ms. Ezgi's response further addresses the pressure that the tests put on teachers by eliminating their autonomy in teaching.

*There is a national education website [where] you can get the similar questions with these exams. I download them all and provide students with these tests. [Ms. Ezgi, elementary/middle school EFL teacher]*

It can be seen that high-stakes grammar-based tests were not only used to assess students' English proficiency, but also teachers' teaching proficiency. Teachers would be regarded as "good" or "expert" English teachers by several stakeholders such as students, parents and administrators if their students scored high on these tests. Due to these factors, teachers experienced a lack of autonomy in their teaching as they perceived their ultimate goal as enabling their students to get high scores on high-stakes tests that would get them into good high schools or colleges.

#### Assessment and Administrative Pressures' Effect on Teacher Motivation

As shown above, the participants in this study revealed that they did not have autonomy in their teaching since they felt obliged to teach in line with centralized tests. Participants commented in the interviews that school principals can judge teachers' teaching skills based on their students' test results. Since the test results were seen as a measurement of teachers' teaching skills, they were perceived as sources of stress and demotivation. When the researcher asked the participants why they had to teach in line with tests even though they all believed that CLT was the best teaching method, Ms. Sijan revealed the response she and some of her colleagues could receive from the school principal by stating that:

*For example, he [principal] says: hey, my teacher I think you're a bit bad about teaching. Why are these grades so low? You can hear these warnings from the principal, unfortunately. [Ms. Sijan, high school EFL teacher]*

Similarly, Ms. Ezgi revealed her perspectives on the significance of test results by stating, Our manager [principal] makes pressure on us, and we do on our students, but we have to do it even if we don't like it. As I said before it is like a domino effect [Ms. Ezgi, elementary/middle school EFL teacher].

As seen in the above excerpts, school principals without any proficiency in English or language teaching knowledge, can judge the teachers' teaching skills or English proficiency based solely on the test results. This issue was a recurring theme in all three of the teacher interviews, and they reported that it caused them to lose their motivation in their profession. When the researcher asked the interviewees if their teaching motivation had changed since they started their job as an EFL teacher, Ms. Sijan revealed:

*As a typical EFL teacher I felt really ambitious about my career at first, but the obstacles [teaching to the test, large classroom sizes, pressure from the principal, teaching grammar rules over and over again] actually diminished that feeling...now I'm a standard teacher who cares [sic] the high grades most; this is a bad result and I'm really sorry about that. [Ms. Sijan, high school EFL teacher]*

As seen from Ms. Sijan's excerpts, her motivation has diminished since she started teaching English, even though she was very motivated when she first started her career. It was noteworthy that Ms. Sijan brought up the term "typical EFL teacher" who she defined as a teacher whose priority was to care about exam results, rather than about students' actual language development and fluency, including herself in that group.

Another participant answered the same question about the change in her motivation by stating "*It is unfortunately diminished*" [Ms. Yeliz, middle school EFL teacher]. Asked if she perceived any change in her teaching motivation, Ms. Ezgi stated that:

*At the beginning I didn't like this job, because I didn't like the system and the students in it. When I started to think emotionally about the students and touch their hearts, I started to love this job. [Ms. Ezgi, elementary/middle school EFL teacher]*

Out of all three teachers, Ms. Ezgi was the only teacher who taught both at elementary and middle school levels and she was the only teacher who stated that her motivation increased since she started working as an EFL teacher in Turkey. This could be due to not having the pressure to prepare her elementary level students for tests and being able to create a stress-free classroom that both students and she enjoyed. As seen from the interview data, there was a difference among Turkish EFL teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels regarding their motivation.



### Implications of the Study

This study identified a perceived gap between language policy and practice in the Turkish EFL context and the effects of this gap on English teachers' motivation. The national curriculum imposes communicative methods for language classrooms, but teachers report difficulty in implementing CLT due to the mismatch between the national curriculum and the assessment practices. Teachers face a dilemma between following the curriculum and preparing their students for centralized grammar-based examinations. It is not feasible for teachers to put much emphasis on implementing the language policies in their classrooms. As a result, teachers feel stressed about their students' scores on high-stakes exams as they are being evaluated or sometimes even criticized by their school principals based on students' success on these exams. Thus, the first implication of this study is that policy makers should replace the written, grammar-based language tests with assessment tools that are more in line with the national curriculum and assess students' communicative competence. Current assessment practices only test students' grammar and reading abilities, but more attention should be given to the students' listening, speaking and writing skills, in order to be in line with the curriculum. The phenomena of having CLT as the official ELT curriculum, but testing students with grammar based language tests has been studied by various researchers (Asassfeh et al, 2012; Denkci-Akkas & Coker, 2016; Hettiarachchi, 2010; Johnson, 2000) in different EFL contexts, and the findings of this study confirm the findings of those studies.

Another implication of this study is that teachers should be more involved in the language planning process since they know the struggles that they face in implementing the current language policies in the classroom. A further implication is that teacher motivation in the context of Turkish EFL education should be given more attention. Teachers that are de-motivated and stressed about students' grades will be less able to help students develop communicative competence. Involving EFL teachers at the policy-planning phase can help address issues that are related to teachers' motivation.

### Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. The sample size is the first limitation. This study may have yielded more reliable results if more teachers had been interviewed in the data collection process. Also, this study used only one-time interviews with the participants. Conducting follow up interviews with participants to explore if there have been any changes in their perceptions toward CLT and motivation, especially after the abolishment of the TEOG exam (the high-stakes assessment completed by students at the end of middle school), could yield important implications for policy makers. Future research exploring the change in middle school EFL teachers' CLT implementation after the ending of TEOG could contribute to EFL teacher motivation research in Turkey.

The present study may have yielded more reliable results regarding the gap between the language policies and the classroom implementation of these policies if other data collection sources were used for triangulation purposes. Classroom observations, interviews with school principals, and the curriculum planners in the Ministry of National Education (MONE) would help to collect more reliable results.

As only three teachers were interviewed, the results are not generalizable for all the EFL teachers in Turkey. However, the results of this study can be tested with larger sample sizes to draw more generalizable conclusions regarding the perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers toward CLT, factors hindering its implementation in the classroom, and EFL teachers' motivation.

### Conclusion

The present study found that even though grammar-based traditional language teaching methods were officially replaced with more communicative teaching methods with the 1997 curriculum reform, among some teachers there is still a perceived gap between the language policies and teachers' reported classroom practices in the Turkish EFL setting. The participants in this study revealed the difficulties that they faced in implementing the national curriculum and the possible outcomes of teaching to the language tests in Turkish EFL setting. Participants also expressed the factors they see as causing them to lose their motivation in their profession.

There is a need for more studies in both ESL and EFL settings exploring teacher motivation and demotivation. Also, future studies should focus on how CLT can be better put into practice in EFL settings, where grammar-based traditional assessment practices are still used to assess students' language proficiency.

## Note

Data for this study was collected in May 2017. In September 2017 the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in Turkey abolished the Transition from Primary to Secondary Education (TEOG) exam. This change in the exam system was very abrupt and caused confusion for both the students and parents since the officials did not provide the details of the new system and how students would be enrolled in the high schools that they wanted to attend. In the new system, there is no centralized exam in transitioning from primary to secondary education administered by MONE; however, schools have their own admission exams.

## References

- Asassfeh, S. M., Khwailah, F. M., Al-Shaboul, Y. M., & Alshboul, S. S. (2012). Communicative language teaching in an EFL context: Learners' attitudes and perceived implementation. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(3), 525-535. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.3.3.525-535>
- Aydin, S. (2012). Factors causing demotivation in EFL teaching process: A case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(51), 1-13. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss51/1>
- Bayyurt, Y. (2012, November 12-13). 4+ 4+ 4 eğitim sisteminde erken yaşta yabancı dil eğitimi. 1. *Yabancı Dil Eğitimi Çalıştayı, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara* [Early age foreign language education in the 4+4+4 education system]. *First Foreign Language Education Workshop, Hacettepe University, Ankara*. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Yasemin\\_Bayyurt/publication/258112407\\_444\\_Eitim\\_Sisteminde\\_Erken\\_Yata\\_Yabanc\\_Dil\\_Eitimi/links/00463527010abe5800000000.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Yasemin_Bayyurt/publication/258112407_444_Eitim_Sisteminde_Erken_Yata_Yabanc_Dil_Eitimi/links/00463527010abe5800000000.pdf)
- Bernaus, M. & Gardner, R. C. (2008). Teacher motivation strategies, student perceptions, student motivation, and English achievement. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(3), 387-401. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00753.x>
- Bernaus Queralt, M., Wilson, A., & Gardner, R. C. (2009). Teachers' motivation, classroom strategy use, students' motivation and second language achievement. *Porta Linguarum* (12). 25-36. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/3016388.pdf>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Denkci-Akkas, F. & Coker, B. (2016). The use of communicative approach in 9th grade EFL classes. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, (65), 71-90. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2016.65.05>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2003). Attitudes, orientations, and motivations in language learning: Advances in theory, research, and applications. *Language Learning*, 53, 3-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.53222>
- Doyle, T. & Kim, M. Y. (1999). Teacher motivation and satisfaction in the United States and Korea. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 23(2), 35-48. <http://mextesol.net/journal/public/files/22f17ffb5be2ca12979c3bf38ad46cb3.pdf>
- Erkaya, O. R. (2013). Factors that motivate Turkish EFL teachers. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 2(2), 49-61. [http://journaldatabase.info/articles/factors\\_that\\_motivate\\_turkish\\_efl.html](http://journaldatabase.info/articles/factors_that_motivate_turkish_efl.html)
- Education First (2011). EF English proficiency index—A comprehensive ranking of countries. <https://www.ef.edu/-/media/centralefcom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v1/ef-epi-2011-report-en.pdf>
- Education First (2015). EF English proficiency index—A comprehensive ranking of countries. <https://www.ef.edu/-/media/centralefcom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v5/ef-epi-2015-english.pdf>
- Education First. (2019). EF English proficiency index—A comprehensive ranking of countries. <http://www.ef.edu/epi>
- Guilloteaux, M. J. & Dörnyei, Z. (2008). Motivating language learners: A classroom-oriented investigation of the effects of motivational strategies on Student motivation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(1), 55-77. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2008.tb00207.x>
- Han, J. & Yin, H. (2016). Teacher motivation: Definition, research development and implications for teachers. *Cogent Education*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1217819>
- Hastings, C. (2012). Teacher motivation: The next step in L2 motivation research. *TNTESOL Journal*, 5, 61-69. <https://www.tntesol.org/resources/Documents/Journal%20and%20Newsletter/TNTESOL%20Journal%20v5%202012.pdf>
- Hettiarachchi, S. (2010). *ESL teacher motivation in Sri Lankan public schools*. [Unpublished master's thesis], Eastern Michigan University. <http://commons.emich.edu/theses/316>
- Işık, A. (2008). Yabancı dil eğitimimizdeki yanlışlar nereden kaynaklanıyor? [What are the sources of mistakes in our foreign language education?]. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*. 4(2). 15-26. <https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/view/62>
- Janghorban, R., Roudsari, R. L., & Taghipour, A. (2014). Skype interviewing: The new generation of online synchronous interview in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 9(1), 24152. <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.24152>
- Johnson, C. R. (2000). *Factors influencing motivation and de-motivation of Mexican EFL teachers*. *MEXTESOL Journal*, 25(1). 51-68. <http://mextesol.net/journal/public/files/fb462fd4080e9fafc0bd89155917cb4d.pdf>
- Karavas, E. (2010). How satisfied are Greek EFL teachers with their work?: Investigating the motivation and job satisfaction levels of Greek EFL teachers. *Porta Linguarum*, 14, 59-78. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3253056>
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2005). English language teaching in Turkey: Challenges for the 21st century. In G. Braine (Ed.), *Teaching English to the world: History, curriculum, and practice* (pp. 159-175). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2007). English language teaching in Turkey: Policy changes and their implementations. *RELC Journal*, 38(2), 216-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688207079696>
- Kırkgöz, Y. (2008). A case study of teachers' implementation of curriculum innovation in English language teaching in Turkish primary education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(7), 1859-1875. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.02.007>

- Kırkgöz, Y., Çelik, S., & Arıkan, A. (2016). Laying the theoretical and practical foundations for a new elementary English curriculum in Turkey: A procedural analysis. *Kastamonu Education Journal*, 24(3), 1199–1212. <https://kefdergi.kastamonu.edu.tr/index.php/Kefdergi/article/view/671>
- Kızıldağ, A. (2009). Teaching English in Turkey: Dialogues with teachers about the challenges in public primary schools. *International Electronic Journal Elementary Education*, 1(3), 188-201. <https://www.iejee.com/index.php/IEJEE/article/view/274>
- Kızıltepe, Z. (2008). Motivation and demotivation of university teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, 14(5-6), 515-530. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600802571361>
- Köksal, D. & Şahin, C. A. (2012). Macro-level foreign language education policy of Turkey: A content analysis of national education councils. *ELT Research Journal*, 1(3), 149–158. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/eltrj/issue/5475/74372>
- Lune, H. & Berg, B. L. (2016). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson.
- Mason, A. & Payant, C. (2019). Experienced teachers' beliefs and practices toward communicative approaches in teaching English as a foreign language in rural Ukraine. *TESOL Journal*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.377>
- Menken, K. & García, O. (Eds.). (2010). *Negotiating language policies in schools: Educators as policymakers*. Routledge.
- Nichols, S. & Berliner, D. (2008). Testing the joy out of learning. *Educational Leadership*, 65(6), 14-18. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar08/vol65/num06/Testing-the-Joy-Out-of-Learning.aspx>
- Nikian, S. (2014). A case study of Iranian EFL teachers perceptions of communicative language teaching approach. *European Academic Research*, 1(10), 3438-3470. <http://www.euacademic.org/UploadArticle/249.pdf>
- Nishino, T. (2008). Japanese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching: An exploratory survey. *JALT Journal*, 30(1), 27-50. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTJJ30.1>
- Phipps, S. & Borg, S. (2009). Exploring tensions between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. *System*, 37(3), 380–390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2009.03.002>
- Rahimi, M. & Naderi, F. (2014). The relationship between EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT and perceived difficulties of implementing CLT in language classes. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 3(3), 237-245. <http://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.3n.3p.237>
- Rahman, M. M., Johan, M., Selim, S. M. M., Singh, M. K. M., & Shahed, F. H. (2019). Teachers' beliefs and practices of implementing secondary English curriculum reform in Bangladesh: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 16(2), 591. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2019.16.2.10.591>
- Rahmawati, Y. (2018). Teachers' perspective on the implementation of Communicative Approach in Indonesian classrooms. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v5i1.9881>
- Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Radel, R., Sarrazin, P., Legrain, P., & Wild, T. C. (2010). Social contagion of motivation between teacher and student: Analyzing underlying processes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 577. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019051>
- Segovia, L. & Hardison, D. M. (2009). Implementing education reform: EFL teachers' perspectives. *ELT journal*, 63(2), 154-162. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn024>
- Tayjasanant, C., & Barnard, R. (2010). Language teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the appropriateness of communicative methodology: A case study from Thailand. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 7(2). [http://journal.asiatefl.org/main/main.php?inx\\_journals=24&inx\\_contents=176&main=1&sub=3&submode=3&PageMode=JournalView&s\\_title=Language+Teachers+Beliefs+and+Practices+Regarding+the+Appropriateness+of+Communicative+Methodology+A+Case+Study+from+Thailand](http://journal.asiatefl.org/main/main.php?inx_journals=24&inx_contents=176&main=1&sub=3&submode=3&PageMode=JournalView&s_title=Language+Teachers+Beliefs+and+Practices+Regarding+the+Appropriateness+of+Communicative+Methodology+A+Case+Study+from+Thailand)
- Wang, H. (2006). *An implementation study of the English as a foreign language curriculum policies in the Chinese tertiary context* [Doctoral dissertation], Queen's University. <https://asian-efl-journal.com/Hong%20Wang%20Thesis.pdf>

## Appendix 1. Interview Questions

## Greeting &amp; Background Information Check (5-10 min)

- Introduce myself
- Background on the study: I am doing a research on the effects of current Turkish ELT curriculum on teacher motivation in Turkish EFL context. The main focus of the study is to find out if there is a gap between macro level policies and micro level classroom practices, if yes how does this gap affect EFL teachers' motivation in Turkey?

## Background information questions:

- Tell me about what you do.
- What is your education background? How long have you been teaching English?
- Which grade/s do you currently teach or work with?
- Tell me about your student population.

## Interview questions

1. What motivated you to become an English teacher?
2. Which teaching method/s are you implementing in your classroom?
3. What is the suggested teaching method in the national curriculum for the grade that you are teaching and do you think it is applicable in the classroom?
4. With which L2 teaching methods are you most familiar with?
5. What do you know about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)? Can you tell me what that means to you?
6. What is the role, if any, of GTM in Turkish EFL context? How do you believe grammar is most effectively taught?
7. Which method do you think is the most effective to teach English for your students? Why?
8. What do you think about the centralized English examinations in Turkey?
9. Do you feel obliged to teach in line with exam questions in these exams? How so?
10. How do you balance the testing requirements with what you know to be best practice? (If you do)
11. How has your motivation for teaching English changed since you started your job as an EFL teacher? (Diminished, increased, stayed the same)



Appendix 2. Sample Coded Data

P&P Gap +	P&P Gap -	GTM +	GTM -	CLT +	CLT-
<p>I have to give these rules but towards the exam week I proactive the rules as much as possible and give students all the necessary information for the exam. (policy&amp;practice +) T3</p> <p>GTM is a large pie of my classroom teaching. Policy&amp;practice (+) T3</p> <p>So I really feel obliged to teach in line with the exam</p>			<p>We need to teach everyday speech rather than grammar GTM (-). T1</p>	<p>I think the most impressive way to teach grammar is to communicate with the students. Because to me, they will learn grammer while making dialogues without pushing themselves to learn grammer. CLT (+) T2</p>	<p>its not easy to apply in the classroom I think. Because of many reasons, for instance the class is so crowded and while some students are doing the required activity its hard to control the others. T3</p>
			<p>Whenever they try to use the grammar truly in a sentence, this time they forget what to say, GTM (-)T2</p>	<p>I try to make meaningful dialogues with them and play fun games CLT (+) T2</p>	
			<p>I'm most familiar with as you know GTM, of course. Actually the other methods being not applicable caused</p>	<p>I think CLT is the most effective one because the students are</p>	

Appendix 3. Sample Coded Data

Assess +	Assess -	Motivation +	Motivation -
	They require grammatical knowledge rather than writing or speaking (Assessment -). T3	First of all, learning a second language was always my ambition, from the very beginning Mot(+). T3	of course I feel. If I don't teach in line with these questions its inevitable that I'm going to come across with grades that are under 50 besides the complaints of the students also maybe a warning from the principle unfortunately. Assessment-), policy&practice +, motivation -) T3
	they just limited you to learn the knowledges in these exams. T1	I can say that my motivation was my teacher (extrinsic mo	For example, he says hey my teacher I think you're a bit bad about teaching why are these grades so low, you can hear these warnings from the principle unfortunately. motivation (-) T3  As a standard EFL teacher I felt really ambitious about my career but the obstacles actually diminished that feeling. (Motivation -) T3
	I don't think that these examinations test students' competencies however the necessity of these exams leads students to be experts of grammatical rules		