

An Investigation on EFL Students' Perceptions of Task-Based Language Assessment in the Blended Learning Environment

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Abstract: This study examined the Turkish EFL students' perceptions of task-based language assessment (TBLA) in the blended learning environment at the tertiary level. It aimed to discover whether there were any significant differences in their perceptions based on gender and level of proficiency. It was a cross-sectional survey design study using the convenience sampling method with the participation of 54 students. Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) was used to collect data descriptively, reporting the means and standard deviations of the results via SPSS 22. The Cronbach's alpha value, which reveals the scale's internal consistency, was calculated to be 0.81. After checking the normality and linearity of the data, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out. The results showed that the students positively perceived TBLA in the blended learning environment. Although the female students obtained slightly higher mean scores on the three scales of the questionnaire, no significant gender differences were reported. Likewise, there was not a significant difference between the A2 and B1 level students' perceptions despite the A2 level students' slightly higher mean scores on three scales.

Anahtar Sözcükler:

Algı
Göreve dayalı
Harmanlanmış
öğrenme
Değerlendirme

Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğrencilerinin Harmanlanmış Öğrenme Ortamında Görev Temelli Dil Değerlendirmesi Algıları Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Özet: Bu çalışma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen Türk öğrencilerinin yükseköğretim düzeyindeki harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamında göreve dayalı dil değerlendirmesi (TBLA) algılarını incelemiştir. Cinsiyete ve yeterlilik düzeyine göre algılarında anlamlı bir farklılık olup olmadığının ortaya çıkarılması amaçlandı. Kolayda örnekleme yönteminin kullanıldığı, 54 öğrencinin katılımıyla yapılan kesitsel bir anket tasarımı çalışmasıydı. Betimsel olarak analiz edilen verilerin toplanmasında Öğrenci Değerlendirme Algısı Anketi (SPAQ) kullanılmış ve sonuçların ortalamaları ve standart sapmaları SPSS 22 aracılığıyla raporlanmıştır. Cronbach alfa değeri, Ölçeğin iç tutarlılığını ortaya koyan değer 0.81 olarak hesaplanmıştır. Verilerin normalliği ve doğrusallığı kontrol edildikten sonra çok değişkenli varyans analizi (MANOVA) yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, öğrencilerin harmanlanmış öğrenme ortamında TBLA'ya ilişkin oldukça olumlu algılara sahip olduklarını göstermektedir. Her ne kadar kadın öğrenciler anketin üç ölçeğinde biraz daha yüksek ortalama puanlar alsalar da, cinsiyetten kaynaklanan anlamlı bir fark tespit edilmemiştir. Aynı şekilde, A2 seviyesindeki öğrencilerin üç ölçekteki puan ortalamaları biraz daha yüksek olmasına rağmen, A2 ve B1 seviyesindeki öğrencilerin algıları arasında anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır.

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1. Introduction

A long-standing history of modernization in language testing has resulted in the development of various techniques and methodologies for evaluating language acquisition, skill level, and other aspects of linguistic competence. Moreover, language testing has been affected by rapid improvements in computer-based testing, including computerized grading, mobile delivery, and computer-mediated interaction with learners (Norris, 2018). According to Norris (2018), these developments and others have brought test users a wide range of opportunities for assessing and understanding L2 ability and a new challenge of choosing the best way to satisfy their needs.

While such technological improvements were still a dilemma along with their opportunities and challenges for educators, the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019 (WHO, 2020), affected all aspects of life, including education. As a result of severe precautions to stop the virus spread, the sudden shift from face-to-face education to online teaching all over the world posed many problems for educators, students, and families (Cengiz & Kaçar, 2024; Demirkol & Dişlen Dağgöl, 2022; Doğan, 2022; Seis, 2023). However, this period showed everyone that even if schools were closed, learning had not ended since innovative methods to deliver education were introduced (Carver, 2020). Although educators altered their teaching methods, one of the fundamental concerns of this sudden change was that it was challenging to keep students engaged and make them communicate with each other and the teacher in an online environment (Vellanki & Bandu, 2021).

This also affected the way how language students' performances were assessed. Assessing students in totally online environments during the pandemic period has exposed several serious problems such as technical problems, cheating, being unsure about students' identities, inadequate feedback, plagiarism, more teacher workload, ineffective interaction, and conducting more multiple-choice tests or giving more written assignments (Abduh, 2021; Afacan-Adanır et al., 2021; İsmailova et al., 2020; Öztürk-Karataş & Tuncer, 2020). Moreover, Ahmad et al. (2021) highlighted that since language classes are more different than others in considering learning outcomes to be achieved and the necessary assessment of the required authentic language performance and set of skills, educators faced severe challenges during the pandemic period. As a result of the pandemic, assessment practices were innovated, and formative assessment methods, including tasks such as blogs, e-portfolios, online presentations, open-book exams, online learning journals, and creative writing were adopted as an alternative to traditional summative assessment, which enabled teachers to involve their students in the assessment procedures (Koris & Pál, 2021).

When the new normal era was introduced around the world, teaching and learning practices were conducted under certain conditions, and blended learning has been considered as a solution to meet teachers' and students' needs since then (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2023). In higher education, the development of online learning has recently made blended learning popular as it combines the advantages of traditional classroom teaching and online learning (Meng & Feng, 2019), and recent studies have focused on the transformation from in-class to online formative assessment in different subject fields. However, the field of language education has been neglected (Tran & Ma, 2021). Moreover, even though the literature is rich with studies about distance learning and students' perceptions of online teaching, the number of studies on online EFL classes that support traditional classes is limited (Wright, 2017). More research on in-class assessment procedures in the Turkish context is also required (Hatipoğlu 2017; Güneş & Alagözü, 2020; Üstünbaş, 2023). This paper aims to fill this gap by uncovering

EFL students' perceptions of task-based language assessment (TBLA) in the blended learning environment (BLE) at a university in Turkey.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. *Blended Learning (BL)*

Blended learning is described as a combination of online and face-to-face learning, which is also called 'flipped classroom' or 'hybrid learning' (Bowyer & Chambers, 2017; Shurygin et al., 2024). Thanks to blended learning, which provides online and face-to-face interaction, teaching and learning take place outside classes (Bielawski & Metcalf, 2003). Online interaction can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2008) highlighted that while face-to-face learning maintains the social interaction necessary for active learning, online learning provides some flexibility, which is mostly difficult to find in a classroom environment. It can be concluded that the most effective approach to back student learning up will always be the combination of teaching and learning methods since it is only then feasible to adopt "all the activities of discussion, interaction, adaptation, and reflection, which are essential for academic learning" (Towndrow & Cheers, 2003, p. 57).

1.1.2. *Formative Assessment in the Blended Learning Environment*

Blended learning environments have created a variety of new opportunities to assess student learning as online learning combined with face-to-face instruction helps teachers scaffold and assess their students with plentiful possibilities in and beyond classes. The role of assessment procedures has gone beyond scoring students' learning and moved more towards being a tool to enhance learning, but in university contexts, summative assessment procedures used to measure what students have learned so far and understand whether they are ready to move to the next level are still the most common (Umar, 2018). He emphasized that formative assessment, a frequent interactive way of identifying problems in classes and adjusting teaching according to students' needs, has positively affected students' English achievement. According to Chan (2021), formative assessment is conducted during classes to obtain feedback about the necessary adjustments of teaching and learning activities in progress, which improves students' achievement of expected outcomes, while summative assessment is used to gather information about students' mastery of skills, knowledge, and content and to score and certify their proficiency.

In a study conducted by Tempelaar (2020), the role of formative assessment in a blended learning environment was investigated by using three types of assessment with e-tutorials, 2-weekly quizzes, and a final written examination in a maths and statistics module, and the results showed that students were active and engaged during the assessment and feedback procedures. In another study by Elmahdi et al. (2018), a technology-based formative assessment tool called Plickers was used at Bahrain Teachers College to improve students' performances, and it was found that using such a tool supported the learning process since it increased student participation and engagement, helped students participate the process equally, saved learning time, and provided a fun and stimulating learning environment. Chen (2023) conducted a study to improve EFL students' writing proficiency in a blended course by using formative assessment tools such as discussion boards, online quizzes, self and peer assessment procedures, teacher feedback and evaluation, and regular face-to-face classes every week. The results demonstrated that the student's writing performances improved thanks to the blended learning environment, and they had positive perceptions towards formative assessment. Given that students had difficulty articulating complex terms, concepts, and phenomena while writing in English (Zorba, 2023a) and lack of clear instructions negatively affect their writing

performances (Zorba, 2023b), there is a pressing need for studies focusing on improving students writing performances and meticulously assess these performances.

Tran and Ma (2021) expressed that a limited number of studies have addressed the efficiency of online formative assessment for language learning majors in the blended learning environment. They added that investigating learners' perceptions can provide enough evidence to adopt a "formative assessment-centred blended-learning framework" more from basic in-class uses to institutional levels (p. 21). Moreover, Almalki and Gruba (2013) highlighted that despite an increasing tendency towards blended learning in foreign language education departments, there is a lack of research focusing on blended assessment for language learning, so blended assessment methods have been lagging. Therefore, they conducted a study in 2020 in the Saudi EFL context and found that blended assessments are effective in motivating learners to get more involved in the learning process and receive more useful feedback through accessible technology while interacting online, which gives them more opportunities to share their ideas. Furthermore, such an assessment design has several advantages as it fosters a compatible, collaborative, encouraging, innovative, and integrative learning environment for students. The results suggested that blended assessment is likely to improve students' language assessment as well as help them get more engaged in-class assessment tasks. They also acquired positive feedback from their students about the potential use of formative blended assessment in language teaching and learning.

1.1.2. Task-Based Language Assessment (TBLA)

The 20th century has been represented by an apparent emphasis on norm-referenced, large-scale testing ranking individuals by differences in valued capabilities, aptitudes, etc., and education has been mainly redesigned as a result of the noticeable use of such assessments concerning reform movements and as a part of standard teaching practice (Norris, 2016). However, Norris (2016) added that in the final decades of the 20th century, different types of assessments appeared as an alternative to such testing traditions since other methods were required to understand individuals' abilities and knowledge. They also tried to fulfil different aims than those related to large-scale testing by taking teaching and learning away from independent facts and rote memorization. Therefore, distinct approaches to testing, such as portfolios and performance assessments, were investigated to reach meaningful goals, and since assessments were adopted for different purposes, they included classroom-based formative feedback and criterion-referenced achievement assessment. TBLA was introduced as one of the alternatives to traditional testing during this period of time (Norris, 2016).

TBLA is accepted as a formative assessment that stresses "assessment for learning rather than the assessment of learning" (Coombe, 2018, p. 40). That is to say, it is an assessment conducted as a part of a course to improve teaching and learning. It is described as a framework for language assessment, in which tasks are essential for testing and assessment (Coombe, 2018). It emphasizes the authenticity of assessment and students' use of language skills rather than knowing a language superficially. Therefore, the main aim of TBLA is to confirm if students are able to use the second language to succeed in the communicative goals of target tasks, so it is not to assess the demonstration of linguistic knowledge or "assign learners to broadly defined levels of language ability" (Long & Norris, 2000, p. 600). To what extent TBLA is valid can be understood if it can build a close relationship between students' performances during tests and their performances in reality (Ellis, 2003). Undoubtedly, as students have a very significant role in the assessment process, effective learning occurs when they engage in meaningful assessment tasks (El-Maaddawy, 2017).

1.1.3. *Students' Perceptions*

Rahman (2020) indicated that how students perceive in-class assessment is of great importance for the success of such procedures for several reasons. Examining these procedures is one of the feasible ways to decide how to manage the teaching-learning process. Whether the ones applied in class are qualified can be monitored through students' viewpoints and attitudes as they are the first source to evaluate assessment procedures. He added that if students are involved in classroom assessments, their learning process can be more meaningful.

Although no studies about students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment were encountered in the literature, there is a small number of studies have focused on students' perceptions of assessment tasks and classroom assessment environment (Alkharusi et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2015; Dorman & Knightley, 2006; Nafisah, 2021). Cheng et al. (2015) involved 620 Chinese EFL students from three universities to examine the relationship between their perceptions of assessment tasks and classroom assessment environment using a newly designed instrument based on two different questionnaires. The results showed that the congruence scores significantly predicted the learning-oriented classroom assessment environment with planned learning, authenticity, student consultation, and transparency. What is more, the performance-oriented classroom assessment environment was positively predicted by the scores of diversity but negatively predicted by the scores of congruence with planned learning and authenticity. Ibrahim, Khairuddin, and Khairuddin (2018) investigated Malaysian university students' perceptions of classroom assessment practices in an English module by using an adapted version of the Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ). The findings showed that the classroom assessment practices implemented in this module were congruent with planned learning, transparent, authentic, and suitable for students' capabilities and levels. They were also considered as a means to consult the instructors and students. A positive correlation among the questionnaire scales was also found in the study. In another study by Nafisah (2021), the SPAQ was used to measure 75 high school students' perceptions of English classroom assessment. It was revealed that the students had positive perceptions towards classroom assessment as the average scores of each scale were high. Rahman (2020) conducted a study with a version of the same questionnaire to measure 69 Indonesian EFL university students' perceptions towards in-class grammar assessment and discovered that they perceived a low congruence between planned learning and grammar assessment, along with insufficient transparency related to purpose, assessment forms, and authenticity. Blažević and Blažević (2021) investigated how teacher assessment practices in three subjects, including English, affected the perceptions of 330 Croatian secondary school students. They adopted the SPAQ as the data collection instrument, and the results revealed that students' perceptions towards teacher assessment practices in English classes acquired the most positive rating.

Students' perceptions of classroom assessment were also investigated based on gender in different contexts via the SPAQ, which was originally designed for classroom assessment procedures in science. A study by Dhindsa, Omar, and Waldrip (2007) aimed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the SPAQ and found no gender-based differences in high school students' perceptions of science assessment in Brunei. Mussawy et al. (2021) conducted another study by using the same questionnaire with the students from the Agriculture, Education, and Humanities colleges in Afghanistan and found that although they had positive perceptions of the assessment practices employed in their classes, there were not any statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the male and female students. In a study by Syaifuddin (2019), it was concluded that there were no significant gender differences in the perceptions of the students attending the Descriptive Statistics course on classroom assessment procedures. In

contrast, Alkharusi and Al-Hosni (2015) discovered statistically significant 2-way or 3-way interaction effects for gender on the different scales of the SPAQ and demonstrated that gender had an influence on how the students perceived classroom assessment tasks in the different courses, including English. Gao (2012) discovered gender differences on the scales of authenticity and transparency in a study he conducted to examine high school students' perceptions of classroom assessment procedures in a math class.

A few studies on students' perceptions of classroom assessment were found to investigate students' perceptions of classroom assessment based on their level of proficiency. In their study, Cheng et al. (2015) also discovered that students with moderate language proficiency were likely to perceive transparency in classroom assessment tasks significantly higher than those with lower language proficiency. Gan et al. (2019) found that the school type determined students' intrinsic motivation and attitudes towards the EFL course as classroom assessment practices, and the degree to which they were exposed to English differed markedly between a rural and urban secondary school. What is more, Alkharusi and Al-Hosni (2015) analyzed the students' perceptions of classroom assessment tasks based on grade level and reported statistically significant interaction effects on congruence with planned learning, transparency, authenticity, and student consultation.

2. Aim and Research Questions of the Study

This study was conducted to examine Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment at the tertiary level. In this context, the following research questions were answered:

1. What are the Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in the Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment in terms of the scales of the SPAQ (congruence with planned learning, authenticity, transparency, and diversity) based on their gender?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in the Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment in terms of the scales of the SPAQ (congruence with planned learning, authenticity, transparency, and diversity) based on their level of proficiency?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

A survey design, which “provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, p.155), was adopted in this study. Brown and Rodgers (2002) reported that surveys involve collecting and outlining the traits, perspectives, ideas, beliefs, and other related aspects of individuals such as students, educators, administrators, or other essential study participants. These surveys commonly involve interviews, questionnaires, or a combination of both. In this study, the Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ) was used as the data collection instrument to ascertain Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment. The present study's design can also be categorized as cross-sectional since the questionnaire was conducted at one point in time (Cummings, 2018).

3.2. Setting and Participants

A total number of 54 (14 male and 40 female) students in the English preparatory program at a Turkish state university in Central Anatolia participated in the study. The convenience sampling method was preferred to determine the present study's participants as they had met some criteria "such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer" (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 98-99). Of the students, 17 were at the A2 proficiency level, while 37 were at the B1 proficiency level. The data were collected during the Spring Semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Before the study was conducted, all the necessary permission procedures for ethical approval were completed by the researchers, and after the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, they gave their informed consent.

The School of Foreign Languages was required to implement a blended teaching format due to the COVID-19 pandemic period during the year. As a result, 24 hours of English classes, 8 hours conducted online via Microsoft Teams, were allocated for both levels per week. The students were taught general English with an integrated approach and assessed using different tools appropriate for their levels, such as quizzes, mid-term exams, and portfolios, including different tasks targeting all the language skills. Moreover, three hours of face-to-face classes and three hours of online classes were devoted to the TBLA procedures for eight weeks. One online or face-to-face task was completed using rubrics to assess either speaking or writing skills each week. Listening and reading skills were integrated into the process to provide enough language input for the production stage.

3.3. Data Collection

Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ), adapted from a study by Koul et al. (2006), was used as the data collection instrument to discover students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment. Since the original questionnaire was conducted for classroom assessment procedures in science classes, it was adapted to English classes with the written permission of the corresponding author via email. The SPAQ comprises 30 closed-type and scaled items and five scales, namely Congruence with Planned Learning, Authenticity, Student Consultation, Transparency, and Diversity, and each scale has six items. The questionnaire was designed with a 4-point Likert-type scale, including statements such as 'Almost Always,' 'Often,' 'Sometimes,' and 'Almost Never.'

Table 1.

Description and Sample Items for Each Scale of the SPAQ

Scale	Description	Sample Item
Congruence with Planned Learning (CPL)	The extent to which the assessment tasks align with the goals, objectives, and activities of the learning program.	The assessment tasks are about what I have done in class.
Authenticity	The extent to which the assessment tasks feature real-life situations relevant to the students.	I find the assessment tasks relevant to what I do outside of school.
Student Consultation	The extent to which the students are consulted and informed about the forms of the assessment tasks being employed.	I have a say in how I will be assessed in class.
Transparency	The extent to which the purposes and forms of the assessment tasks are well-defined and clear to the students.	I have been clear about what the teachers want in the assessment tasks.
Diversity	The extent to which all the students have an equal chance at completing the assessment tasks.	I have had as much chance as any other student to complete the assessment tasks.

Adapted from Koul et al. (2006, p. 296)

The items were written in English and Turkish to ensure a better understanding of the items by the participants. In a study by Buldur (2014), the Turkish version of the SPAQ with 24 items was used, so the researchers adapted these items into their study with his permission. The researchers translated the remaining items into Turkish and back-translated by two colleagues to check accuracy. A personal information part was also prepared to learn about the participants' demographic details. The participants completed the SPAQ in their own classes via Google Forms in the actual study.

Before the study, the SPAQ was piloted with 30 participants via Google Forms. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to be 0.73. Even though this value was relatively high, Table 2 demonstrates that when the scale of Student Consultation had been eliminated, the alpha value could have been revealed to be 0.81. Moreover, it is also clear that this scale had the lowest mean ($M=2.47$; $SD=0.38$). Another critical point to note was that the TBLA procedures conducted in the blended learning environment had been designed long before the study, so consulting the student participants during the design of the assessment procedures was out of the scope of the study. As a result, this scale was not included in the actual study.

Table 2.
Cronbach's Alpha Reliability for the Scales of the SPAQ

	N of items	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Alpha if deleted
CPL	6	3.32	0.50	0.83	0.62
Authenticity	6	3.11	0.58	0.84	0.60
Student Consultation	6	2.47	0.38	0.34	0.81
Transparency	6	3.48	0.42	0.79	0.67
Diversity	6	3.09	0.57	0.77	0.61
n=30 students					

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22. After the descriptive statistics such as the mean scores of the scales of the SPAQ, the total mean score of the SPAQ, and the standard deviations were calculated, the Skewness and Kurtosis values were obtained, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to check their normality and linearity as the number of the participants was more than 50 ($N>50$) (Mishra et al., 2019).

Table 3.
Normality Tests for the SPAQ

	N	Skewness		Kurtosis		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
		Value	SE	Value	SE	Statistic	do	p
CPL	54	-.710	.325	-.305	.639	.158	54	.002
Authenticity	54	-.228	.325	-.221	.639	.096	54	.200
Transparency	54	-.357	.325	-.582	.639	.119	54	.054
Diversity	54	.050	.325	-1.077	.639	.132	54	.020
Total SPAQ	54	-.063	.325	-.839	.639	.080	54	.200*

*This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

p > .05.

Following this, the results of the descriptive statistics were interpreted to give an idea about the Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment. As

the final step, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out to see if there were any statistically significant differences in the Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment in terms of the scales of the SPAQ based on their gender and level of proficiency.

As shown in Table 3, the scales Authenticity ($p=.200$) and Transparency ($p=.054$) and the overall mean of the SPAQ ($p=.200$) indicated normality ($p>.05$) whereas the significant results for the scales Congruence with Planned Learning (CPL) ($p=.002$) and Diversity ($p=.020$) suggested that the assumption of the normality was violated. On the other hand, the Skewness and Kurtosis values for these scales showed that they exhibited a normal distribution since their values were within the range of ± 1.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

4. Findings and Discussion

Findings of the study are presented, referring to each related research question as follows.

4.1. Findings Related to Research Question 1

Table 4, which presents the comprehensive descriptive statistics for the SPAQ, revealed that the EFL students exhibited fairly positive attitudes towards TBLA in the blended learning environment, with a total mean score of $M=3.24$ ($SD=0.41$). Similar results were also found in several studies, although they were conducted in different settings (Blažević & Blažević, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Nafisah, 2021). When the mean scores of the scales demonstrated in Table 4 were analyzed, it was discovered that they were relatively high considering a 4-point Likert scale, except for the Authenticity scale ($M=2.95$, $SD=0.64$), which had the lowest mean score. Likewise, Rahman (2020) found out that the assessment tasks were not perceived as authentic by the students, and Cheng et al. (2015) obtained a similar outcome for the performance-oriented classroom assessment environment.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics for the SPAQ

	N	M	SD
CPL	54	3.45	.416
Authenticity	54	2.95	.649
Transparency	54	3.36	.498
Diversity	54	3.20	.480
Total SPAQ	54	3.24	.415

4.2. Findings Related to Research Question 2

Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were employed in order to find an answer to the research question above. Table 5 illustrates that the average scores on the SPAQ for the female students ($M=3.30$, $SD=0.39$) and the male students ($M=3.24$, $SD=0.37$) were found to be close to each other despite a slightly higher mean score for the female students. Moreover, both the female and male students displayed similar mean scores across all the scales. The female students tended to have slightly higher mean scores on the scales such as Congruence with Planned Learning ($M=3.54$, $SD=0.31$), Authenticity ($M=3.00$, $SD=0.71$), and Transparency ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.43$) while exhibiting a lower mean score on the scale Diversity ($M=3.22$, $SD=0.44$) than the male students ($M=3.28$, $SD=0.51$). Dhindsa et al. (2007) also obtained similar results related to Congruence with Planned Learning, Transparency, and Diversity scales. However, two of these results contradicted a

study by Syaifuddin (2019) as he discovered that the male students got slightly higher scores on the Congruence with Planned Learning and Authenticity scales. Gao (2012) also found out that the male students in his study obtained a slightly higher mean score on the Congruence with Planned Learning scale despite the statistically significant results in favour of the female students on the Scales of Authenticity and Transparency. Last but not least, Alkharusi and Al-Hosni (2015) also discovered that the female students in their study, regardless of their grade level or the subjects they were taught, held higher mean scores on all the scales although whether these differences were significant or not depended on the other variables they were compared.

Table 5.
Gender-based Descriptive Statistics for the SPAQ

	Gender	N	M	SD
CPL	Female	35	3.54	.311
	Male	15	3.45	.424
Authenticity	Female	35	3.00	.712
	Male	15	2.95	.464
Transparency	Female	35	3.44	.433
	Male	15	3.27	.536
Diversity	Female	35	3.22	.446
	Male	15	3.28	.513
Total SPAQ	Female	35	3.30	.396
	Male	15	3.24	.370

Even though the mean scores were quite similar, MANOVA was conducted to explore any potential significant differences between the female and male students. The crucial assumptions for MANOVA, including sample size, data normality, outliers, linearity, multicollinearity and singularity, and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Pallant, 2011), were found to be met. Despite the overall dataset displaying normal distribution, it was analyzed concerning gender to ensure the reliability of MANOVA results. Four outliers were identified for congruence with the Planned Learning scale and subsequently removed from the dataset to enhance reliability. Following this, Mahalanobis distance was calculated to assess whether “the maximum value for Mahalanobis distance was less than the critical value” (Pallant, 2011, p. 288). No significant multivariate outliers were found. When homogeneity of variance was assessed using Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices, Box’s M result yielded $F(10.3479.826)=1.286, p=.232 (p>.05)$, indicating no violation of the assumption. Additionally, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances was conducted, yielding $F(1.48)=2.295, p=.136$ for Congruence of Planned Learning; $F(1.48)=2.735, p=.105$ for Authenticity; $F(1.48)=.614, p=.437$ for Transparency; $F(1.48)=.360, p=.551$ for Diversity. Subsequently, a separate univariate analysis of variance was performed for the overall SPAQ. Considering its formation as a combination of other scales, MANOVA was deemed inappropriate due to potential multicollinearity and singularity (Pallant, 2011), resulting in $F(1.48)=.289, p=.594$ for the overall SPAQ. Consequently, it was concluded that the assumption of equality of variance was upheld for all the scales and the overall SPAQ ($p>.05$).

After the preliminary analyses for MANOVA were conducted for the four scales of the SPAQ as dependent variables and gender as the independent variable, the results outlined in Table 6 illustrated that there was not a significant gender difference between the female and male EFL students regarding their perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment

($F(4.45)=1.055$, $p=.390$; Wilks' Lambda=.914; Partial eta squared=.086), considering the significance level of 0.05. This result was in line with the studies by Dhindsa et al. (2007), Mussawy et al. (2021), and Syaifuddin (2019), while it contradicted the result of the studies by Alkharusi and Al-Hosni (2015) and Gao (2012).

Table 6.

MANOVA Results of the Scales of the SPAQ Regarding Gender

	Wilks' Λ	F (4.45)	p	Partial eta ²
Gender	.914	1.055	.390	.086

$p<.05$

4.3. Findings Related to Research Question 3

Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were utilized to examine this research question. Table 7 displays that the overall mean score of the SPAQ for the A2 level students ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.40$) was marginally higher than that of the B1 level students ($M=3.27$, $SD=0.37$). Regarding the scales, the A2 level students demonstrated slightly higher mean scores for Congruence with Planned Learning ($M=3.55$, $SD=0.43$), Authenticity ($M=3.28$, $SD=0.43$), and Transparency ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.57$), while exhibiting slightly lower mean scores for Diversity ($M=3.27$, $SD=0.48$). Unlike the present results, Cheng et al. (2025) discovered that the students with moderate language proficiency got a significantly higher result on the Transparency scale than those with lower language proficiency. Moreover, Alkharusi and Al-Hosni (2015) reported statistically significant differences on the scales Congruence with Planned Learning, Transparency, and Authenticity based on grade level rather than level of language proficiency.

Table 7.

Level of Proficiency-based Descriptive Statistics for the SPAQ

	Level	N	M	SD
CPL	A2	13	3.55	.437
	B1	35	3.54	.278
Authenticity	A2	13	3.28	.437
	B1	35	2.88	.691
Transparency	A2	13	3.42	.579
	B1	35	3.40	.426
Diversity	A2	13	3.24	.428
	B1	35	3.27	.481
Total SPAQ	A2	13	3.37	.405
	B1	35	3.27	.376

Despite the similarity in the mean scores mentioned earlier, MANOVA was conducted to investigate the potential significant differences between the A2 and B1 level students. Initially, the preliminary assumptions for MANOVA were scrutinized. Although the overall data exhibited normal distribution, they were analyzed based on the students' proficiency levels to ensure the results obtained via MANOVA were reliable. Two additional outliers were spotted for the Congruence with the Planned Learning scale and then omitted from the dataset to enhance the reliability. Upon calculating the Mahalanobis distance, it became apparent that no substantial multivariate outliers existed. Furthermore, the homogeneity of the data was assessed via Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices, yielding Box's M result of $F(10.2402.098)=1.276$, $p=.238>.05$), which indicated no violation of the

homogeneity assumption. When Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was conducted, it was revealed to be $F(1.46)=4.860, p=.033$ for Congruence of Planned Learning; $F(1.46)=2.261, p=.139$ for Authenticity; $F(1.46)=1.051, p=.311$ for Transparency; $F(1.46)=1.013, p=.320$ for Diversity. After employing a separate univariate analysis of variance for the overall SPAQ, the value was found to be $F(1.46)=.064, p=.801$. As a result, it was confirmed that the analyses did not violate the assumption of equality of variance for three of the scales and the overall SPAQ ($p > .05$). However, it was violated by Levene's test result for Congruence with Planned Learning. In such cases, Pallant (2011) suggests adjusting the alpha level to determine significance in the univariate F-test. Thus, an Alpha of .025 was employed rather than the conventional .05 level. With this adjustment, Levene's test result was sufficient to proceed with the analysis ($p > 0.25$).

The results of MANOVA utilized to understand whether a significant difference existed between the A2 and B1 level EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment are illustrated in Table 8. Initially, the preliminary analyses for MANOVA were conducted for the four scales of the SPAQ as dependent variables and level of proficiency as the independent variable. Consequently, it was revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the A2 level and B1 level students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment ($F(4.43)=1.446, p=.235$; Wilks' Lambda=.881; Partial eta squared=.119), considering the significance level of 0.05. This result was not supported by the previous studies in the literature (Alkharusi & Al-Hosni, 2015; Cheng et al., 2015; Gan et al., 2019) as they reported statistically significant differences in the students' perceptions of classroom assessment practices in terms of grade level, school type and the way they were taught English, and level of proficiency.

Table 8.

MANOVA Results of the Scales of the SPAQ Regarding Level of Proficiency

	Wilks' Λ	F (4,43)	p	Partial η^2
Level	.881	1.446	.235	.119

$p < .05$

5. Conclusion and Implications

The primary aim of the present study was to explore Turkish EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment at the tertiary level. The researchers also investigated whether the students' perceptions differ based on their gender and level of proficiency to gather more detailed information in this context.

The data collected from 54 students through a questionnaire called Students' Perceptions of Assessment Questionnaire (SPAQ), adapted from Koul et al. (2006), showed that the students had relatively positive attitudes towards TBLA in the blended learning environment and got relatively high mean scores on the scales Congruence with Planned Learning, Transparency, and Diversity expect for the scale Authenticity. This means that the students agreed that the TBLA procedures conducted in both environments were in harmony with lesson plans, easy to understand, and provided equal opportunities for each student to complete them. However, it was surprising that the students did not fully find the tasks relevant to their lives, although ensuring the authenticity of the assessment and students' use of language skills are the essential qualities of TBLA. It can be suggested that instructors are required to pay more attention to the organization of real-life contexts in the blended learning environment to foster authenticity in both environments. What is more, what is thought to

be authentic by teachers may not be perceived by students as authenticity, which may mainly depend on individual perception and personal experiences (Gulikers et al., 2008). Therefore, involving both parties in decision-making may be effective before tasks are conducted. Another finding of the present study was that no significant differences were detected among the EFL students' perceptions of TBLA in the blended learning environment regarding their gender and level of proficiency. This result showed that regardless of such groupings, these students were aware of the importance of the TBLA procedures, which promote classroom assessment in both environments.

This study suggests that TBLA can cultivate classroom assessment practices in the blended learning environment and arouse students' willingness to participate in the learning process. As students engage in the TBLA procedures, they become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and develop their language skills accordingly. The present study implies that it is crucial for teachers to consider students' perceptions before designing classroom assessment tasks and learning environments. As for policymakers, faculties of education and professional training programs for teachers are required to cover how to develop and conduct classroom assessment tasks by integrating technology, which is a must-to-learn skill to be effective teachers for today's young generation since their approaches to classroom assessment practices can have a strong influence on how students perceive the assessment process in class. Future studies are advised to be conducted with a larger sample size to generalize the present study's findings. It can also be suggested that qualitative data collection methods can be employed to support the statistical data presented in this study.

Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that ethical approval was obtained from Hacettepe University on 18.04.2022 with the number 21339953.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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