

High School Entrance Exam Effect on the Teaching of English: A Case Study of Teachers' Experiences

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Abstract: English education programs are updated to keep up with new trends and approaches. Curriculum designers introduce the changes into the curriculum. The use of innovations in the classroom is explained to pre-service and in-service teachers. Nevertheless, there are multiple complaints regarding implementation, especially during the exam preparation process. Since the teachers are expected to prepare students for high stakes exams, some practical difficulties emerge as a result of the discrepancies between following the curriculum and preparing for the exam. This study is therefore set out to determine the effects of high-school entrance exams on the implementation of the English curriculum. The methodological approach taken in this study is a mixed methodology based on the teachers' views. 201 EFL teachers working at lower secondary schools filled out the questionnaire regarding their in-class practices. Among the teachers, 10 teachers are interviewed with taking ample notes. To collect the quantitative and qualitative data, web tools are utilized due to the vexatious process during the Covid-19 pandemic days. The results of the study reveal that the high-school entrance test has negative effects regarding the approaches and methods employed in the classes. Furthermore, classroom practices differ in different grades. The negative washback effects of high-stakes tests outweigh the positive ones in terms of the use of the English language in a communicative way.

Keywords: Curriculum, EFL teachers, high-stakes exams, washback effect

İngilizce Öğretiminde Lise Giriş Sınavı Etkisi: Öğretmenlerin Deneyimleri Üzerine Bir Durum Çalışması

Öz: İngilizce öğretim programları yeni eğilimlere ve yaklaşımlara ayak uyduracak şekilde güncellenir. Müfredat tasarımcıları müfredata değişiklikleri ekler. Yeniliklerin sınıfta kullanımı hizmet öncesi ve hizmet içi öğretmenlere aktarılır. Bununla birlikte, özellikle sınava hazırlık sürecinde uygulamaya ilişkin çok sayıda şikâyet bulunmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin öğrencileri yüksek çıtalı sınavlara hazırlaması beklendiğinden, müfredatı takip etme ile sınava hazırlanma arasındaki tutarsızlıkların bir sonucu olarak bazı uygulama güçlükleri ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, lise giriş sınavlarının İngilizce müfredatının uygulanması üzerindeki etkilerini belirlemek amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Bu çalışmada benimsenen yöntem bilimsel yaklaşım, öğretmenlerin görüşlerine dayalı karma bir yaklaşımdır. Ortaokullarda görev yapan 201 İngilizce öğretmeni sınıf içi uygulamalarıyla ilgili olan anketi doldürmüştür. Öğretmenler arasında 10 öğretmenle not alınarak görüşme yapılmıştır. Nitel ve nicel verilerin toplanması için Covid-19

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günlerinin can sıkıcı süreci nedeniyle internet araçları kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, lise giriş sınavının sınıflarda uygulanan yaklaşımlar ve yöntemlere ilişkin olumsuz etkilerinin olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, sınıf içi uygulamalar değişik kademelerde farklılık göstermektedir. Yüksek çıtalı testlerin olumsuz etkileri, İngilizce dilinin iletişimsel bir şekilde kullanılması açısından olumlu etkilerine ağır basmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Müfredat, İngilizce öğretmenleri, yüksek çıtalı sınavlar, ket vurma etkisi

Introduction

Solomon (2009) remarks that no matter who decides on the curriculum - a single teacher, a group of teachers, or those in charge - as long as it is planned and documented, it becomes part of the written curriculum. The curriculum needs to be up to date to keep up with the times. The English language curriculum in Turkey is amended in line with the vicissitudes that aim to facilitate the language teaching and learning process. For this reason, pre-service and in-service teachers are indoctrinated and trained to achieve the goals of the designed curriculum accordingly. At the end of the academic year, the students are assumed to be able to communicate in the target language by exploiting the points they covered throughout the academic year. Even though the curriculum seems absolute, in general, the graduates cannot communicate in the target language. As a result, preparing for the high school entrance exam steals classroom time and can cause teachers to skip some curricular activities.

English is taught as a compulsory lesson in Turkey. The teachers have the urgency to follow the curriculum. In 1997, a new curriculum, which gives importance to the communicative classes, was presented (Kırkgöz, 2008). 1997 curriculum was renewed in 2006. It has been in use since that time (Çal, 2010). A teacher in Çarıkcioğlu's (2019) study opined that there is a continuous updating of the educational program in Turkey. The new program is more realistic and, compared to the former one, shows the functional side of the language. Isik (2008) puts down the curriculum that is in use and sustains that curriculum should be organized taking cognizance of the society. For that reason alone, it is significant to take the views of the teachers who are experts in their field.

Numerous studies dwell on the inconsistency between classroom practices and curriculum requirements (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Kırkgöz, 2008; Orafi & Borg, 2009; Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2009). High-stakes tests are one of the most commonly cited issues that change the way teachers used to teach. Despite the significance of the subject, teachers' opinions on how high school admission examinations affect communicative classes have received very little attention until this point.

This study is unique in that it simultaneously incorporates teacher perspectives from qualitative and quantitative data. On the other hand, this study involves secondary school teachers of minor grade levels in addition to the 8th grade teachers who help their students prepare for the high school entrance exam. Because it reveals the viewpoints of EFL teachers on the connection between the LGS exam and curriculum implementation in lower secondary schools (from the fifth to the eighth grade), the current study significantly contributes to the body of knowledge on the effects of LGS. Moreover, there are several important areas where this study makes an original contribution to teaching English to EFL learners. Compendiously, this study fills a gap in the

literature as it is unique in conferring on the teacher views by both employing questionnaire and interview with the object of correlating preparation for the high school entrance exam in Turkey and the teachers' classroom practices across the curriculum during the Covid-19 process.

Purpose of the Study

Based on the effects of the LGS exam, the central thesis of this current study is to share the effect of the high school entrance exam on implementing curriculum and communicative classes. By this means, the washback effect of the LGS exam is central to put forth the reasons for the negative backwash. The study uses a mixed study approach in an attempt to investigate the reflections of EFL teachers' on LGS and its backwash on communicative classroom practices. The main questions that guided this research are:

1. To what extent are the aims of the curriculum followed in EFL classes?
2. Are the classes with the 8th graders communicative?
3. Is there a relationship between LGS and classroom practices?
4. Does LGS have any washback effect on the implementation of the English curriculum?

Literature Review

Schools play an important role in students' careers throughout their lives. Sorokin (1959) describes 'school' as a type of machine that teases out the learner's abilities and thereby designates their future plans. The prestige of a school has an inevitable influence on the following school the students would attend. Though this chain seems inevitable, there is a possibility of attending a good school after the less preferred one or the other way around. Indeed, the tendency towards choosing a well-trained school is directed by lots of factors. These factors include the decisions of not only the students and teachers but the parents and administrators, as well.

Registering for a school commonly requires exams throughout the world. These exams are described as placement tests or placement exams. The paths that students take during their education and the challenges they encounter in receiving their diplomas are being paid rising attention and the placement of learners as they start high school or university is a crucial phase on the student path (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). If the placement tests are not developed for a specific concern, they serve the same purpose: to place the students into the schools they deserve. Many people have misunderstandings about what placement exams are meant to assess, including students, faculty, staff, counsellors, administrators, and policymakers (Llosa & Bunch, 2011). The aim of a placement test for Morante (2012) is to allow students to choose suitable courses in line with their abilities.

A foreign language class organized according to the communicative approach aspires to present the culture of the target language as well. This reflects the widespread acceptance of the inseparable link between language and culture. The discrepancies that emerged from the interpretation of behaviors, body language, taboo states, and formal and informal relations are underscored in communicative classes as for Aktaş (2005). This point recapitulates that the culture of society mirrors the values of that society and language learning cannot be isolated from the culture of the target language.

High-stakes tests for Akpınar and Cakildere (2013) should be designed to have an accurate conclusion on test takers, students, administrators, parents, and policymakers. According to the

related exam results and sometimes other factors such as grade point average (GPA) and level of a foreign language, students are placed into a high school or university. This placement mostly occurs in the students' last year of education at primary, secondary, and high schools. By virtue of this fact, students' grades before the exams directly affect their lifelong career and as Brown (1989) states, these decisions are of utmost importance in individuals' lives and should be decided meticulously given the current data. Students that are regarded successful in placement tests are considered successful in their academic activities, correspondingly (Şen et al., 2012).

To pursue their academic aims, institutions determine the best way to select students. Due to the need for placing students into the groupings under their skills, placement is delineated as an essential part of the programs, as Brown (1989) represents. Two criteria are put forward by Green and Weir (2004) concerning the placement tests' measurement. The first criterion deals with measurement dimensionality. Students placed in a class should usually learn the same content because they all join the class at a similar stage or level. To support this statement, it should be assured that the tasks vary in 5 difficulty level and this rating is suitable for all learners regardless of their background information. The second criterion is that tests should be valid (Green & Weir, 2004). It differentiates between students who could properly answer the questions and those who couldn't answer. This touchstone necessarily means that items in a test measure the information that is supposed to be checked. Taylor (2005) claims that high-stakes tests have an influence on educational systems and society at large: test results, for instance, are used to take action on school curriculum scheduling, and the popularity of a test can lead publishers and institutions to produce test preparation materials and conduct test preparation sessions.

Some schools perform their own exams to choose students. The aim of the school affects the preparation and evaluation process of the placement tests. Colleges generally have two points whilst utilizing the placement tests (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). Whether a student needs improvement to be selected or good at any specific subject determines the eligibility of that student. That is to say, if a student achieves a certain point in a test, the student is deemed as ready to take classes in a college (Belfield & Crosta, 2012). Awareness of the teachers exerts an influence over the stress level of the students and teachers. Many teachers are confused about what the exam is measuring or what the textbook is teaching (Alderson & Wall, 1993) which in turn causes bemusement among students and teachers.

Washback Effects of the Exams

Anxiety is the result of the experiences people have had throughout their lives and the emotions they experience, as described by Karayaşar (2019). The tests the learners take during their education increase their anxiety or create a reverse situation. Still, though anxiety is a distressing situation, it also has the satisfying feature of being motivating.

Şenel and Tütüniş (2011) share that there are several causes of language anxiety, including test anxiety and failure anxiety. One of these causes that stands out the most is test anxiety. Test anxiety is a worry about failing exams and an unpleasant emotion experienced by students in a variety of settings, either unconsciously or consciously.

Test-takers, organizations that create tests, and of course for employers and other institutions that use these tests to teach people, understanding the effects of high-stakes assessments is crucial as for Özmen (2011). The effects of the tests on the teaching and learning process are described as the "washback effect". Similarly, the term "washback" is often used to describe how exams affect teaching and learning as for Yi-Ching (2009). To put it differently, the washback

effect, following Alderson and Wall's (1993) definition, is a set of classroom behaviours of teachers and learners. Instead of using the term "washback"; "impact" and "backwash" terms could also be used according to Spratt (2005). Heyneman (1987) also identifies the washback effect as follows:

"It is true that educators prepare students for tests. Regarding this 'backwash effect', national leaders have three options: they can fight it, ignore it, or use it. The advice given to developing nations is to maximize the impact of exams on classroom instruction and to create assessments with a well-balanced mindset toward pedagogical concepts."

Given the viewpoint of the student, Kılıçkaya (2016) discusses that tests might influence what the students learn, how they prepare for exams and their study practices. Nonetheless, particularly nationwide tests could result in alterations to teachers' methods of instruction and evaluation as Kılıçkaya contends. Taken together, the effects of the exams could have both positive and negative sides. The washback effect is frequently taught in language testing courses and all test designers need to pay attention to it since the washback effect have a big influence on language classes, according to Alderson and Wall (1993).

Washback Effect on Language Education

Tests influence not only the students and teachers but teaching and learning processes as well. These effects could be both positive and negative as a result of the processes. The washback effects of the exams stem from several factors like students, teachers, parents and even administrators. A teacher in a related study expresses opinion by claiming that the administrators put them under stress by attempting to turn up at any time to check on them (Shohamy et al., 1996), which proves that the sources of the pressure are similar in different countries.

To determine whether this test had an impact on the participants, language education, and teaching and learning outcomes, Ferman (2004) investigates the washback effects of the National EFL Oral Matriculation test. The findings reveal that the majority of the teachers acknowledge that they and their students have intense anxiety and worry as a result of the test outcomes. Teachers clarify that as soon as the results of the oral examination are made public, students and teachers are eager to compare their performance with that of other classes. This leads to a competition between the teachers, creating a stressful atmosphere, which is undesired.

The effects of the tests have a great role in students' lives. These effects could be either positive or negative according to their reflections of them. The changes in the placement exams may affect the teachers who facilitate the classes and adapt their classes accordingly. Hatipoğlu (2016) suggests that there is a common perception among professionals, researchers, students, and parents that the university entrance exam harms foreign language teaching and learning in Turkey and students in Turkey "learn to the test". During the interview with them, students in Çakır's (2017) study signaled that thanks to the exam, they are learning English. They claimed that if English was not included in the content of the exam, they would not prepare for it that much. On the other hand, however, negative washback effects are seen as a consequence of stress caused by the existence of test pressure and worry for the results of the exam.

In another study carried out by Demir (2019), the pressure is also felt by the teachers and their students who are supposed to be successful in the LGS exam (high school entrance exam in Turkey) is considered to have a negative washback effect. Moreover, the negative washback effects of a placement test are reported by the teachers in a study by Kizildag (2009). These negative

washback effects happen as the upshot of demotivation and ambiguity of the placement system which systematically changes. Yet another reason behind this demotivation is that the curriculum requires communicative activities to apply but the placement exam doesn't assess the communicative skills, which in turn causes dissonance between the curriculum and implementation.

Karabulut (2007) investigates the washback effects of university entrance exam which has foreign language test in it. The findings suggest that the test has an impact on what teachers teach, how they teach it, and what and how students learn it. To perform well on a test and be admitted to university is the main objective of language learning. However, comments from college students and teachers suggest that because the test does not entail speaking, writing, and listening, students don't get certain crucial linguistic concepts while studying. The student's desire is to see neglected skills included in the exam. Similarly, the professors also opine that the test is not comprehensive and effective enough to reflect the proficiency of the students with the language.

High School Entrance Examinations in Turkey

Placement tests include English language exam topics which are covered through the primary education years. In the course of preparing such tests, which are considered to be important in many respects for students, parents, and school administrators, it is appropriate to examine the content, applicability, and degree to which the applicable curriculum benefits from the test, Çakır (2017) suggests. Administrators and educators frequently concentrate their efforts on test content and spend an increasing amount of time helping learners get ready for these exams as a result of the pressure to ensure that they perform well on exams, as Şenel and Tütüniş (2011) contend.

Işıklı and Tarakcioglu (2017) mention that Turkish students are required to transfer from primary to secondary education from level A2 to level B1 in accordance with commonly accepted CEFR levels. Besides Gündüz (2010) simply justifies that a placement test should take attainment, ability, the level of motivation, and effort of the student into account. Moreover, keeping up with the changes in the examination system requires second wind. Andrews (2004) ratifies that altering the test will alter the type of exam practice, but not the reality of exam practice.

At the end of Grade 8, Turkey traditionally has some kind of examination to decide on student placement in the various types of high schools in the country as Kitchen et al. (2019) view. TEOG (transition from primary to secondary school) is one of the examinations that students have taken to attend a high school between the years of 2013-2018. It has created substantial competition in classrooms, with students and teachers expending a great deal of time on exam preparation rather than improving the skills highlighted in the curriculum (Kitchen et al., 2019).

Contrary to this, 8th-grade students choose five schools to attend around their neighbourhood with the new placement system. Central and automatic placement system run by the General Directorate of Measurement, Evaluation, and Examination Services position students following their proximity to the schools as Kitchen et al. (2019) points out. Since the possibility of quota being limited in the selected schools is viable and students could justifiably want to be assigned to the best schools, the oversubscription criteria get involved to determine the placement of a student into a school. The criteria comprise of factors which are proximity to the school geographically; having sisters or brothers at the same school or having attended the school already; students' former academic success; attendance; and date of birth with priority given to the younger students.

In Turkey, the transition exams to the Anatolian High School with its current name have continued to be held with various differences since 1955. Pass exams, which were held at the end of the 5th grade until 1998, started to be held at the end of the 8th grade after 1999, and the high schools that previously accepted students with a separate entrance exam started to accept students with a common central exam in 1999. In SBS and TEOG from 2009 to 2017, 70% of the high school placement score consisted of the score obtained in the central exam, and 30% consisted of the school success score.

2018 High School Entrance Exams, on the other hand, are similar to the OKS, which was last made in 2008, with the number of schools where students will be admitted with the exam, score calculation and the way the exams are applied. Between the years of 1955 and 1999, the name of the exam was Anatolian High School exam and it used to be carried out at the end of the 5th grade. In 2000, its name changed to LGS. In 2004, the name of the exam was OKS. In 2008, it was SBS for 6th and 7th graders and there were final OKS. In 2009, its name was still SBS but it was held at the end of the 8th grade. In 2014, it changed into TEOG. Its last name became LGS again in 2018.

English Curriculum in Turkey

Curriculum is different from syllabus, much as those two terms are perceived as interchangeable. Richards (2001) makes the senses clear as: “A syllabus is a specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested. Thus, the syllabus for a speaking course might specify the kinds of oral skills that will be taught and practiced during the course, the functions, topics, or other aspects of conversation that will be taught, and the order in which they will appear in the course. Syllabus design is the process of developing a syllabus. Curriculum development is a more comprehensive process than syllabus design. It includes the processes that are used to determine the needs of a group of learners, to develop aims or objectives for a program to address those needs to determine an appropriate syllabus, course structure, teaching methods, and materials, and to carry out an evaluation of the language program that results from these processes.” Syllabus should involve all the necessary skills and abilities in order for the language to be ingested.

The present curricula in Turkey took its final shape after a switch from 8+4 educational model to 4+4+4 one. English language education starts at grade 2 with the adoption of new educational model. A new curriculum is composed for 2nd and 3rd grades. So, a former version of the curriculum is redesigned. The new curriculum is not merely a regurgitation of the old one. It has been updated taking the teachers’, parents’ and academicians’ view into consideration.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is followed for forming the new English curriculum. Pupils need to learn English in an authentic communicative atmosphere per week, in accordance with their grade level, and according to the necessities of the new curriculum, English should be emphasized as a communication tool, not as a topic of study, as Turkish Ministry of Education Curriculum (2018) documents.

Communicative Components of English Curriculum in Turkey

It is crucial that students carry the spirit of positive feelings towards the aimed language as Arpacı and Su Bergil (2020) note. Communicative classes prejudice students in favor of the target language. For several reasons, the aims of a communicative class, which are rather ideal and should be specified, are simply not considered feasible. One of the most significant reasons for this is that

students have to prepare for the placement exam. Some teachers consider themselves lucky for not teaching to the 8th grader students.

Pre-service and in-service training presents new trends in English language teaching to the teachers and teacher candidates. The teachers have the necessary knowledge and motivation for CLL (Communicative Language Learning). However, there are still problems in carrying out the activities. Since teachers are making decisions to attain desired behaviors from students in each context, this will inevitably lead to different practices among teachers as Karabacak (2020) indicates.

Kirkgöz (2009) concurs that the majority of teachers are unable to establish the suggested communicative learning environment which is needed to promote learners' language acquisition. On the other hand, the LGS exam doesn't encapsulate speaking, listening, and writing skills which in turn gives cause for not covering these skills in classes. What is more, the students, parents, and administrators support this opinion. Apart from this view, the teachers are busy with preparing their students for the voluminous exam at a rattling pace. Demir (2019) shows the evidence of this idea by marking that the teachers hardly ever have enough time to do listening, writing, or speaking activities though they would prefer to utilize such activities more in their English classes.

In a very recent study of Çakır (2017), the experiences of the teachers with the problems of teacher practices are shared. One of the teachers alludes that in the classes, they do activities so that the students could learn the phrases in each unit. Unfortunately, in doing so, the pronunciation of these words cannot be properly stressed. It is also shown that the students are unable to pronounce the terms properly and that they do not care much about it. Since listening and speaking skills are not assessed on the tests, they do not care much about the actual pronunciation of the word. Moreover, teachers typically state that they have to use the Grammar Translation Method when lecturing because of the preparation for the exam. For students, this approach is simple since it requires grammar, translation, and vocabulary. During the lecture, activities like games are not included. This case is experienced by most of the teachers. For this reason, İnceçay (2012) recommends that during fulfilment, the schools, school administrators, teachers, and students should be encouraged inasmuch as enforcing a policy is not the same as establishing it. Cheng's (1997) findings reveal that teachers may have a favorable view about change, but they still perceive it challenging to put their ideas into practice.

Recently, the ability to communicate in a second language has gained significance with the rising popularity of teaching language in a communicative way as Altiner (2018) notes. With the adoption of CLT in Turkey, more interactive and competent classroom practices are targeted. A communicative English language course aims to enable students to acquire listening-comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, writing skills, to communicate with the language they learn, and to develop a positive attitude towards foreign language teaching. Hence, teaching English to communicate necessitates stressing more on speaking and listening skills. To acquire the target language properly, according to Sayın and Aslan (2016), the courses and the assessment exams should mainly comprise of four skills.

Teaching English has been included in the education program as of the second grade of primary school since the 2013-2014 academic years, and has been taught two hours a week. Paker (2018) upholds that it is a positive development that children encounter a second language at an early age and form a positive attitude towards it. In this way, it is aimed that children face foreign languages at an early age, and begin to develop awareness and positive attitude towards language

and culture. At this level, the aim is to increase their self-confidence and motivation towards learning a foreign language with activities appropriate to children's interest, social, physical, and mental development, and also to develop a positive attitude towards learning English. For this purpose, education programs and teaching materials were prepared under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, and language learning processes of students were supported through activities such as hearing and understanding, listening and recognition, matching, and physical response, listening and verbal response.

Speaking and listening skills are prioritized in the 2nd and 3rd grades, whereas reading and writing skills are introduced when pupils proceed to higher grades. Drama, arts and crafts are promoted in grades 2, 3, and 4 with 2 hours of class per week. In 5th and 6th grades, students are expected to improve their reading skills with the introduction of short texts and limited writing activities. Reading is limited and writing is very limited for the 5th grade. For the 6th grade, on the other hand, reading and writing is limited. Drama and role-play activities are essential for these grades. In the grades 7th and 8th, the students should be able to read simple texts write simple stories. What is more, the students are anticipated to level up from A1 to A2 in 7th grade. Primary skills that should be emphasized are speaking and listening in 7th and 8th grades. Reading and writing skills are also crucial to foster communication in the target language. Autonomous learning and problem-solving skills are aimed at each stage. Leaving a positive washback effect is one of the curriculum's most crucial components.

English should be constantly introduced to students through audio and visual elements according to Turkish Ministry of Education Curriculum (2018). Arts and crafts, TPR, and drama are just a few of the activities that encourage enjoyment of language acquisition. Learning is more concerned with improving communication than it is with finishing curricular tasks by a certain deadline. Instead of only learning about the language, students improve their conversational abilities in English by doing things with the language.

LGS Exam and English Curriculum Relationship

It is generally agreed that teachers adjust their teaching strategies and lesson content to meet the requirements of the test when they are aware that their learners will be taking a certain exam, according to Taylor (2005). In Turkey, the first introduction to a placement test is in grade 8 when students are in their last year in the primary education. They are supposed to be placed in a high school according to the results of their exams. The curriculum for grades 6 to 8 is more convoluted than the lower grades and the role of English classes for these grades is to extend the basic communicative skills the students have learned through the incorporation of the four language skills, as Kirkgöz (2007) indicates. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) conducts the national placement exam in Turkey. Akçay (2014) depicts this situation as entering a higher grade of the educational level at the end of the stage students stand in order to decide the degree of success.

Paker (2012) discusses the problems and reasons that drive these problems in his study. In all conscience, he disserts that if you do not measure the four skills even though you teach them, after a while students start to neglect the skill that you did not measure. At the end of a certain period, students learn only the skills that have been measured and do not need to learn the parts that are not measured at all. In fact, this is also experienced in the language learning process in Turkey. In other words, since only reading skills are measured in language proficiency exams at the national level, those who are successful in these exams can mostly answer the multiple-choice

questions that are asked in writing, but cannot hear when they are told in English, they cannot express themselves and organize their feelings and thoughts. They cannot write their opinions or even letters. In short, they cannot communicate even at the beginner level of English. This situation is a product of such exams. Whereas, if such exams are used for communicative purposes based on four skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, English learners will also prepare themselves for these skills and learn to communicate in four skills. To exemplify, a teacher in a study by Çakır (2017) claims that the TEOG exam does not enhance speaking and writing abilities in particular. In the textbooks, however, there are so many good activities aimed at developing these learners' skills that they do not have time to apply them. Besides, teachers modeling such national exams will also place emphasis on measuring the four skills in their exams and guide their students to learn English for communicative purposes. This signals a gap between the ideal official policy endorsed by MoNE and substantial classroom activities as Kirkgöz (2009) acknowledges. As a result, all stakeholders who learn and teach English should first consider English as a communication tool and organize all learning and teaching processes for this purpose. Otherwise, this situation will continue as a vicious circle in the current system as Paker (2012) disserts.

Akalın and Zengin (2007) confirm that people in Turkey, in addition to the advantages they will bring in professional, academic, and commercial terms, with their sincerity, which is prone to intercultural communication, look favorably on foreign languages, especially English. Although Turkey often undergoes some changes in an educational context, there is still a perception of incompetence in terms of communicating in English. In the best-case scenario, students graduate as an individual who can understand the English language and communicate in it to some extent. Unfortunately, these students are few in number. The reasons behind this picture are deliberated by some researchers and teachers. Even though the public puts the blame on the teachers, Çarikcioğlu (2019) calls attention to the other considerations. She expresses that to understand the reasons for the problem that are faced in the foreign language learning process, some other areas are needed to be examined other than the teacher, learner, and the education system.

The support of the school management and organization has an important place in overcoming the hindrances faced in the foreign language learning process. In this sense, Çarikcioğlu (2019) clarifies that it should be admitted that in order for the education system to meet the expectations, the role of innovative school administrators, as well as the teacher and the student, is crucial. Hence, if the school administrators stand by the teachers, the process would be more painless. Brown (1990) proves this idea by explicitly saying that tests will allow language teachers and administrators to make responsible decisions about students, curriculum, and future policy if used effectively.

The LGS exam was designed with the intension of raising individuals who have strong understanding skills, and question forms are formed in accordance with our education system as Mehrali and Alp kaya (2021) document. The LGS examination encompasses the 8th grade curriculum topics. The LGS examination focuses on 10 questions that are parallel with the units covered throughout the academic year. The questions are aggregated from the 8th grade units. The topics in the first term of the 8th grade are as follows: Unit 1: Friendship Unit 2: Teen Life Unit 3: Cooking Unit 4: Communication Unit 5: The Internet The second term topics are as follows: Unit 6: Adventures Unit 7: Tourism Unit 8: Chores Unit 9: Science Unit 10: Natural Forces.

The units of the 8th grade concur with the topics of the curriculum. The questions are in test format. In addition to this, the exam doesn't evaluate speaking and listening skills while the

English curriculum objectives place special emphasis on speaking and listening skills. The curriculum advises setting listening and speaking skills above reading and writing skills to achieve communication in the 8th grades and minor grades. Listening comprehension, verbal interaction, oral expression, reading comprehension, and writing abilities are among the expected learning outcomes of the curriculum. The high school entrance exam, on the other hand, doesn't engage with the evaluation of the acquisition of the related skills and communication that is targeted, attendantly.

Studies Related to English Curriculum and Exam Preparation Process in Turkey

Test content, skill requirements, and format frequently have an impact on results as Kılıçkaya (2016) explains. Many examinations use multiple choice and gap fill questions to measure grammar, reading, and vocabulary skills, which prioritizes usability. These exams disregard speaking and listening skills and do not place much emphasis on communication skills. Additionally, the majority of exams aim to evaluate vocabulary and grammar at the word or sentence level while omitting the discourse level as for Kılıçkaya (2016).

Güler (2022) compares Finland, China, Holland and Turkey in terms of primary school foreign language curriculum. In his study, it is shown that China and Turkey have similar aim in their general objectives which is to make students achieve communicational skills. It is also found that in Turkey's curriculum, grammar is not stressed which is similar to Finland's and Holland's curricula. Indeed, there are common qualities in these countries' curriculum like being student-centered, emphasizing oral communication in the foreground, using authentic materials and creating incentive atmosphere.

In a study conducted by Palabıyık and Çakmak (2021), the teachers agree on the point that listening and speaking aims are possible to achieve. Furthermore, educational attainments are found to be consistent with the general objectives of the curriculum. The teachers are of the opinion that the curriculum encourages the use of various approaches and techniques. Utilizing English songs and games are inspired in the classes as teachers' state. The use of target language is also prevalent in the classes of the teachers in Palabıyık and Çakmak's (2021) study.

Kerimoğlu (2021) evaluates the 8th grade English curriculum and it is found out that curriculum is in accordance with the development of the basic language skills of the students. Dissimilarly, the teachers partly agree that curriculum is prepared to improve all four skills of the students equally and the students can communicate using simple sentences at the end. The participants also partly agree that the program fulfills the needs of language learning and the students can improve their speaking and listening skills. The obtained level of the students conforms with the aimed level at the end of the term partially, according to the views of the teachers.

Participant teachers in a study carried out by Özden (2019) find the update in the 2nd grade English curriculum necessary and educational attainments are efficacious. Moreover, the methods, techniques and materials are used effectively by the teachers. Educational attainments are found to be simplified. Besides, weekly class hours are found insufficient by the teachers.

Turkey's educational policy is discussed in a study by Çarıkcioğlu (2019), and the teachers take the view that foreign language educational policy is not sufficient and should be altered and updated. Likewise, four skills are not attached importance in the curriculum and the importance given to the grammar teaching is decreased, according to the perceptions of the teachers.

In a study by Yildirim (2010), the teachers have identified a number of detrimental effects of testing, including curriculum constriction, teaching to the test, decreased teacher morale, increased student and teacher stress, etc. Despite the fact that students devote a lot of time and effort to studying reading, grammar, and vocabulary, exams have some negative consequences on their grasp of these three language skills. The texts used in the exam for reading, according to teachers, are quite brief (often one or two paragraphs) and limited in terms of type, thus they don't accurately represent the length and diversity of passages in real life.

In Karabacak's (2020) study, the teachers state that vocabulary and grammar teaching is important. It is also shared that there is not allocated time for fostering speaking, listening, writing and reading skills. 3 of the teachers clearly state that the time allocated for each student is also limited. Negative washback effects of the exam are also debated in the relevant study. The participant teachers publish that the students are stressed because of their parents' pressure. The student participants in a study carried out by Karanfil (2020) also express that they are highly anxious because of LGS examination.

In Çakır's (2017) study, one of the English language teachers states that teachers are made responsible for the failure of the students. If this pressure is not because of the administrators or parents, it is because of the teacher himself. The same teacher points out that most of the teachers are of the opinion that if their students are successful, they are successful teachers, too; a student's failure is considered inadmissible.

Sayın and Aslan (2016) reveal that in the light of their study on the LYS-5 exam that measures foreign languages for university entrance, four skills are ignored and are not only omitted from the LYS-5 exam but also the students' and teachers' activities and classroom practices. As a consequence, students only concentrate their studies on grammar activities and vocabulary memorization. This is a strong indication that the LYS5 placement exam is not an inclusive one and does not assess language acquisition competency. Likewise, one of the significant problems encountered in the foreign language teaching process, as stated above, is that students studying in the 8th grade in the secondary education exams prioritize learning test techniques rather than learning a foreign language. Keeping these in mind, final year students both in primary schools, namely 8th graders, and in high schools don't have English language education in a planned way determined at the very beginning of the year.

The results of a study executed by Tılfarlıoğlu and Öztürk (2016) display that 13.3 percent of teachers announce that they never do speaking activities in the classroom and 18.8 percent of them express that they hardly ever do speaking activities in the ELT classroom. This suggests that one-third of learners attempt to learn a foreign language without communicating or speaking the target language.

Kılıçkaya (2016) reveals that the teachers could not teach many subjects they have to teach as they want due to the students' obligation to prepare for the exam; especially the listening,

writing, and speaking skills could not be provided to eighth-grade students. Most of the classrooms are this way, and the students feel that they would never achieve producing some piece of a communicative sample but only have the chance to perceive the language in that way, at least. Akalin and Zengin (2007) summarize this idea by notifying that just as a teacher's beliefs, goals, attitudes, and decisions about teaching affect her teaching, a student's beliefs, goals, attitudes, and decisions about teaching and learning affect her learning.

Further to those examples, Isik (2008) claims that there is no coordination between the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education and what is worse, the changes and improvements cannot be adapted to the foreign language education system.

Method

Design

This study examines questions related to the high school entrance exam and EFL classroom practices in Turkey. The incentive behind the current study is to unveil the effects of the LGS exam on the implementation of the English curriculum. Qualitative and quantitative strategy both in tandem are employed to shed light on the EFL teachers' instructional practices with regard to their perception of high school entrance exam and curriculum implementation connection.

The justification for combining quantitative and qualitative data in one study stems from the fact that neither quantitative nor qualitative methodologies are sufficient to capture the patterns and specifics of a situation on their own (Ivankova et al., 2006). In an attempt to determine the washback effects of the LGS exam by getting the views of the EFL teachers, this study seeks to gather data for which a mixed approach is adopted. Mixed methods combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tashakkori et al., 1998), and it is crystal clear that the current study is a mixed one by its nature.

An online questionnaire is utilized to collect quantitative data. To gather qualitative data, on the other hand, interviews are utilized. For the quantitative data, cross-sectional design is adopted. Olsen and George (2004) represent the type of this research as follows: "The entire population is selected and data are collected to help answer the research questions of interest. Its name comes from the gathering of the information that presents what is going on at only one point in time." Interviews are commonly applied to find out the experiences of people and their inner senses, manners, and feelings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In this connection, the teachers filled out the online questionnaire on their willingness at first. Then, ten volunteer teachers that noted their e-mail addresses at the end of the questionnaire to be the part of one-to-one interviews voluntarily, are reached. Qualitative approach of the study is based on the grounded theory of sociologists Glaser and Strauss (2017).

Participants

The purposive sampling method is applied which is a form of non-probability sampling. In purposive selection, the primary objective is to concentrate on particular characteristics of a population (Rai & Thapa, 2015), wherefore the purposive sampling method matches the needs of the current study.

The sample consists of 201 EFL teachers who work in secondary schools in Turkey. The teachers are working in the provinces of Amasya, Ankara, Antalya, Balıkesir, Giresun, İstanbul,

Konya, Manisa, Samsun and Sivas. EFL teachers are reached for the questionnaire and the volunteers to take part in the interviews are asked to leave their e-mail addresses at the end of the questionnaire. Among them, 10 volunteers are kindly requested to have an interview. Pre-determined questions are followed in a conversational manner which paves the way for semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are applied to the volunteers and detailed notes are taken during the interviews.

Purposive sampling method is applied to select the participants, as it is the most efficient method of non-probability sampling when it is appropriate to research a specific cultural field with knowledgeable individuals engaged in the process (Tongco, 2007). The participants who don't give approval are not targeted for this study. Besides, the volunteers are assured that their names would remain anonymous. They are also assured that they can leave the meeting at any time they desire.

Table 1

Gender Distribution of Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Female	139	69.2
Male	62	30.8
Total	201	100.0

Table 1 proves that 139 (69.2%) of the questionnaire participants who return the questionnaire are female, while 62 (30.8%) are male.

Table 2

Age Distribution of Participants

	Frequency	Percent
20-25	87	43.3
26-30	69	34.3
31-35	29	14.4
36-40	10	5.0
41-45	5	2.5
46-Above	1	.5
Total	201	100.0

As Table 2 shows, 87 (43.3%) of the participants, which could be thought as the majority, are between the ages of 20 – 25. Of 201 teachers, 69 (34.3%) are from 26 to 30. 29 (14.4%) of the participants are between the age range of 31 – 35. 10 (5.0%) of the participant teachers are between 36 – 40. Few teachers' ages range between 41 – 45. 1 (.5%) of the teachers are at the age of 46 or above.

Table 3

Participants' Year of Experience

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 4 years	112	55.7
4-9 years	54	26.9
10-14 years	25	12.4
15 or more years	10	5.0
Total	201	100.0

It is clear in the table 3 that 112 (55.7%) teachers who volunteer to fill out the questionnaire part have less than 4 years of experience in teaching English. Among them, 54 (26.9%) have the experience of 4 – 9 years. 25 (12.4%) of the participants have from 10 to 14 years of experience. Lastly, 10 (5.0%) of the teachers have at least 15 (or more) years of experience in the field.

Table 4

Participants' Department of Graduation

	Frequency	Percent
ELT	161	80.1
ELL	26	12.9
Translation-Interpreting	6	3.0
Linguistics-Philology	4	2.0
Other	4	2.0
Total	201	100.0

161 (80.1%) of the teachers are graduates of the English Language Teaching Programme. Having the second predominance, 26 (12.9%) teacher participants are English Language and Literature graduates. 4 (2.0%) are Linguistics / Philology graduates and the other 4 (2.0%) are graduates of other department/s that are not given as an option among the questions.

Data Collection

At the core of this study are online environments which are the best options to collect the data on Covid-19 days. Quantitative data is gathered in a span of 2 months and the window of time for gathering qualitative data is 1 month. Both qualitative and quantitative data is collected on-line lest the teachers might feel uneasy about the Coronavirus outbreak, which will go against the ethical perception of this study. Voluntary participation form of study is shared with the participants while sharing the link for the questionnaire.

Qualitative data is obtained via Zoom, a cloud-based video communication application. While doing the interview, sharing the view is precluded with the will of both the interviewer and the interviewee. In the light of these, notes are taken whilst the teacher participants are responding to the questions.

On-line questionnaire was taken from an MA thesis named “Communicative Language Teaching in Turkey: Teachers’ Views and Classroom Practices” (Hunutlu, 2011) and the interview questions were adopted from another MA thesis named “The washback effects of high school entrance examination (LGS) on the teaching and learning processes of English language education in a public middle school in Turkey” (Demir, 2019).

Necessary permissions were received through e-mail for the interview questions and the questionnaire questions respectively on the 30th of November 2020 and the 30th of January 2021. To conduct this study, ethical permission was obtained from Amasya University Institute of Social Sciences in 02.02.2021, with the decision numbered E-30640013-108.01-3636. Besides, permission was taken from MoNE in 17.01.202, number E-49614598-605.01-41447218, to gather the views of the teachers.

Validity and reliability are ensured by 2 colleagues and an expert who runs through the codes and categories. Instructors who run through the codes and categories work at a state university in Turkey.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected from the teachers, the responses of the teachers for each statement and their frequencies and percentages are reckoned and presented in tables. Since SPSS is the most widely used predictive data analysis software application in educational science (Muijs, 2010) the statistics are analysed through SPSS 11, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistical analysis is put to use for the analysis of frequencies.

Interviews are applied to the participants who agree to be the participant in the study and interview notes are analysed. The interview transcriptions are analysed individually and separately. The deductive approach is employed to analyse the gathered data. Content analyses of the interviews are meticulously done by the researcher using NVivo, which can analyse all the data and assist to organize, analyse, visualize and report the data (Dhakal, 2022). Themes are effectuated based on grounded theory. The use of constant comparative analysis is addressed in this study, which originated from the grounded theory. By comparing, it is possible to constitute a theory by categorizing, coding, delineating categories and connecting them (Boeije, 2002).

Perry Hinton et al. (2004) reveals that if the reliability level is between 0.50 and 0.75, it is accepted to be medium. Cronbach’s Alpha for the 8 items is 0.69, which is between 0.50 and 0.75; thus, it is clear that the data are measured reliably.

Findings

In the following pages, analysis of the levels, frequency and percentage values of the items on the questionnaire exist. Additionally, categories, codes and quotes from the interviews are also shared following the research questions.

Research Question 1: To What Extent are the Aims of the Curriculum Followed in EFL Classes?

The related items of the questionnaire are debated in this part. The first item of the questionnaire pertains to the use of English in classes.

Table 5

Teachers' Use of English

	Frequency	Percent
Never	4	2.0
Infrequently	22	10.9
Sometimes	50	24.9
Frequently	95	47.3
Always	30	14.9
Total	201	100.0

It can be seen from the data in Table 5 that almost half of the participants (47.3%), 95 participants namely, use English frequently in their classes. 50 (24.9%) participants sometimes use the target language. 30 (14.9%) of them always take advantage of English language in their classes. 22 (10.9%) of the teacher participants infrequently utilize the language. 4 (2.0%) of the participants selected never for this item, which indicates they never use English in their classes.

The second item of the questionnaire is linked to following the curriculum.

Table 6

Teachers' Following of the Curriculum

	Frequency	Percent
Never	3	1.5
Infrequently	2	1.0
Sometimes	16	8.0
Frequently	58	28.9
Always	122	60.7
Total	201	100.0

Table 6 provides an overview of the degree to which informants follow the curriculum. The better part of the teachers, which are 122 (60.7%), always follows the curriculum. 58 (28.9%) of the participants follow the curriculum frequently. 16 (8.0%) of the teacher participants sometimes follow the curriculum. 3 (1.5) of the participants never follow the curriculum and 2 (1.0%) follow the curriculum infrequently.

Research Question 2: Are the Classes with the 8th Graders Communicative?

The second research question is “Are the classes with the 8th grades communicative?”. The third item of the questionnaire is “I have my students speak English in classes”.

Table 7

Students' Frequency of Speaking English

	Frequency	Percent
Never	1	.5
Infrequently	23	11.4
Sometimes	65	32.3
Frequently	44	21.9
Always	68	33.8
Total	201	100.0

Table 7 presents above that 68 (33.8%) of the informants always have their students speak English. In a similar vein, 65 (32.3%) of the participants have their learners speak English. Among 201 participants, 44 (21.9%) frequently have their students speak English in their classes. 23 (11.4%) of them infrequently have their learners speak English in class. 1 (.5%) of the teacher participants never have his or her students speak English.

The fourth item aims to assess the writing practice of the students from the teachers' point of view.

Table 8

Students' Frequency of Writing

	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	3.0
Infrequently	56	27.9
Sometimes	91	45.3
Frequently	37	18.4
Always	11	5.5
Total	201	100.0

As shown in Table 8, 91 (45.3%) of the teachers sometimes have their students write an essay or a story. 56 (27.9%) of them infrequently have their learners write a story or an essay. Among them, 37 (18.4%) frequently have their students writing practice. 11 (5.5%) teachers always make their students write a story or an essay. 6 (3.0%) of the participants never make use of writing practices.

The fifth item is “I have my students talk about the story they read”.

Table 9

Students’ Frequency of Speaking on a Story

	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	3.0
Infrequently	73	36.3
Sometimes	71	35.3
Frequently	36	17.9
Always	15	7.5
Total	201	100.0

It can be seen from the data in table 9 that 73 (36.3%) of the participants infrequently have their students talk about the story that is read by the students. Comparably, 71 (35.3%) of the teachers sometimes have their learners talk about the story. Among 201 participants, 36 (17.9%) teachers’ students frequently talk about the story they read. 15 (7.5%) teacher participants always have their learners talk about the story they read and 6 (3.0%) of the teachers never have their students talk about the story read by the students.

The ninth item is “I use English songs or games”.

Table 10

Teachers’ Use of English Songs or Games

	Frequency	Percent
Never	2	1.0
Infrequently	16	8.0
Sometimes	37	18.4
Frequently	88	43.8
Always	58	28.9
Total	201	100.0

In Table 10, it is explicit that 88 (43.8%) of the teachers frequently use English songs or games in their classes. What is more, 58 (28.9%) always use English songs or games. The third maximum number is 37 (18.4%), with the choice of “sometimes”. 16 (8.0%) participants infrequently have English songs or games in the classroom. 2 (1.0%) of the teachers never use English games or songs in their classroom.

The tenth item is linked to the use of English movies or dramas.

Table 11

Teachers' Use of English Movies or Dramas

	Frequency	Percent
Never	2	1.0
Infrequently	21	10.4
Sometimes	31	15.4
Frequently	78	38.8
Always	69	34.3
Total	201	100.0

As table 11 demonstrates, 78 (38.8%) teachers frequently use English movies or dramas in the classroom. Moreover, 69 (34.3%) of the informants always use English dramas or movies. On the flipside, 31 (15.4%) teacher respondents sometimes make use of English movies or dramas in the class. Among 201 participators, 21 (10.4%) infrequently give place to English movies or dramas and 2 (1.0%) never use these items.

The last item is “I use pair work or group work in English”.

Table 12

Use of Pair or Group Work

	Frequency	Percent
Never	3	1.5
Infrequently	19	9.5
Sometimes	34	16.9
Frequently	54	26.9
Always	91	45.3
Total	201	100.0

Inspection of the Table 12 expresses that 91 (45.3%) teacher participators always use pair work or group work in English. 54 (26.9%), on the other side, frequently use pair work or group

work. 34 (16.9%) attendants sometimes use group or pair work in the classroom. 19 (9.5%) respondents mark “infrequently” for implying their use of group or pair work in the class. 3 (1.5%) teacher participants never use group or pair work according to the answers.

Research Question 3: Is there a Relationship between LGS and Classroom Practices?

Along with the third research question, both quantitative and qualitative findings are revealed in this part. The sixth item of the questionnaire examines whether the participants teach vocabulary by using the target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia.

Table 13

Teachers’ Frequency of Teaching Vocabulary Using Communicative Items

	Frequency	Percent
Never	3	1.5
Infrequently	62	30.8
Sometimes	72	35.8
Frequently	48	23.9
Always	16	8.0
Total	201	100.0

It is apparent from Table 13 that 72 (35.8%) of the attendants select “sometimes” as for the related item. 62 (30.8%) of the participators infrequently use target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia to teach vocabulary. 48 (23.9%) teachers frequently use target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia in order to teach vocabulary. 3 (1.5%) of the informants opt for “never” to remark on their use of target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia for vocabulary teaching.

The seventh item is associates with explaining English grammar in English.

Table 14

Teachers’ Explanation of English Grammar in English

	Frequency	Percent
Never	14	7.0
Infrequently	64	31.8
Sometimes	61	30.3
Frequently	41	20.4
Always	21	10.4
Total	201	100.0

Data from this table display that 64 (31.8%) of the teachers explain English grammar in English infrequently. Correlatively, 61 (30.3%) of the respondents sometimes explain English grammar in English. Out of 201 participants, 41 (20.4%) of them frequently explain English grammar in English. 21 (10.4%) of the attendants choose “always” to indicate their explaining English grammar in English. 14 (7.0%) of the teachers never explain English grammar in English.

The eighth item is relevant to using communicative activities in the classroom.

Table 15

Teachers' Use of Communicative Activities

	Frequency	Percent
Never	3	1.5
Infrequently	21	10.4
Sometimes	41	20.4
Frequently	101	50.2
Always	35	17.4
Total	201	100.0

Table 15 is quite revealing in that more than one half of (50.2%) the teachers frequently use communicative activities in their classes. 41 (20.4%) of the participant teachers sometimes use communicative activities in the class. 35 (17.4%), on the other hand, choose “always” choice to remark that they give place to communicative activities in their classes. 21 (10.4%) of 201 participants infrequently apply communicative activities in the classroom. Being the minority, 3 (1.5%) attendants never make use of communicative activities in their classroom.

During the interviews, the teachers are asked “How is your process of preparing the students for the exam?” as the first question. The findings demonstrate that 6 of the teachers' foci are on the LGS exam as they state that they implement their classes in an exam-oriented way. Among 10 teachers, 4 conduct their classes in a communication-based way, giving less emphasis on the exam. Still, both exam-oriented and communication-based groups follow curriculum since LGS encompasses curriculum aims.

Table 16

Findings About Teaching Process

Categories	Codes	Participants
Test-Oriented		(6)
	Introducing Vocabulary	M, O, S, T, D
	Introducing Grammar	O, S
	Applying Pilot Tests	F, M, O, S, T
Communication-Based		(4)

Introducing Unit	Y, Z, U
Following The Course book	İ, Y, Z, U
Applying Extra Activities	Y, U
Applying Pilot Tests	Y, Z, U

The majority of teachers remark that they introduce the unit, primarily. Subsequently, they apply pilot tests to see their students' levels. They also state that they abide by the English curriculum in their classes.

Throughout the interviews, the participant teachers are posed question 2 which is "Does the preparation process affect the way you teach?".

Table 17

Findings About Teachers' Changing Their Teaching Style for LGS

Categories	Codes	Participants
Yes		(8)
	School Management's Pressure	U, S, O, M
	Parents' Pressure	U, M
	Students' Pressure	S, M
	Limited English Class Hours	U, T, D, Z, M, F, S
No		(2)
	Communicative Activities	İ
	Curriculum Activities	Y

A considerable number of teachers change their teaching style when they are teaching to 8th grade students. Those 8 teachers debate the reasons for their change in style and it is found out that there are four main reasons behind the changes. 4 teachers mention that the school management wants the teachers to focus on the exam which is important for their school's fame. Besides, as 2 of the teachers share, parents also feel free to have right to interrogate teachers about the pilot test results. What is more, 2 of the teachers report that they also have student pressure as the students don't want to learn what is not involved in LGS exam. Of 7 teachers that change their teaching style, 6 discuss the weekly class hours which is, according to them, is limited.

On the other hand, 2 of the English teachers don't have any change because of the LGS exam as they state. One of them also remarks that following the curriculum is enough for preparing them for the exam. The other teacher that doesn't change the style utters that, communicative activities in 8th grade should be prioritized in the classes like the other grades. Nevertheless, those 2 teachers are of the opinion that class hours are limited to follow and implement the curriculum wholly. They state that they bring extra activities to the classroom. That's why there is a lack of weekly class hours especially with 8th grades.

The teachers are questioned whether the course with 8th graders differs from the courses with minor grades. All of the participants responded positively to this query. As a result of the responses, the differences are made clear.

Table 18

The Difference Between 8th Grades and Other Grades

Categories	Codes	Participants
Minor Grades	More Communicative Activities	U, Z, O, F, M, İ
	Extra Activities	U, D, S, O, İ
	Games	T, S, Y, Z, O,
	No Tests	T, İ
	All Four Skills	D, S, Y, F
8 th Grades	Non-Communicative Activities	T, S, Z, O, F, M, İ
	Stressful Teaching Process	U, T, D, S, Y, O, M
	No Games	T, S, Z, O, F, M,
	Test-Based Classes	T, Z, İ

As delineated in Table 18, more than half of the teachers apply more communicative activities with minor grades when compared to 8th graders. In addition, 5 of the teachers bring extra activities for their learners in minor grades, which is not mentioned for the 8th grade students. In the same vein, 5 of the teachers give place to games in their classes with minor grades. 2 teachers state that they don't allow for tests in the classes with minor grades. 4 teachers predicated that they can involve all four skills in the classes with minor grades.

In other respects, 7 teachers point out that their classes with 8th grades are not communicative. Again, 7 of the teachers conceive the teaching and learning process with 8th graders stressful. 7 teachers connote that they don't make the students play games in the class with 8th graders. They clearly express that the 8th grade students seem bored when their teacher starts a game. 2 of them also vented that their students find games extraneous since they are going to have an important exam for high school entrance. 3 of the teachers reflect that their classes with 8th graders are test-based.

Research Question 4: Does LGS have any Washback Effect on the implementation of English Curriculum?

In order to unveil the positive and negative washback effects of LGS on the implementation of English curriculum, the interview questions are presented in this part.

The next question in the interview is an attempt to see if LGS improves the English level of the learners.

Table 19

Contribution of LGS Process to the Students' English Level

Categories	Codes	Participants
Partly Yes	Vocabulary	(4)
	Grammar	U, S, M
	Reading	U, S, M S, Z, M
No	Neglected Skills - Sub-Skills	(6) T, D, Y, O, F, İ

Referring to Table 19, among 10 teachers, 4 consider the exam to contribute to the students' English level at best. 3 of the teachers envision that the LGS redounds to the vocabulary of the students. They also reckon that LGS bolsters the students' grammar knowledge. Similarly, 3 of the teachers uphold that the reading comprehension skill of the students develops to some extent.

6 volunteer teachers are of the opinion that the LGS examination has no positive impact in terms of improving the students' English level. They hold forth that most of the skills and sub-skills that are highly crucial while learning English are neglected because of the exam preparation process. One of the participants illustrates that vocabulary knowledge of the learners seems to develop but they don't use the vocabulary they learned in the classroom. The other participant interlards that English is a lesson for the students, not a skill. Moreover, one of the participants propounds that one of the students answers all the questions correctly in pilot tests but has no aim and ability to use the target language.

The participants are asked around about the positive and negative sides of LGS. Each participant states that LGS has some negative effects. However, 8 participants find positive effect, some responding after thinking for about 5 minutes.

Table 20

Negative and Positive Aspects of LGS

Categories	Codes	Participants
Positive Aspects	Autonomous Learning	D, U
	Time Management	U, M
	Multiple Choice Practice	D, S
	Vocabulary Memorization	T, S, F
	Reading Comprehension	T, S, Z
	Motivation Factor	T, O, M, İ
	Importance of English	O

Negative Aspects	English as a Lesson	D, S, Z, F
	No Authentic Use	D, S, M
	Shadowed Communication Skills	U, T, O, İ
	Emphasis on Exam	Y
	No Fun Activities	M

As for positive aspects, 2 participants state that their students develop autonomous learning while preparing for the exam. 2 teachers report that their students learn to manage their time thanks to the exam. Another 2 teachers note that the students get used to multiple choice questions at a young age, which is a positive aspect leastways. 3 participants identify vocabulary memorization as another positive aspect. Reading comprehension of the students' progress, according to 3 of the teachers. Half of the teachers that can name positive effects talk about the motivation factor of the exam. They advocate that LGS motivates their students to study English. One of the teachers mentions that in favor of LGS, the students appreciate the importance of English.

On the negative side, one half of the interviewees points out that their students perceive English as a lesson, not as a skill. 3 participants assert that there is no authentic use of English the students learn. They don't use that English in their daily life. Again, half of the volunteer participants argue that communication skills of the 8th grade students are shadowed because of the exam preparation process. One of the participants observed that the interest is in the exam for 8th grade students, not in the language itself. Another participant draws the attention to the lack of fun activities because of the exam essence and time problem throughout the class.

During the interview, the voluntary participants discussed the negative aspects of the exam for the most part. Whereby, they try to find positive aspects when they are posed the last question. They postulate that they already talked about the negative aspects. Hence, the table shows that positive aspects of LGS outweigh. Agreeably, the participants' responses are crucial in that point. They principally explain that negative aspects of the exam are preponderant.

Discussion

In response to question 1 in the questionnaire, the results reveal that almost half of the participants frequently use English in their classes, with the majority opting to use it sometimes or always. These results are consistent with data obtained in a study by Kapcı (2014). In his study, most of the teachers supported the use of the target language. As the sample consists of secondary school teachers, the use of English in classes may vary in that the teachers change their way of teaching according to the grade of the students.

It is also explicit from both the questionnaire responses and the interview quotes that the teachers substantially follow the curriculum. They state that the high school entrance exam is concerned with the curriculum, and if they follow the course book, they would give the learners what they would need for the exam. The data coming from Çal (2010) confirms the association between the textbook and the curriculum from the perception of teachers. In both studies, when asked about curriculum, the teachers shared that they follow the curriculum by abiding by the course material. Akin to this, Kütük and Bergil (2021) conclude that the majority of teachers and students view textbooks as the only source of knowledge. Hence, it can be concluded that the

teachers perceive the course book given by MoNE as a guide for following the curriculum. Still, the teachers are following the curriculum on a large scale.

The teachers principally have their students speak English in their classes according to the answers. It is also promoted by the interview participants. What stands out in most of the interviews is that the 8th grade students don't attract as intensive attention as the other grade students, according to the teachers. It shows up that the students in the 8th grades have low motivation and interest in speaking English in classes in contrast with the students at lower grades. In a resembling study's findings, a participant reveals that learners in Turkey go for traditional ways of learning where they are expected to memorize the things they have learnt (Hoyland, 2021). It is pointed out that the reason for this behaviour stems from the exam-based studying habits, which expounds the lack of motivation for speaking English. To put the whole matter in a nutshell, the teachers actually do their best to make their students speak English in classes notwithstanding the fact that LGS doesn't comprise of speaking skill.

The teachers are mostly irresolute about having their students write an essay or a story. Indeed, the participant teachers have a head start on applying writing activities infrequently in their classes. This doesn't necessarily mean that the teachers definitely don't accommodate writing activities in their classes, yet the frequency for this skill is low. When it comes to the writing skill, the teachers put the least emphasis on this skill. A congruent study by Zengin (2020) highlights that class hours are insufficient for developing writing skills. The current study also deduces that the teachers are not content with the weekly class hours when they are asked about writing part of their classes. In a nutshell, the teachers don't make their students write an essay, a story or about any topic because of the limited time allocated for English classes.

The teachers infrequently have their students talk about the story they read. The underlying cause for this problem should inevitably result from not reading stories in the class. This is because the teachers broadly have their students speak English in classes according to the 7th question. When the students don't read a story, they don't have the opportunity to talk about it. The curriculum necessitates reading and speaking in a communicative classroom atmosphere. It can be concluded that the teachers get around to these skills separately and on a less than desirable because of the exam factor. The comments are crucial because of the fact that the teachers eliminate the skills in line with the significance of the LGS exam. To put it another way, if it wouldn't appear in the exam, the teachers prefer not to take heed of the related skill. In sum, the teachers don't opt for making their students talk about the story they read.

Respondents are asked to indicate whether they use the target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia while teaching vocabulary. The teachers sometimes use the target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia while teaching vocabulary to their secondary school students. Remarks of the interviewees make clear that the teachers change their vocabulary teaching style for grade 8 students. However, they apply the aforesaid techniques to the other grade students. It can therefore be assumed that the teachers alter their vocabulary teaching style in the 8th grade classes and they reckon as they sometimes use the target language, body language, pictures, videos or realia while teaching vocabulary.

In reply to the 11th item of the questionnaire which is "I explain English grammar in English", the majority of the respondent teachers say they infrequently do this. Foregoing quotations enucleate that the teachers teach grammar in their classes and they don't emphasize it. To make the meaning and understanding clear, the teachers would prefer using Turkish language

while teaching grammar since the students expect to make translation to understand better. With this in mind, only a small number of teachers explain grammar in English. Those teachers also dissent that they have communicative classes. In line with the claim of Palalı (2006), it could be concluded that grammar could be absorbed influentially with communicative activities.

For the 12th item of the questionnaire, the respondents share that they frequently use communicative activities in their classes. Given that the participants are secondary school teachers who have classes 5,6,7 and 8, the majority of them think they often have communicative activities in their classes. Only 8th grade teachers or those who has classes for 8th graders remark that they don't have such communicative activities with 8th grade students or they have limited amounts of those activities. Findings of this study match with a study of Kırkgöz (2007) up to a point. In her study, the teachers are found to be reluctant to apply communicative activities that curriculum advise.

The respondent teachers frequently use English songs or games, according to their answers. Given the teachers use communicative activities frequently, it is inescapable that they utilize these kinds of materials since the ages of the learners require such activities. It is worth mentioning that great number of students in a similar study drew a conclusion that edutainment activities are used by the teachers on a vast scale (İnan, 2006).

The teachers frequently allocate time for English movies or dramas. Fortunately, they indicate that they link the topics of the unit to the movies they bring to the class. On top of that, students at that age need to realize that the English language is authentic. With this object in mind, it is also noteworthy that the teachers integrate technology into their classes by presenting movies in the class. A similar conclusion is drawn by Ekinci (2017) that teachers might use movies and dramas as an authentic input for EFL learners since those learners are not in luck of being exposed to the foreign language beyond the classroom.

The teachers always have their students work in pairs or groups. It is a stubborn fact that working in groups or pairs promotes social intelligence. To put it differently, learning a language necessitates social intelligence, obliquely. Moreover, teachers in a study by Paker (2009) take the view that group work is paramount to achieving academic, intellectual and social targets. Taken as a whole, it is undeniable that group and pair work is promoted by the teachers in this study.

The present curriculum necessitates the use of English as a means of communication as Turkish Ministry of Education Curriculum (2018) shares. However, the teachers think that English is perceived as a lesson because of the format of the exam. The LGS doesn't include speaking, listening and writing skills. Hence, both the teachers and the students don't give the necessary importance for these skills. It is clearly mentioned in the curriculum that speaking and listening skills should be an attached priority. Instructional practices of the EFL lower secondary school teachers don't correspond with the curriculum.

Conclusion

This study is based on the thesis named "The Effect of High-School Entrance Exam on Implementation of English Curriculum". The findings of the study demonstrate that the instructional practices of the teachers depend on the grade they teach as a result of the exam preparation process. The teachers also remark that they have communicative classes with both 8th grade students and minor grade students. After all, the teachers state that they have very limited time to allow for all four skills in their classes with 8th graders. The root cause of insufficient time

is that the teachers make time for pilot tests or other activities that prepare students for LGS. To allocate this time, they choose not to apply some skills like listening, speaking and writing. Nonetheless, time isn't the only problem. The teachers also complain about the pressure from their school administration, parents and students. They state that anticipation of school administration, parents or students makes them focus on the exam results and teach the students accordingly. On the whole, LGS has significant negative effects on classroom practices though it has questions parallel with the curriculum. It also hinders communicative classes, which are essential for learning a foreign language.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions

The secondary school teachers conduct communicative classes on a large scale while adhering to the curriculum. However, if they teach the 8th graders, they need to make an extra effort to conduct their lessons in a communicative manner, for they feel under pressure to include extra activities like mock tests to enhance exam preparation, which ultimately results in time limitations. Hence, the negative washback effects of the exam taint the teachers' efforts for communicative EFL sessions. This issue cannot be resolved by simply increasing class time or adding more sessions because teachers would almost certainly use those extra hours to continue practising for more mock exams. Instead, it would be desirable to incorporate the four skills into the LGS system in order to sustain communicative class hours that would result in long-lasting communicative skills. The teachers also indicate that students' expectations for the foreign language alter as they desire to prepare for LGS when they start 8th grade. Similar to this, including disregarded skills into LGS would benefit students by allowing them to study the language in an entertaining manner. Furthermore, if all of the skills were covered during the school year, students would be familiar with them when encountered as part of the LGS questions.

It is also purported that both the teachers and the students are under stress due to the high school entrance exam. Along the same line, the teachers in Demir's (2010) study declare that they feel responsibility for preparing their learners for the high school entrance exam. The findings of the both studies support that there is a stress factor of the teachers which ensured the negative washback effect of the exams. It is a well-known fact that failure causes stress in the students. In an attempt to decrease this stress, fostering communicative skills and real-life experiences serve the purpose in this technology age. It is also inestimable to stand behind the teachers who are constrained to carry out the mandatory recommendations of seniors or parents. If the teachers insist on their voluntariness and expertise in their field, those who are not language teachers cannot interfere in the teachers' province. Conducting seminars about the related topics could raise awareness in language teachers and headmasters. In epitome, it is inevitable to make a mention of that the negative washback effects of LGS tip the scales over the positive washback effects when the teachers' comments are taken into consideration.

For further studies, interviews with the administrators and parents could be conducted. Taking the results into consideration, the effects of the high-stakes exams could be compared with each other. Despite the promising results of the current study, there are still unanswered questions about the following exams that students will encounter in their lives. This is an important issue for future research because university entrance exams might have effects on the students and teachers. Further to that, the English curriculum emphasizes speaking, listening, writing and reading skills.

LGS format could include 4 skills equally. To conclude, this study raises the possibility that further additional research could be required.

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Geniş Özet

Giriş

Akpınar ve Cakildere (2013) için yüksek çıtalı testler; sınava girenler, öğrenciler, yöneticiler ve aileler için bir sonuca varmak üzere tasarlanmıştır. İlgili sınavın sonuçlarına ve bazen de not ortalaması ve yabancı dil seviyesi gibi diğer faktörlere göre öğrenciler lise veya üniversiteye yerleştirilir. Bu yerleştirme genellikle öğrencilerin ilkökul, ortaokul ve lisedeki son eğitim yıllarının sonunda gerçekleşir. Bu sebeple, öğrencilerin sınavdan sonra aldıkları puanlar yaşam boyu kariyerlerini direkt olarak etkiler. Brown (1989) bu kararların kişilerin hayatında son derece

önemli olduğunu ve titizlikle karar verilmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Yerleştirme sınavlarında başarılı bulunan öğrencilerin akademik hayatlarında da benzer şekilde başarılı oldukları ortadadır (Şen et al., 2012).

İngilizce müfredatı, dil öğrenmeyi ve öğretmeyi kolaylaştıracak değişimler doğrultusunda güncellenir. Hizmet içi ve hizmet öncesi öğretmenler bu değişimlerle ilgili bilgilendirilir ve eğitilir. Akademik yılın sonunda, öğrencilerin hedef dilde iletişim kurabilmesi amaçlanır. Müfredat eksiksiz görünse de genel olarak öğrenciler akademik yılın sonunda hedef dilde iletişim kuramamaktadır.

Yöntem

Bu araştırmayı yönlendiren ana sorular şunlardır:

1. İngilizce derslerinde müfredatın amaçlarına ne ölçüde uyulmaktadır?
2. 8. sınıflarla dersler iletişimsel midir?
3. LGS ile sınıf içi uygulamalar arasında bir ilişki var mıdır?
4. LGS'nin İngilizce müfredatının uygulanması üzerinde herhangi bir ket vurma etkisi var mıdır?

Bu çalışma, lise giriş sınavı LGS'nin İngilizce derslerinde sınıf içi uygulamalara olumlu ve olumsuz etkilerini ortaya çıkarmak için tasarlanmıştır. Bu nedenle ortaokullarda görev yapan öğretmenlerle iletişime geçilmiş ve literatürü yeniden canlandırmak amacıyla öğretmenlerin görüşlerinden yararlanılmıştır. 201 İngilizce öğretmeni ankete dönüş yapmıştır. Bu öğretmenler arasından görüşme yapmak için gönüllü olanlar anket sonuna mail adreslerini bırakmıştır. 10 gönüllü ortaokul İngilizce öğretmenine ulaşılmış ve görüşmeler çevrim içi ortamda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar İngilizce öğretmeni olduğu için hem anket maddeleri hem de yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları İngilizcedir.

Anket sorularının 4'ü katılımcıların demografik bilgilerini sorgulamak üzere toplam 15 maddeden oluşmaktadır. İlk demografik bilgi sorusu cinsiyet ve ikinci demografik bilgi sorusu yaştır. Üçüncü madde ise katılımcıların mezun olduğu bölüm hakkındadır. Dördüncü madde, katılımcılara deneyim yılını/yıllarını sorar. Beşinci madde derslerde İngilizce kullanımı ile ilgilidir. Altıncısı öğretmenlerin müfredatı takip etme sıklığını sorgular. Yedinci madde öğrencilerin derslerde İngilizce konuşmasıyla ilgilidir. Sekizinci madde derste İngilizce yazma becerisi ile ilgilidir. Dokuzuncu madde okunan İngilizce hikayeler hakkında konuşmakla ilgilidir. Onuncu madde kelime öğretimi hakkında bilgi toplar. On birinci madde öğretmenlerin İngilizce dilbilgisi öğretirken tercih ettikleri dili sormaktadır. On ikinci madde sınıfta iletişimsel etkinlikler kullanımını sorgular. On üçüncü madde, öğretmenlerin İngilizce şarkı ve oyunlardan ne derecede yararlandıklarını sorgular. On dördüncü madde derslerde İngilizce filmlerin veya dramaların kullanımını sorgular. Son madde ikili çalışma veya grup çalışmasından yararlanma sıklığını sorgular. Anketin sonunda öğretmenlerin görüşme için gönüllü olup olmadığını sorgulayan bir bölüm bulunmaktadır. Doldurulması zorunlu olmayan bu bölümde gönüllü olan öğretmenler e-posta adresini paylaşırlar.

Bir yandan nicel veriler anket aracılığıyla toplanırken, diğer yandan anket için gönüllülere e-posta aracılığıyla ulaşılmıştır. 10 katılımcıya kaç yıldır görev yaptıkları, mezuniyet programları, ne kadar süredir öğrencilerini sınava hazırladıkları, sınava hazırlık süreciyle ilgili görüşleri, sınava hazırlık sürecinin dersi anlatma şekillerini etkileyip etkilemediği, farklı kademelerde derse

girmenin izlenen metot ve teknik açısından müfredatı işlemede farklılık yaratıp yaratmadığı, sınava hazırlık sürecinin öğrencilerin İngilizce bilgisine katkıda bulunup bulunmadığı, ve son olarak LGS'ye hazırlık sürecinin olumlu ve olumsuz yanları sorulmuştur. Görüşmeler yarı yapılandırılmış olduğundan, verilen cevaplara göre konuyla ilgili yardımcı başka sorulara da gerektiğinde yer verilmiştir.

Veri toplama sürecinin en sonunda, betimsel analiz için anket sonuçları SPSS programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme sorularına verilen cevaplar içerik analizi için analiz edilmiştir. Bilgisayar destekli bir yazılım aracı olan NVivo ile yazıya dökülmüş görüşmelerin maddeleri tek tek kontrol edilmiştir. Sonuçlar hep birlikte ele alındığında, araştırma sorularının her birine verilen cevaplar ortaya çıkmıştır ve araştırma sürecinin sonunda bazı çıkarımlara varılmıştır.

Sonuçlar ve Tartışma

Yıldırım (2010), farklı bir sınavdan bahsetmekle birlikte, bu çalışmayla paralel sonuçlar elde etmiştir. Şöyle ki, sınava hazırlanan öğrencilerin sınavda sorulduğu için yalnızca dilbilgisi, kelime ve okuma becerilerini geliştirmeye odaklandıklarını iddia etmektedir.

Öğretmenler öğrencilerinin 8. Sınıfa geçtiklerinde LGS için hazırlanırken yabancı dilden beklentilerinin değiştiğini de vurgulamıştır. Hem öğretmenlerin hem de öğrencilerin LGS dolayısıyla stres altında oldukları ortaya çıkmıştır. Benzer şekilde, Demir (2019) çalışmasındaki öğretmenlerin, öğrencileri sınava hazırlama konusunda sorumluluk hissettiğini belirtmiştir. Her iki çalışmanın da bulguları sınavların olumsuz ket vurma etkilerini destekleyen stres faktörünün bulunduğunu savunmaktadır.

Araştırmanın sonucuna göre sınava hazırlık sürecinin sonucu olarak öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalarının öğrencilerin buldukları kademeye göre farklılık gösterdiği saptanmıştır. Öğretmenler aynı zamanda hem 8. Sınıflarla hem de diğer kademelerde derslerin iletişim odaklı olduğunu vurgulamıştır. Öğretmenler ayrıca 8. Sınıfta kısıtlı zamandan dolayı 4 temel beceriye ayıracak vakitlerinin olmadığını da belirtmiştir. Bu kısıtlı zamanın asıl nedeninin öğretmenlerin seviye tespit sınavlarına ve öğrencileri LGS'ye hazırlayacak diğer aktivitelere zaman ayırması olduğu görüşmeler sonucunda ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu vakti yaratmak için de öğretmenler dinleme, konuşma ve yazma gibi bazı becerileri derslerde göz ardı etmektedir. Yine de kısıtlı zaman suçlanacak tek faktör değildir. Öğretmenler diğer yandan okul yönetiminin, velilerin ve öğrencilerin baskısından şikâyet etmektedir. Okul yönetiminin, velilerin ya da öğrencilerin beklentileri öğretmenleri deneme sınav sonuçlarına odaklamaya ve dersi ona göre işlemeye yönlendirmektedir. Genel olarak, müfredatla uyumlu soruları olmasına karşın, LGS'nin sınıf uygulamalarına önemli olumsuz etkileri olduğu ortaya konulmuştur. Bir yabancı dil dersi için gerekli olan iletişimsel aktiviteleri de sınırlı zaman faktörü dolayısıyla büyük ölçüde kısıtladığı vurgulanmıştır.