



English language assessment and evaluation practices in the 4th grade classes at mainstream schools

İskender Hakkı Sarıgöz^{a *} , Fatıma Nur Fişne^b 

^a *Gazi University, English Language Teaching Department, Ankara 06500, Turkey*

^b *Gazi University, English Language Teaching Department, Ankara 06500, Turkey*

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Abstract

Young language learners (YLLs) have a pivotal role in constructing their English language learning by making sense of their own environment. For that reason, assessing and evaluating young learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom setting require the administration of appropriate and tailor-made measurement tools and techniques. In this respect, it is necessary to become familiar with YLLs' characteristics and classroom-based experiences. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the existing language assessment practices in the 4th grade classroom in MoNE (Ministry of National Education) and to examine the relationship between curricular underpinnings and real-life practices. To this end, classroom-based observation and interviews were conducted to collect in-depth data about young learners' language assessment process. The basic findings show that EFL teachers carry out English language assessment and evaluation at the 4th grade with mainly formative purposes. As language skills, writing and vocabulary are more commonly assessed. In addition, written exams and assignments are extensively administered in YLLs' classrooms. It is regarded that objectivity is the major strength of the current language assessment program whereas the allotted time for language assessment and evaluation may not be enough to assess young learners comprehensively. This research attempts to provide information on the theoretical and practical implementation of curricular requirements in English language assessment and evaluation process at the 4th grade at state primary schools.

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1. Introduction

Language assessment and evaluation is a prevalent field in which SLA researchers have become increasingly interested in recent years. It plays an active role in language learning with respect to monitoring what has been achieved in language programs as well as determining the effectiveness of curricular components (Bachman & Palmer, 2010). Compared to other age-groups, young learners are assessed on the basis of the more meticulous process in which authentic setting is required in consonance with the language teaching methodology. Since young language learners are not familiar with high-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +0-0312-202-8468
E-mail address: iskender@gazi.edu.tr

stakes examination (Hasselgreen, 2005), language classrooms are the central places in which pupils are taught and assessed concurrently. This kind of classroom-based assessment procedure is widely regarded as teacher assessment (McKay, 2006).

Language assessment program in ELT (English Language Teaching) curriculum (MoNE, 2013) emphasizes that the pupils should be assessed through projects or performance tasks, self- and peer-assessment, teacher-assessment, and classical pen and paper tests (including oral skills). In addition, revised curriculum (MoNE, 2017) puts forward that language teachers should make use of different techniques and methods to assess major skills and integrated skills as well as alternative assessment such as language journal, project assessment, and performance assessment. On the other hand, some research studies (Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 1999; Yıldırım & Örsdemir, 2013) indicate that teachers' in-class assessment practices are not matched with the curricular objectives. In relation to classroom-based assessment, a large number of research studies have focused attention on teachers' assessment procedures in young language learners' classrooms across the world (Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 1999; Yang, 2008; Brumen, Cagran, & Rixon, 2009; Yılmaz & Akcan, 2012; Cojocnean, 2012). In the Turkish setting, the research on young language learners is generally related to the analysis of language program, teaching and assessing materials in use (Kırkgöz, 2008; Kırkgöz & Ağçam, 2012; Mirici, 2008; Sarıçoban & Hasdemir, 2012; Yıldırım & Örsdemir, 2013). It seems that there has been little research conducted on the investigation of teacher-assessment practices with the aim of conceptualizing the connection between theory and practice.

Accordingly, this study attempts to describe language assessment practices and existing testing perspectives in the 4th grade classrooms in MoNE. The current research not only elaborates on teacher assessment practices in YLL's classrooms but also aims to give feedback to policy-makers on the implementation process of language assessment program in terms of reflecting the connection between praxis and curriculum within the domain of TEFL to young learners.

1.1. Review of Literature

Language teaching is a multi-dimensional process in which a number of important components are in interaction to build linguistic knowledge. As a crucial component, language assessment is an active mechanism of learning by giving feedback on achievement and attainment. It not only gives feedback on language objectives but also provides in-depth information on formal setting, instructional materials, the effectiveness of the program, and evaluation of language performance (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 8).

In the language testing field, the assessment of young language learners is relatively different from other assessment areas in terms of their age-appropriate characteristics. More specifically, YLLs are aged from 5 to 12 years (McKay, 2006; Rea-Dickens, 2000). They construct the knowledge within their limited experiences, learn new structures in a social environment, show tendency to be distracted easily, and have relatively low affective filter (Cameron, 2001; Hasselgren, 2000; Hughes, 2003; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). In order to assess the pupils in a valid and reliable way, it is necessary to pay attention to these characteristics in language assessment process. Additionally, language assessment should be appropriate to their age-level, motivate them to take part in language use, eliminate the effect of affective factors on learning, and regard the pupils socially, psychologically, cognitively, and physically as a whole (Cameron, 2001; Hasselgreen, 2005; Hughes, 2003; Linse, 2005; McKay, 2006). Considering abovementioned reasons, a familiar and practical language assessment setting is required to cater for the assessment needs of young language learners. Classrooms are the places in which a foreign language is taught and tested in the same breath. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) define the classroom context as "the learning environment, constructed of sets of learning experiences that are designed to lead to the

acquisition of language and communication” (p. 25). By comparison with high-stakes testing which has major impacts on important curricular decisions, the language assessment in a classroom setting can be defined as low-stakes (Hasselgreen, 2005) since young learners basically learn a foreign/second language in classrooms. Accordingly, classroom-based assessment plays a crucial role in observing the language behavior, operationalizing it, and making the stakeholders familiar with the attainment of language learning (Brindley, 2003, p. 326). It has many purposes such as defining strengths and weaknesses of existing practices, making a judgment on the curricular components in use, providing feedback for the participants, and giving an overall summary of language achievement (McKay, 2006).

In the literature, classroom assessment may be alternatively regarded as the teacher assessment because language teacher is responsible for guiding the pupils to master language objectives and measuring to what extent these objectives are achieved in the classroom (McKay, 2006, p. 141). According to Hamp-Lyons (2007), “the learner, the teacher, and the classroom” are the fundamental factors in classroom-based assessment (p. 493). In a classroom context, teachers are more engaged in teaching-based assessment activities by designing and conducting language assessment, tracking what has been learnt, and finally providing information about assessment results (Rea-Dickins, 2001, p. 435). In addition, language teachers can “build up a solid and broadly-based understanding of the pupil’s attainment” by observing the students systematically in the classroom (Gipps, 1994, p. 123). Brindley (2003) suggests some guidelines about the classroom-based assessment and evaluation to measure young learners’ language performance more effectively. In line with these guidelines, the assessment techniques and methods can be exemplified as classroom tests, portfolios, self-assessment, observations, conferences, portfolios, peer-assessment, performance assessment, dynamic assessment, and projects (Brown, 2007; Cameron, 2001; McKay, 2006).

There is also a large body of research studies carried out with the aim of illustrating in-class assessment practices in young language learners’ classrooms. For example, Gattullo (2000) found that language teachers used multiple assessment activities including “questioning, correcting, judging, rewarding, observing process, examining product, clarifying, task criteria, and metacognitive questioning” (p. 281). In the Romanian context, Cojocnean (2012) concluded that teachers did not evaluate the students’ performance on the basis of the numerical system. Instead, they assigned “descriptive grades” to the language behaviors (p. 61). Additionally, the study results indicated that young learners should be orally assessed with interactive purposes despite some limitations concerning practicality, consistency, and objectivity of measurement. Teacher assessment practices in YLLs’ classrooms in Slovenia, Croatia, and the Czech Republic were also examined by Brumen, Cagran, and Rixon (2009). The study findings pointed out that the assessment results were reported to parents, students, and teachers as the stakeholders. It was found that teacher-made tests, oral interviews, and observation were commonly used assessment tools and methods while self-assessment and language portfolio were less employed. In Yang (2008), teachers conducted multiple assessment activities to cater for the students’ needs in Taiwanese young learners’ classrooms. According to this study, in-class questioning and observation were frequently administered. Rea-Dickins and Rixon (1999) attempted to describe the relationship between curricular aims and European language teachers’ assessment practices in young learners’ classrooms. They explicated that there was a mismatch between theory and practice. The study showed that traditional tests were commonly used, grammar and lexis were frequently assessed skills, and gap-filling and matching were the mechanic activities used to assess linguistic knowledge in the classroom context.

As regards the language assessment of young learners in Turkey, the framework for the classroom-based assessment at the state schools was extensively shaped in language teaching program developed by MoNE (2013) and revised in 2017. The main methods and techniques are thoroughly elaborated in this program. Accordingly, classical exams aiming at receptive and productive skills, projects,

portfolios, self-and peer-assessment and performance-based assessment are the basic components of classroom assessment for young language learners. In this respect, Yılmaz and Akcan (2012) researched on ELP (European Language Portfolio) and found that it was a helpful teaching and testing tool at the 4th and 5th grade. Likewise, Kırkgöz and Ağçam (2012) examined the 4th and 5th grade written exams administered before and after curricular revision in 2005 in view of 14 question types. In those exams, there were not considerable differences in question types between two implementations related to ELT curriculum revision.

On the whole, research studies have made an attempt to investigate the classroom-based language assessment practices. However, there seems to be little study which has been carried out with the purpose of investigating the relationship between curricular considerations and in-class assessment practice. Accordingly, this study has respectively two main aims: (1) to describe language assessment practices at the 4th grade (A1 Level) and (2) to examine the nexus between theory and practice. In light of these aims, the research questions of the study are given as follows:

1. What are English language assessment and evaluation practices in the 4th grade classrooms at the state primary schools in MoNE?
 - a. What are the purposes of English language assessment at the 4th grade?
 - b. Which skills are assessed by EFL teachers in these classrooms?
 - c. What kinds of English language assessment methods, techniques and tools are employed?
 - d. How are English language assessment results explained to the stakeholders?
 - e. What are the possible strengths and weaknesses of the current English language assessment at this level?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

In this research study, the qualitative research methodology was adopted to collect in-depth data on language assessment practices. Qualitative research is conducted to “investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials” in a specified context (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p. 426). On the basis of qualitative methodology, the descriptive research design was employed to describe YLLs’ assessment setting. Descriptive studies are “concerned with conditions and relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, and effects that are evident” (Best & Khan, 2006, p. 118). In line with this research design, the basic qualitative data collection procedure was closely followed.

2.2. Participants

In this research study, the subject group consists of young language learners (N=166) and English language teachers (N=13) at state primary schools in different districts of Ankara. The participants were selected with convenience sampling in which “an important criterion of sample selection is the convenience of the researcher: members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 95). With respect to YLLs’ demographics, 78 learners (47%) are female, and 88 learners (53%) are male participants. Their age group is between 8 and 11 years ($M=9.6$). On the other hand, 11 EFL teachers (84.62%) are female, and 2 EFL teachers (15.38%) are male. Their teaching experience ranges from 8 to 35 years. In addition, one of the EFL teachers has a MA degree in the field of education.

2.3. Data Collection and Instruments

Focus-group interviews, semi-structured interviews, and classroom-based observation forms were employed to collect qualitative data. These are the techniques used commonly in qualitative research studies (Patton, 2002). During data collection, YLLs' classrooms were observed at first for the purpose of getting evidence on their assessment practices in an authentic setting. In order to throw more light on language assessment process at the 4th grade, focus-group interviews were conducted with the students, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with EFL teachers.

2.3.1. Observation Forms

Observation is a technique to gather data “during actual language lessons or tutorial sessions, primarily by watching, listening, and recording (rather than by asking)” (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 258). Accordingly, it was intended to describe a language assessment environment in the 4th grade classrooms through classroom-based observation. Classroom-based observation form was developed for this study in consonance with the theoretical considerations of English language assessment. With the aim of ensuring the content validity of the observation form, it was asked for two experts' opinions and then reviewed in the light of their feedback. The final version of the observation form (see Appendix 1) was used in 15 classrooms to observe the 4th grade assessment setting for almost 25 class times (a class time: 40 minutes).

2.3.2. Focus-group and Semi-structured Interviews

Following the observation of language assessment settings, focus-group student interviews were conducted with the 4th grade young EFL learners (N=166). Focus-group interview requires researchers to ask the questions directly in a central group (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). This kind of interview is advantageous in terms of time practicality because it gives “a good deal of information in a short time” (McKay, 2006, p. 52). In this research, the interview questions were asked and explained in six focus groups (there were approximately 25-30 students in each group) and the pupils were requested to write down their own answers. As a second step of data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with EFL teachers (N=13) in order to describe the 4th grade language assessment practices from teachers' perspectives. Whereas 12 teachers were interviewed through note-taking, one teacher preferred to submit the interview in a written form. Theoretically, semi structured interview consists of “a set of prepared questions” (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 313). Accordingly, both interview forms include open-ended and closed-ended questions based on the classroom observation findings and adapting the items of the questionnaire devised by Brumen, Cagran, and Rixon (2009). In order to ensure the content validity of data collection, the interview questions were examined by five experts, *two experts in English language teaching and three experts in educational measurement*. In light of the expert feedback, the interview forms were revised and finalized (see Appendix 2).

2.4. Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis which refers to “reading the data over a variety of times, looking for key ideas or topics and labeling these ideas by marginal notes or post-its” (McKay, 2006, p. 57). In consonance with content analysis, the qualitative data gathered through observation forms and interviews were transcribed and comprehensively elaborated at different times. Following that, the basic codes in relation to language testing were identified. After this process, the codes were compared, categorized, and classified. Finally, descriptive statistics (e.g. frequency, percentage) were calculated.

3. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results and discussion of classroom observation and interview data analysis of young learners' language assessment practices. Research findings are explained in line with the research questions of the study. The main question is about *what language assessment and evaluation practices are conducted in the 4th grade classrooms*. In light of this main question, five main constructs, i.e. *language assessment purposes, assessing language skills, language assessment methods, techniques, and tools, language assessment results, and strengths and weaknesses of the existing language assessment*, are broadly discussed in connection with the sub-questions of this research study.

3.1. Language Assessment Purposes

With respect to 13 EFL teachers' responses in semi-structured interviews, it can be stated that EFL teachers mostly administer formative assessment (85%). Hughes (2003) explains that language assessment becomes formative when teachers familiarize themselves with learner development, understand to what extent learners have gained what is taught, and then make necessary arrangements in prospective language learning. According to Rea-Dickins and Gardner (2000), formative assessment is a way of "improving teaching and learning" (p. 217). Along with formative assessment, EFL teachers attempt to summarize overall language learning at the 4th grade (69.23%). Summative assessment holistically describes what instructional objectives have been achieved at the end of the program (Brown, 2004; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007; Gipps, 1994). Besides that, English language teachers carry out the diagnostic assessment (23%) but it is not conducted as commonly as formative and summative assessment. Broadly speaking, English language assessment purposes at the 4th grade are in agreement with the assessment purposes which McKay (2006) defined for YLLs such as diagnosing strengths and weaknesses, making decisions on the program, giving feedback to the stakeholders, and summarizing the success.

3.2. Assessing Language Skills

As pointed out in Table 1, major and minor skills of English language are assessed in YLLs' classrooms with different percentages. Writing (28.8%), vocabulary (26.6%) and speaking (20%) are more commonly assessed language skills in view of classroom-based observation.

Table 1: Assessing Language Skills and Components

	Classroom-based Observation		Semi-structured Interview	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Writing	13	28.8	10	19.61
Speaking	9	20	8	15.69
Listening	1	2.2	8	15.69
Reading	2	4.4	3	5.88
Grammar	4	8.8	7	13.73
Vocabulary	12	26.6	9	17.65
Pronunciation	4	8.8	6	11.76
Total	45	100	51	100

Also, interview results explain that writing (19.61%) and vocabulary (17.65%) are more frequently assessed by EFL teachers in comparison with other skills. In Rea-Dickins and Rixon (1999), lexis is one of the language skills which are largely assessed. Accordingly, it can be stated that vocabulary is taken into consideration as a language component which language teachers extensively assess in YLLs' classrooms. On the other hand, listening (2.2%) is relatively less frequently assessed according to the observation results whereas it is among commonly assessed language skills (15.69%) in semi-structured interviews. In a similar study conducted by Brumen, Cagran and Rixon (2005), listening is a highly ranked language skill in young learner assessment. In the current study, it is seen that reading is not frequently assessed (5.88%) as understood from semi-structured interviews. However, MoNE (2017) puts the emphasis on assessing main language skills. In view of this theoretical perspective, it can be concluded that there may be a slight mismatch between curricular principles and classroom practices in terms of the skills to be assessed.

3.3. Language Assessment Methods, Techniques, and Tools

Table 2 describes a wide range of assessment methods, techniques, and tools employed in YLLs' classrooms at the 4th grade. Classroom-based observation explicates that written examination (41.67%), assignments (16.67%), and teacher observation (16.67%) are the methods used more commonly in YLLs' assessment. In view of semi-structured interviews, EFL teachers mostly use written examination (28.95%), in-class participation, (18.42%) and assignments (15.79%). In focus-group interviews, young learners express that written examination (34.72%), oral examination (20.47%), and performance tasks (16.62%) are mainly employed in their language assessment setting. It is clear that written examination is a language assessment method which is more commonly used at the 4th grade. Rea-Dickins and Rixon (1999) reported similar findings in European context. According to this study, traditional language tests were mainly employed in young learner classrooms.

Table 2: Language Assessment Methods

	Classroom-based Observation		Semi-structured Interview		Focus-group Student Interview	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Written Examination	10	41.67	11	28.95	117	34.72
Oral Examination	-	-	5	13.16	69	20.47
Assignments	4	16.67	6	15.79	41	12.17
Projects	-	-	2	5.26	36	10.68
Performance Tasks	2	8.33	3	7.89	56	16.62
In-class Participation	2	8.33	7	18.42	-	-
Pop-quizzes	1	4.17	2	5.26	-	-
Portfolio Assessment	-	-	2	5.26	7	2.08
Self-assessment	1	4.17	-	-	8	2.37
Peer-assessment	-	-	-	-	3	0.89
Teacher Observation	4	16.67	-	-	-	-
Total	24	100	38	100	337	100

In consonance with the findings obtained through classroom-based observation, teacher observation, as a language assessment method, provides EFL teachers with an opportunity to assess YLLs in a natural setting without distracting them (Cameron, 2001). In a similar vein, written exams and assignments are among the practices of young learner assessment at the Slovenian primary schools (Cojocnean, 2012). Also, Table 2 gives information about less employed assessment methods. More particularly, self-assessment, peer-assessment, portfolio assessment, and pop-quizzes seem to be rarely used in the 4th grade classrooms at state primary schools. This finding shows similarities with the research studies which Yang (2008) and Brumen, Cagran, and Rixon (2009) carried out in different countries to describe how young language learners are assessed. On the other hand, McKay (2006) highlights the importance of self-assessment and peer-assessment which offer young learners to get involved in their own learning. Likewise, Cameron (2001) lists the advantages of self-assessment with respect to learner motivation, teacher-learner interaction and language learning. In addition, MoNE (2013, 2017) underlines the importance of the self-assessment along with other alternative approaches. For that reason, it can be stated that the result of this research study may not be consistent with theoretical aspect of language assessment in ELT curriculum. In relation to portfolio assessment, Yılmaz and Akcan (2012) report the advantages of ELP (the European Language Portfolio) use at the 4th and 5th grade classes such as “raising awareness, goal-tracking, making choices, reflection, and self-assessment” (p. 3). In this regard, implementation of language portfolios in YLLs’ learning context may promote self-assessment practices. Similarly, Shaaban (2005) emphasizes the significant points in the administration of self-assessment (e.g. learner development), peer-assessment (i.e. collaboration), and student portfolio (i.e. learner products) to be used in young learner classrooms. It is obvious that a variety of language assessments methods are in use at the primary schools as the research studies (Brumen, Cagran, & Rixon, 2005; Hasselgreen, 2005) put forward.

Table 3 summarizes what tools are used at the 4th grade in order to assess YLLs. With respect to this table, written exam papers (33.05%), task materials (26.78%), and classical resources (27.62%) are chiefly used by EFL teachers as it is seen from the focus group interviews.

Table 3: Language Assessment Tools

	Focus-group Student Interview		Semi-structured Interview	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Exam Papers	79	33.05	5	45.45
Task Materials	64	26.78	1	9.09
Classical Tools	66	27.62	2	18.18
Language Portfolio	9	3.77	1	9.09
Worksheets	21	8.79	2	18.18
Total	239	100	11	100

Relevantly, EFL teachers point out that they mainly administer written exam papers (45.45%), classical tools (18.18%), and worksheets (18.18%). Since writing is commonly assessed language skill, and written examination is a language assessment method widely used at the 4th grade, it may be reasonable that written exam papers are extensively employed by EFL teachers. According to Cameron (2001), the development of written exams is relatively easier than oral language assessment tasks. In addition to exam papers, classical tools, regarded as stationary items, and task materials are employed by YLLs. In view of target age-group, colorful task materials may be suitable for YLLs’ cognitive

development (Hughes, 2003; McKay, 2006). In both interviews, it is seen that language portfolio is less employed in the 4th grade classrooms. This finding is in agreement with Brumen, Cagran and Rixon (2005) who point out that language portfolio is less used in young learner classrooms. According to Cameron (2001), portfolios provide a connection between language assessment and teaching by enabling young learners to take part in evaluating their own learning.

3.4. Disseminating Language Assessment Results

Another sub-question of this research study was about how language assessment results were explained to the stakeholders. Table 4 holistically displays the way of dissemination of language assessment results to stakeholders, and whether EFL teacher provides feedback in relation to these results.

Table 4: Disseminating Language Assessment Results

Categories		Focus-group Student Interview		Semi-structured Teacher Interview	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Stakeholders	Students	135	78.49	13	72.22
	Parents	30	17.44	2	11.11
	4 th Grade Teacher	7	4.07	3	16.67
	Total	172	100	18	100
Way of dissemination	Written	26	12.09	8	44.44
	Orally	104	48.37	5	27.78
	E-school*	63	29.30	5	27.78
	School Reports	22	10.23	-	-
	Total	215	100	18	100
Feedback	Yes	117	82.39	13	100
	No	25	17.61	-	-
	Total	142	100	13	100

*E-school is a way of making the results public.

In respect of focus group interviews, assessment results are primarily explained to YLLs (78.19%), parents (17.44%), and 4th grade class teachers (4.07) as illustrated in Table 4. According to semi structured interviews, EFL teachers inform young learners (72.22%), parents (11.11%) and 4th grade class teachers (16.67%) about language assessment results. Similarly, Brumen, Cagran and Rixon (2009) and Cojocnean (2012) found that assessment results were mostly explained to parents, students and teachers. These findings show consistency. Whereas young learners state that their language teacher disseminates these results through mainly oral explanations (48.37%) and e-school (29.30%), EFL teachers report that these results are mostly given in written (44.44%) and they also explain them orally (27.78%) and through e-school (27.78%). Furthermore, it is investigated whether the feedback is provided at the end of language assessment in focus group and semi-structured interviews. According to Table 4, young language learners get information on their own learning in line with assessment results. Cameron (2001) claims that feedback should help learners with language learning. Agreeably, Johnstone

(2000) emphasizes that providing feedback to the stakeholders is among the reasons of “good assessment” for YLLs.

3.5. Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Language Assessment

In semi-structured interviews, it was aimed to describe the development, administration, and scoring aspects of the fourth-grade assessment program from EFL teachers’ points of view. Table 5 illustrates the basic strengths and weaknesses of existing language assessment program in light of EFL teachers’ responses.

Table 5: Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Language Assessment

Strengths	<i>f</i>	%	Weaknesses	<i>f</i>	%
Objectivity	3	42.86	Practicality (time)	3	50
Content Validity	3	42.86	Reliability	2	33.33
Practicality (development)	1	14.29	Exam Anxiety	1	16.67
Total	7	100	Total	6	100

Accordingly, the main strengths of this program are objectivity (42.86%), content validity (42.86%) and practicality (14.29%). To take an example, Teacher 11 states that language assessment materials for YLLs are practical in terms of development. “*They are easy to construct. ...*” (Teacher 11). On the other hand, EFL teachers have difficulty in allocating enough time for assessing YLLs (50%). As Teacher 2 explained, language assessment is objective, but more time is required for a precise assessment. “*The weakness is time. The strength of the written exams is objectivity.*” (Teacher 2). As it is seen, the current assessment is practical in terms of the development; however, EFL teachers need to allocate more time for young learner assessment at the 4th grade. In addition, Teacher 6 and Teacher 3 throw light upon the reliability issue. Reliability in language assessment is concerned with providing accurate measures of language performance (Douglas, 2010). “*Product portfolio provides more subjective evaluation than written exams.*” (Teacher 6) and “*... Actually, I want to make A and B groups for reliability but it causes difficulty in practice. This decreases the reliability....*” (Teacher 3). In view of teacher responses, the reliability of language assessment at the 4th grade may be affected by the factors of “objectiveness” and “practicality”. For that reason, portfolio assessment may be less administered.

4. Conclusion

Language assessment in young learner classrooms requires more sophisticated assessment skills since young learners have more individual and peculiar characteristics in comparison with other age-groups. In light of this perspective, this study attempts to describe the existing assessment practices in the 4th grade classrooms at the state primary schools in Turkey. To achieve this attempt, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the 4th grade young language learners and EFL teachers in MoNE in line with the qualitative research methodology. The study results show that YLLs are mainly assessed with formative purposes. Summative assessment is also conducted at this level. In view of language skills, writing and vocabulary are more commonly assessed by EFL teachers. Following that, speaking is largely assessed as a productive skill as emphasized in language teaching curriculum devised by MoNE (2013, 2017). Within classroom-based assessment practices, written examination is regarded as the main language assessment method. Similarly, homework assignments are widely employed to assess

YLLs' performance along with teacher observation and assessment tasks. In agreement with these methods, exam papers, classical tools, and task materials are used as language assessment tools. Although MoNE (2013, 2017) gives importance to self-assessment, peer-assessment and portfolio assessment, these methods seem to be less used in the 4th grade classrooms. With respect to language assessment results, they are primarily reported to the young learners in written or oral ways, and YLLs get feedback on their language learning at the end of language assessment. In view of existing language assessment program (MoNE, 2013), objectivity and content validity are considered as the strengths of language assessment at the 4th grade whereas the allotted time may not be adequate for administering assessment practices. Additionally, it is required to ensure reliability in the current assessment program by promoting objectivity and practicality. Broadly speaking, the reflection of theoretical considerations on classroom practices has been examined in this study. The basic findings show that there is a nexus between theory and practice to some degree, but it should be extended through alternative and language-use oriented assessment methods, techniques and tools. Not only does this argument summarize teacher-assessment practices in young learner classrooms, but also provides decision-makers with feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the language assessment program (MoNE, 2013). As a further research study, English language assessment practices at other levels of young learner education may be described and examined. Also, the description of English language assessment practices may be enriched through the involvement of other stakeholders, i.e. administrators, policy makers, and teacher educators.

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Appendix A. Observation Form

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

The Aim of Observation:		Date:/...../.....
Participants / Class:		Time:	
Physical Setting:		School:	
		Teacher:	
		Observer:	
Unit & Subject:			

The Assessment & Evaluation Methods, Types, Activities & Materials in EFL Classroom	COMMENTS & OPINIONS

Appendix B. Interview Questions

Interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, Turkish, but English version of interview questions are given in this appendix.

B.1. Semi-structured Teacher Interview Questions

You teach English as a foreign language at state schools. During teaching English, you conduct assessment and evaluation activities to assess your students' foreign language performance.

- 1. What kinds of activities do you administer in your classroom to assess and evaluate your students' English language performance? In view of these activities, what kinds of assessment and evaluation tools do you employ in the classroom?** (Written examination, oral examination, portfolio, performance tasks, projects, homework, self-assessment, peer-assessment etc.) (Written exam papers, worksheets, colourful papers and materials, language portfolio etc.)
- 2. What are the main purposes of assessment and evaluation you conduct in your classroom?** (Diagnostic, Formative, Summative)
- 3. What skills do you basically assess in your classroom through these assessment activities?** (Writing, Speaking, Listening, Reading, Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation)
- 4. In order to assess your students' English language performance in a reliable, valid and objective way, what factors do you take into consideration in development, administration, and scoring of assessment tools?** (How do you develop? What do you give attention in administration? Do you use any answer keys or rubrics in scoring?)
- 5. How and to whom do you explain assessment results in your lessons (except for e-school)? Do you give feedback on the results?**

6. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment activities, conducted with the aim of assessing the students' English language performance, in terms of usefulness? (Time, Cost, Mastery, Objectivity, Reliability, Validity)

B.2. Focus-group Student Interview Questions

You learn English as a foreign language in your school. While you learn English, your teacher conducts the activities in which s/he assesses your learning and gives scores at the end of assessment.

- 1. What kinds of assessment activities does your teacher administer in the classroom to give you scores?** (Written examination, oral examination, portfolio, performance tasks, projects, homework, self-assessment, peer-assessment etc.)
- 2. What kinds of tools does your teacher employ in administration of these activities?** (Written exam papers, worksheets, colourful papers and materials, language portfolio etc.)
- 3. To whom does your teacher explain the assessment results?** (to you, your friends, your parents etc.)
- 4. How does your teacher explain the assessment results to you?** (in written, verbally, e-school etc.)
- 5. Does your teacher give information about your strengths and weaknesses at the end of these activities?**

Devlet okullarındaki 4. sınıflarda İngiliz dili ölçme ve değerlendirme uygulamaları

Öz

Çocuk yaşta dil öğrenenler, kendi çevrelerini anlamlandırarak İngilizce öğrenmelerini yapılandırmada önemli bir rol oynarlar. Bu sebeple, İngilizce sınıflarında çocukları ölçmek ve değerlendirmek için uygun ve özel ölçme araçlarının ve tekniklerinin kullanılması gerekmektedir. Bu bağlamda, çocukların karakteristik özelliklerine ve sınıf deneyimlerine aşina olmak gerekir. Dolayısı ile bu çalışma Milli Eğitim Bakanlığına bağlı 4. Sınıflarda uygulanan dil ölçme ve değerlendirme etkinliklerini araştırmayı ve müfredat unsurları ile uygulamada olan etkinlikler arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda dil ölçme süreçleri hakkında derinlemesine bilgi toplamak için görüşme ve sınıf-temelli gözlem yapılmıştır. Temel bulgular İngilizce öğretmenlerinin 4. Sınıfta çoğunlukla biçimlendirme (formatif) amacı ile ölçme ve değerlendirme yaptığını göstermektedir. Dil becerileri olarak yazma ve kelime bilgisi daha yaygın olarak ölçülmektedir. Ayrıca, yazılı sınavlar ve ödevler çocuk yaşta dil öğrenenlerin sınıflarında geniş ölçüde uygulanmaktadır. Uygulanan ölçme programının en güçlü tarafının objektiflik olduğu düşünülmektedir. Öte yandan, dil ölçme ve değerlendirme için ayrılan zaman çocukları kapsamlı olarak ölçmek için yeterli olmayabilir. Bu araştırma, devlet ilkokullarının 4. Sınıf düzeyindeki İngilizce ölçme ve değerlendirme sürecinde müfredat gerekliliklerinin kuramsal ve pratik biçimde uygulanması hakkında derinlemesine bilgi sunmaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sınıf temelli ölçme; çocuk yaşta dil öğrenenleri ölçme; dil ölçme uygulamaları

AUTHOR BIODATA

İskender Hakkı Sarıgöz is an associate professor at Gazi University, ELT Department. He holds MA and Ph. D degrees from Gazi University. His professional interests are teacher training, methodology, interdisciplinary dimensions of ELT, and translation. He has lectured at Gazi University ELT Department for 35 years. He has also lectured at some universities in Turkey and Europe (Erasmus) including Anadolu University DELTTP.

Fatma Nur Fişne is a research assistant at Gazi University, English Language Teaching Program. She is currently pursuing her PhD in ELT. Her research interests include English language assessment and evaluation, teaching English to young learners, and English language teacher education.