Investigating high school teachers' digital practices and alignment with the EFL curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the proficiency of English teachers working at high schools in Türkiye in digital literacy and their adherence to the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum concerning digital integration. Utilizing a descriptive case study, the research focuses on a sample comprising three EFL teachers working in various school contexts. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus-group interview. Inductive thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data, and key themes were identified. The findings reveal that teachers consistently integrate digital literacy into their practices, using various tools to enhance student engagement and collaboration. Furthermore, despite a centralized curriculum that limits flexibility, the participants in the current study make an effort to revise and refine their pedagogical approaches to accommodate the various needs of learners by utilizing their digital literacy, touching upon issues such as e-safety and disinformation. The study suggests important implications regarding differentiated curriculum materials based on school types and more flexibility granted for teachers.

Introduction

The 21st century has brought many changes to our lives, technology being one of the most fundamental. Many fields, including education, have undergone revolutions, and technology has led to new perspectives in teaching and learning. While technology is integrated into learning/teaching environments, new concerns regarding technology integration have been raised. The effective use of technology, the skills and knowledge required for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) attitudes, accessibility, restrictions, and ethics are some of the issues discussed in the field. Therefore, it is of great value to investigate whether technology emerges as a tool to aid classroom applications making learning suit the 21st-century technology-oriented ways.

Based on the rapid changes brought about by technology, the issue of digital literacy (DL) has become an area of great concern and even controversy in classrooms. A more digital world calls for effective and active engagement for children, an aspect greatly enhanced by the fact that children are coming up in an intensely technological world. That is the main reason

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why kids need digital literacy skills and why curricula of K12 education must be integrated with various curriculum requirements to help children develop the specific DL skills they need.

Literature Review

Digital literacy of EFL teachers

In today's world, due to technological improvements, the position of EFL teachers is quite different from how it was previously. In the classroom, digital literacy, which is the capacity to make critical and effective use of technology, is essential (Ray, 2019). For this reason, EFL teachers can bring digital literacy into the language learning process and can contribute positively to teaching and learning. EFL teachers are also expected to have the required level of DL and skills in using various digital platforms. Teachers' skills development can draw support from using technology since it allows teachers to use more than one skill set in their lessons (Hamidah, 2021). This highlights the importance of teachers developing the technical competence to use ICT tools and a critical understanding of how digital resources can support language learning.

Nevertheless, there are findings that not every EFL teacher believes to be in a position to include digital literacy in their instructional practices. While some educators are proficient in using digital resources, yet others have difficulties like lack of equipment or inadequate training (Preis & Geyer, 2023) and poor access to the Internet (Zhang, 2023). In a similar vein, Eryansyah et al. (2019) argue that resource and infrastructure utilization are a significant aspect of developing a literate society, but limited access to technology creates barriers to teachers' and students' willingness to be entirely digitally literate. In fact, the lack of adequate training support is one of the reasons restraining the digital tool integration of the teachers; hence, such teacher confidence needs to be more adequately developed. This concurs with Pertiwi's (2022) findings, where she notes that even though university students have a positive impression of the incorporation of digital means in EFL classes, a significant number of instructors are hesitant concerning the technologies, especially those that are relatively new and called for high technical competence. As a result, there is a great need for EFL teachers to adapt in several areas, including DL. Teachers need to get involved in continuous professional development, receive institutional reinforcement, and possess the tools for teaching with technological resources.

EFL curriculum and ICT integration

The use of ICT in teaching EFL has increasingly been called for as a means of improving learners' educational experiences and learning outcomes. The use of ICT in the EFL context not only broadens the range of available teaching resources but also increases students' interest and activity. Using ICT makes the acquisition of the English language enjoyable and effective, as interactive school sessions and the real usage of English are promoted (Arif & Handayani, 2021; Hidayati, 2022; Sulistiyo et al., 2022). Furthermore, with the help of ICT, learners can avail themselves of a wide range of materials that help improve their language skills (Sulistiyo et al., 2022).

Apart from increased motivation and engagement levels, ICT integration in EFL contexts also helps achieve individual learning goals. Nowadays, due to various means, students can interact with the content at different levels and in different forms that meet their personal

needs. This is very useful in language learning because learners differ in proficiency and learning approaches (Fitri et al., 2024; Hidayati, 2022).

On the other hand, teachers' roles in the successful implementation of ICT in EFL activities can be seen as a challenge. Teachers' Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is one of the components that determine the success of ICT in the classroom; therefore, teachers' positive attitudes towards the use of ICT improve the learning conditions of the students (Rahmaniah & Setiawan, 2022). However, the challenges such as the lack of adequate training and resources must be highlighted (Guerreo, 2023; Wijaya, 2022). Due to these challenges suggested in the literature, many teachers are uncomfortable and worried about using technology for instruction because they are not knowledgeable about the tools or are undertrained (Nur et al., 2021; Wijaya, 2022). Furthermore, the availability of ICT resources also differs from one education system to another, leading to inequities in language teaching quality (Dang et al., 2013; Guerreo, 2023).

When it comes to ICT integration, Türkiye also attaches great importance to DL and its integration into the EFL Curriculum (Ministry of National Education-MoNE, 2018). The primary purpose for embedding ICT in the EFL curriculum is to promote student interest and effectiveness in learning. A wide array of research shows that students' participation and motivation for language learning may be raised through the use of digital tools and resources (Ağcam & Babanoğlu, 2020; Coşkun, 2015). This is consistent with an international initiative in education that aims to give learners more control over their learning by making it more technology-augmented (Dilber, 2023; Kose & Ünsal, 2021). The implementation and sustainability of these technological initiatives, however, rely on the existing level of ICT use in classroom instruction by the teachers (Aksoy, 2020; Karabuga & İlin, 2019). Regarding ICT integration, it has been established that many EFL teachers in Türkiye still have problems regarding technology skills-related challenges and resource requirements that can inhibit the successful use of ICT in teaching languages (Hatipoğlu, 2016). Given this situation, it is critical to develop and offer suitable ICT and other training programs for teachers to be able to use technology effectively in their teaching (Karabuga & İlin, 2019; Solak & Bayar, 2015).

Curriculum fidelity of Turkish EFL teachers

Curriculum fidelity is the degree to which teachers adhere to the planned curriculum, ensuring that what is outlined on paper is effectively implemented in the classroom (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Various factors influence how faithfully teachers can implement the curriculum, particularly in Türkiye, where unique educational dynamics are at play (Bümen et al., 2014; Doğuş & Tabak, 2023; Süer & Kınay, 2022). Many factors shape the way teachers apply curricula, including their characteristics, the institutional environment, and external pressures (Doğuş & Tabak, 2023). A teacher's sense of self-efficacy, motivation, and the quality of their training are deeply connected to how closely they follow the curriculum. However, the challenges in the classroom mainly result in teachers adapting the curriculum, which can either improve or inhibit the teaching process, depending on the circumstances (Ercan & Çubukçu, 2023; Shawer, 2010).

In Türkiye, another issue to be considered is systematic pressures such as high-stakes testing. Because standardized exams play such a central role, teachers often feel pressured to focus on test preparation at the expense of a well-rounded education, which can undermine the integrity of the curriculum (Bümen et al., 2014; Doğuş & Tabak, 2023). Moreover, the centralized structure of Türkiye's education system restricts teachers' ability to creatively adjust the curriculum to cater to their students' requirements (Süer & Kınay, 2022). Despite the availability of digital sources, EFL teachers in Türkiye continue to rely extensively on printed

textbooks, particularly in language courses (Işık, 2013; Zohrabi, 2011), which according to Şahin (2014) constrains the possibility of implementing more creative teaching methods.

Besides the presence of tools to benefit from, a teacher's experience also influences how faithfully they stick to the curriculum. Research shows that more experienced teachers are often more comfortable making modifications to fit their students' needs, but this can lead to discrepancies between what was intended and what is actually taught (Gürbüz & Şen, 2023). Furthermore, professional development and institutional support are essential to enhancing curriculum fidelity (McMaster et al., 2020). Training programs that help teachers balance following the curriculum and adapting it ensure both fidelity and responsiveness to students (Shawer, 2010). A supportive environment that reduces standardized testing pressure and promotes teacher autonomy can improve curriculum implementation (Bümen et al., 2014).

ICT integration in classes is a domain the MoNE (2018) concentrates on. Most of the literature reviewed has reported a gap between the enacted and the intended curriculum (Morgan & Xu, 2011). More importantly, the reason for favoring or omitting certain materials in the coursebooks, where EFL teachers are to utilize their DL, has not received enough attention. Previous research has primarily focused on the integration of ICT in education (Kızılet & Özmen, 2017), but DL encompasses a broader concept. As such, the current study aims to develop a more comprehensive approach to the use of technology in education.

1) Do the EFL teachers working at the secondary level utilize their digital literacy in their classes? If they do, to what extent do they utilize their digital literacy in their classes?
2) Do the EFL teachers working at the secondary level align with the curriculum regarding integrating digital tools into classroom practices? If they do, to what extent do they align with the curriculum?

Methodology

Research design

This study is aimed at developing a rich understanding of the EFL teachers' use of DL and their alignment with the curriculum. A qualitative research method was adopted in the current study. Among qualitative research methods, the present study is a case study that aims to analyze a unique case in depth (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Case studies are considered to be common methods, especially in educational research (Yin, 2014). According to Heigham and Croker (2009), their focus on describing a particular learning and teaching process through a single or a few cases contextualizes case studies.

Among case studies which are classified into several types by Yin (2014), this is a descriptive case study as it presents a detailed and contextualized picture of a specific phenomenon. The practices of high school EFL teachers regarding DL and the use of ICT tools and their compliance with the curriculum are the topics described thoroughly for each participant in the current study.

In the present study, three cases (Emre, Uğur, and Ece- *pseudonyms*) are analyzed in depth Each case is specific regarding their mindset for teaching considering the context they are teaching in and their experiences.

Participants

This study was conducted with three English teachers working at different types of secondary state schools. The primary eligibility criteria required individuals to be delivering lessons at

high schools at the time of the research. High school level classes were chosen as the research settings since the use of digital literacy and technology integration could clearly be observed at this level's EFL curriculum. The three participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling as it required choosing the participants based on their knowledge and experience in a specific topic (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The participants in the current study were also selected based on the degree of their perceived digital literacy. In addition, considering their at least five years of experience, they were considered to be knowledgeable about the EFL curriculum in Türkiye.

All the participants (two males, one female) are over 30 years old and have over five years of experience. The first male teacher, Emre, is 39 years old. He is an experienced English teacher with over 10 years of teaching practice. He worked at a vocational high school for about eight years. He is currently teaching at a qualified high school which accepts students according to the grades they receive in national exams, and the use of technology is highly valued at his school.

The other male teacher, Uğur, is 35 years old and has over 10 years of experience working in a socioeconomically advantaged district of Istanbul. He has a special interest in technology integration in classroom applications while teaching English. His school is classified as a 'qualified high school' because students with high points in the national high school entrance exam attend this school.

The female teacher, Ece, is 34 years old and has been working in a socioeconomically disadvantaged district of Istanbul for the last five years, and she has prior technology-enhanced teaching training. Ece is an EFL teacher with an IB (international baccalaureate) educator certificate. Her school has two parts: Anatolian high school (students with higher GNO can enroll in) and multi-program high school (students with lower GNO can enroll in). She has lessons with both school types.

Data collection tools

In line with the qualitative nature of the study, one-to-one and focus-group interviews were conducted respectively with the participants. First, a semi-structured interview guide was prepared by the researchers (Appendix 1); the questions in the interview were formed based on the aims of the study. In order to be able to get richer data, the interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants, which was Turkish. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes on a video conference application and was recorded upon receiving the consent of the participants.

After each one-to-one interview, a focus-group interview which lasted around 60 minutes, addressing the same questions was conducted for several purposes. Firstly, focus-group interviews were conducted as they may reveal some findings that may be missed in individual settings (Gillham, 2005). Furthermore, the synergy and commonality in the group may indicate important implications (Gillham, 2005). The second purpose was to increase the credibility of the findings achieved in individual interviews (Morgan, 1997) and to contribute to the depth and breadth of the results obtained from individual and focus-group interviews (Crabtree et al., 1993).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis, which is the identification, analysis, and patterning of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was adopted for this research study. The process of the analysis started with the

transcription of around 180-minute recordings. The data were transcribed by speech-to-text software, and the transcription was checked by the researchers for the correctness of the transcription. Through the bottom-up organization, the data were inductively analyzed and open-coded (Creswell, 2014). After iterative readings, initial codes emerged in the data. So as to ensure inter-coder reliability, the codes were agreed on by the three researchers after cross-checking all the codes. Finally, these initial codes were aggregated into categories, and major themes were induced.

Heigham and Croker's (2009) several criteria for trustworthiness have been addressed in the current study. To start with, to ensure trustworthiness, the data from both individual and focus-group interviews were compared and contrasted**.** In addition, the transcriptions along with the codes and the themes were sent to the participants for member checking, and they were all confirmed by the participants. Furthermore, the participants, the context, and the analysis process were described in detail to provide a thick description.

Findings

The data from the interviews were analyzed inductively and yielded the themes and codes in Table 1. Through inductive analysis three themes emerged; the first two themes in the table address the first research question while the third theme provides insights for the second research question. In the following parts, the findings regarding each research question are presented case by case.

Table 1. *Themes and related codes emerging in the interview dataset*

Themes	Codes
Motivation to use ICT tools	authentic materials source availability, accessibility, grading, user-friendliness
Practicing DL in the classroom	disinformation, fostering creativity, security, safety, anonymity, collaboration, learner characteristics
Adherence to the curriculum	readiness, cyclical curriculum, loaded curriculum, unsuitable books, teacher flexibility

Findings related to the research question 1

The first research question of the study seeks to find out whether the participants utilize their digital literacy and to what extent they integrate it in their classes. The analysis of the data reveals three themes; *motivation to use ICT tools*, *practicing DL in the classroom*, and *adherence to the curriculum*.

Emre

Motivation to use ICT tools emerges as a key theme in this study, highlighting the various factors that lead the participants to engage with technology in educational settings. To start with, it is evident in the interviews that Emre is quite prone to utilize digital tools in the classroom, and the possibility of benefitting from authentic materials poses a great motivation for him to make use of ICT tools as he states: *"We can say that the use of technology, in terms of teaching English, is truly valuable as it provides the students with authentic, real life-like alternative sources."* He goes on to highlight the importance of authenticity by criticizing the EFL books that are used at state schools in Türkiye as follows; *"kids should face real content, real pronunciation, and real life-like scenarios, books should be loaded with videos or listening content."* With this shortcoming in the EFL books at state schools, he turns to ICT tools to expose his students to authentic English pronunciation.

Even though he holds the idea that *"the fact that there are not interactive whiteboards at all schools is a huge factor which lessens the use of listening materials,"* the availability of interactive books on the material website of MoNE is an excellent impetus for him in terms of ICT integration.

Besides the use of such online materials, Emre also utilizes ICT tools such as Kahoot or Quizzes in his lessons for educational purposes, and he is of the idea that such tools make great ways to assess students' learning. He believes that putting the exam questions onto Kahoot could be an efficient way of administering a quiz in the classroom. Besides Kahoot, another common tool he makes use of to provide up-to-date sources is YouTube. Thanks to YouTube, he states he can provide visual content according to the content of the day.

In addition, Emre mentions that especially during the lockdown period of the pandemic, he prefers to communicate with his students via email as he thinks it will help them teach how to write emails or attach documents to their emails. He also encourages students to post under a thread on the Instagram page of an Erasmus project or upload their projects onto their Instagram page to communicate their ideas with people within and outside Türkiye. Furthermore, to foster students' creativity, he sometimes makes videos in the classroom himself as a model and asks students to make their own videos. Regarding this practice, he states:

> I assign homework in which they make videos and ask if any of the students can edit a video, and I grade them as homework or projects. I once asked them to interview some tourists in Istanbul, video record it and assign it as project homework.

While motivation plays a critical role in encouraging the use of ICT tools, *practicing DL in the classroom* emerges as another theme. We can understand from these comments that Emre gives the students a floor where they can use their creativity even outside the classroom. Regarding the disinformation aspect of DL, however, when Emre is inquired about whether he does anything to increase students' awareness of disinformation, he admits not doing much about it even though he acknowledges the significance of disinformation awareness. In the interview, he states that he only suggests websites for pronunciation and good dictionaries.

Uğur

It is evident in the interviews that Uğur necessitates the use of digital tools in his lessons. Regarding *motivation to use ICT tools*, firstly, he states that digital tools provide practicality in many aspects. For example, he uploads classroom materials and homework on Google Classroom, which makes accessibility easier for both the teachers and the students. Moreover, he suggests that better coordination is ensured thanks to digital tools in managing the groups, making announcements, evaluating, and sending feedback to students. Confidentiality is another factor in his usage of digital tools. The tools he has selected to use in his classes protect the confidentiality of the students. The students are not seen in the videos since they can create their own avatars. He expresses that *"anonymity is an important issue and teachers should find different ways to ensure that."* He elaborates that especially in speaking performances in which students may feel uncomfortable, digital tools give the students an opportunity to interact with the teacher one-to-one.

Digital tools may also serve as a learning environment for the students, as Uğur indicates in the interviews. Besides enabling students to practice the subjects that have been covered during class time, group/peer works may pave the way for learning. He holds the idea that "*even a simple application like Kahoot may be used for collaborative learning."* Regarding the improvement of learning through digital tools, he states:

> When students are involved in groups in demanding tasks which require the use of digital tools, they learn from each other supporting their collaboration skills and contributing to their learning.

In line with these motives, Uğur practices DL in various facets. To start with, Google Classroom is the most frequent Web tool utilized by Uğur for the practicality, evaluation, and effectiveness of the tool. In addition, the Web 2.0 tool Voki is a convenient tool which serves some important purposes, as Uğur suggests;

> Voki provides an excellent opportunity for creativity and confidentiality. Students can create their avatars by giving them physical appearance features such as hair, eyes, etc., and voice their character. In particular tasks, students are asked to share their ideas and make a speech or presentation. Voki, in that sense, contributes to both their creativity and language skills in English. As they do not appear in the videos, their confidentiality is also assured.

The analysis of the interviews with Uğur also reveals utterances within the theme of practicing DL in the classroom. As noted earlier, DL also involves raising awareness about disinformation. However, as Uğur indicates, which is also confirmed by Ece and Emre, neither the curriculum nor the coursebooks refer to disinformation. Nevertheless, the participants try to touch on this issue as they attach importance to disinformation. With this object in mind, Uğur has even applied to The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) for a research grant with his students. In this project, the students are required to scan for disinformation on internet sites or publications which are claimed to provide content for teaching English. Uğur believes that this project will help the students use the internet and other sources consciously, and select the correct information.

Moreover, Uğur, as an attempt to prevent disinformation, also emphasizes the safe use of the internet and digital tools during his classes. He realizes this in two ways. Firstly, at the beginning of the term, he explicitly gives instructions on the issue and reminds the students of some of the guidelines. Furthermore, he asks the students to mention the resources that they use for an assignment or a performance to make sure that students can select appropriate sources to be prepared.

Ece

From the interviews conducted with Ece, her *motivation to use ICT tools* is also evident. This motive of hers is revealed during the discussions of the use of these tools because of online

education during the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasizes the fact that *"it is easy to access limitless resources online when teaching English."* Furthermore, ease of use is another motivation for her to use ICT tools as they grant access to checking assignments and assessment. She reports that *"I am using tools such as ZipGrade and Google Drive to collect assignments, to give feedback and to grade them and these tools require less effort from you to carry out your responsibilities."* Further analysis of the data reveals another theme which is the ways of *practicing DL in the classroom*. Referring to this issue, Ece, in line with Uğur, first comments on the lack of reference to this skill in the course books, but she endeavors to integrate her own knowledge of the topic into her lessons. Regarding this, she states:

> E-safety is crucial. However, the curriculum has no part allocated for this issue. That's why, at the beginning of each school year, I personally talk about the e-safety rules, the importance of anonymity in online environments, and respecting each other.

Additionally, she informs her students about differentiating what is genuine and what is fake in online environments, which is called disinformation. In this regard, she says:

> Unfortunately, there is no mention of this topic of disinformation in our books, but I provide a general guideline for doing research and talking about disinformation, misinformation, and plagiarism. I suggest some online tools that they can use and should not use.

Besides trying to increase awareness about the disinformation, how Ece emphasizes the effect of learner characteristics on utilizing digital literacy particularly emerges to be a significant finding as can be seen below:

> No matter how encouraged I am to integrate ICT tools into my lessons and try to foster DL skills in the classroom, I realize that I am broadly affected by the attitude of my students. There are some classes where I use these tools efficiently as my students are also keen on technology, but in some others, the interactive board is used just like a one-dimensional whiteboard.

Findings related to the research question 2

The second research question of the study aims to explore whether and to what extent secondary-level EFL teachers align with the curriculum's mandate for integrating digital tools into classroom practices. Major codes found in the analysis regarding adherence to the curriculum are readiness, cyclical curriculum, loaded curriculum, unsuitable books, and teacher flexibility. The findings regarding the theme of adherence to the curriculum are presented case by case below.

Emre

It is evident in the interviews that Emre, unlike the other two participants, favors strict compliance with the curriculum, and in this regard, he states:

> If we want a standard education and equality, teachers should not have any flexibility. If there are one million English teachers, it means one million different classes. In order to create standards in a country, I am of the idea that there should be standard education and curriculum.

In the interview, he also highlights the importance of this by stating that the students will suffer when they change teachers the following year or semester if different teachers teach different content. However, despite having stern ideas on this issue, he acknowledges that there are some preconditions for such strictness, and there are times when it is not possible to abide by the curriculum totally. In this regard, he states: *"The readiness of students ought to be tested properly and the content of the curriculum needs to be adjusted in a better way to fit the levels of the students and the schools"*.

As can be understood from what Emre states, the content in the curriculum makes it difficult for teachers to adhere to the curriculum. Regarding the content, he raises two problems. The first one is related to the design of EFL books. He believes that since *"all the books at*

MoNE start with A1 level, when they start, especially project schools with preparatory classes, they do not meet the students' needs,". Therefore, teachers need to go out of the curriculum since students have to be supported with extra materials. He also adds "*Since the content is too simple for eleventh graders, they are really bored in the classroom.*".

Another vital problem that Emre mentions is that the same curriculum is followed by vocational schools, pilot schools, and regular high schools. Having worked at a vocational school for a long time, he thinks that *"none of the students who studied there were at a level to understand the content."* In such cases, he suggests teachers adapt the content according to the students' levels.

Uğur

Regarding *adherence to the curriculum*, Uğur mentions that he makes an effort to comply with the curriculum. To exemplify, he always executes tasks such as video blogs and e-portfolio entries placed at the end of the units in the course books and mentioned specifically in the curriculum. He believes that the EFL curriculum and the books have some attempts to promote the use of ICT and DL; however, these attempts may not lead to fruitful results due to the limited sources available, which necessitates teachers to search for extra suitable materials which are digital and interactive. Uğur further highlights the shortcomings of a centralized curriculum in terms of ICT integration as follows;:

> The main problem with the curriculum and the books is that they are all centralized and uniform throughout Türkiye regardless of the school types and regions. Especially, in qualified schools, students have the potential to improve themselves in both English and digital skills. In vocational schools, on the other hand, the needs and the abilities of the students may differ substantially.

As can be concluded from Uğur's opinions, the curriculum makes it clear for teachers to integrate the use of ICT tools and DL into their classroom practices. Yet, the sources and the facilities supplied are insufficient and may not fit well into a specific context. As stated by other participants, as well, flexibility may be an efficient way to overcome this problem.

Uğur concludes that ICT tools may support teachers' development to a great extent as well as students' creativity and collaboration, DL, and language skills.

Ece

Concerning compliance with the curriculum, Ece raises a similar concern with the other two participants as she thinks that the curriculum that she is to teach is loaded and not suitable for her students' English language level. Regarding this, she states "*I cannot see how possible it is to take a student from A1 and finish the educational year with B1 with only five hours of English lessons in the 9th grade.*"

She also makes specific comments regarding compliance to curriculum, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and school lockdowns. Feeling the need to diverge from the curriculum to cover the topics which were not possibly learned thoroughly in the previous year, she believes in the necessity for a comprehensive revision by stating *I have noticed a huge gap in students' English knowledge. So, starting from scratch might be good but it takes time to cover language units.*

Another issue related to the loaded curriculum problem addressed by Ece is teachers' flexibility in implementing the curriculum in the classroom:

> We are expected to cover everything written in the curriculum, but this is not realistic. I strongly believe that teachers should be flexible and adjust the curriculum according to their students' needs.

In order for a curriculum to be effective and applicable, Ece further articulates that teachers, as well as program designers, policymakers, and other stakeholders, should be

included in the curriculum design procedures as teachers are the ones who know their students and respond to their needs. Otherwise, the curriculum may become redundant and inapplicable.

Discussion

This study aims to examine the practices of high school ELT teachers regarding DL utilization, the use of ICT tools, and their compliance with the curriculum. The participants have been found to have similar views and experiences in using their DL in the classroom via various digital sources. The reason for this expected finding may possibly result from their high level of perceived DL and the use of technology both in their classroom practices and their daily lives. It can be concluded from the data that participating teachers are aware of the importance of DL and the opportunities which DL provides for the students. From that perspective, the results are compatible with Garcia and Weiss (2017) who also address the significance of survival in this digitalized world. In addition, it may be inferred that teachers' role expands to cover DL and technology competence and the participating teachers consider DL integration, and the use of ICT tools as an indispensable part of their practices in the EFL context. This finding corroborates what Su (2023) postulates as it is now teachers' daily classroom practice to integrate DL and the use of ICT tools to attune to the digital era.

The participants in the current study use various ICT tools and attach importance to utilizing DL in their classrooms. They integrate DL and technology for a variety of purposes (Belshaw, 2011; Payton & Hague, 2010) such as fostering creativity thanks to Voki and video-editing. By utilizing platforms like Kahoot, YouTube, and Google Classroom, the teachers actively seek to create interactive, meaningful, and immersive learning environments encouraging student participation and fostering digital literacy skills, which is in line with the findings by Arif and Handayani (2021) and Hamidah's (2021). In addition, especially in demanding tasks, the participants ask the students to work in groups and help each other, which contributes to collaboration and communication skills, as also found in the studies by Kwok and Yang (2017) and Wichadee and Pattanapichet (2018).

Another significant finding of the study is that the participants also agree on important components of DL such as confidentiality, e-safety, and disinformation even though such components are not addressed in the curriculum. What further enhances the noteworthiness of the findings is the participants' endeavors to integrate DL into their lessons regardless of their types of schools at socioeconomically various contexts. This unexpected finding illustrates how teachers can extend their role beyond prescribed objectives to develop students' critical digital literacy skills. This aligns with the findings of Pertiwi (2022), who notes that even when teachers are hesitant about new technologies, they often appreciate the importance of digital literacy in preparing students for the future.

Furthermore, participants of this present study also emphasize the ease-of-use aspect of ICT tools in their classes corroborating the study by Chapelle and Sauro (2019). Besides being practical, the participants confirm the convenience that ICT tools provide for instruction (Agufana, 2021). Additionally, in line with what Looi et al. (2020) find out, the participants comment on the fact that these tools allow them to access various sources that are helpful both to them and to the students. Concerning that, another important finding confirming previous research is that the participants state they are able to reach and use authentic tools with their students whenever they want (Otto, 2019). As the participants of this study are EFL teachers, it is also crucial to find ways for practical assessments, and to this end, each participant has found effective digital ways of evaluating students. This finding is also consistent with the findings

of Owan et al. (2023) who find that teachers benefit from digital tools in terms of assessment and evaluation.

The second question of this present research aims to shed light on the extent the participant teachers adhere to the curriculum that necessitates digital integration in the classroom. The in-depth individual and focus-group interviews unveil significant findings as the participants put great effort into integrating digital tools into their lessons both when it is prescribed in the curriculum, and more importantly when they feel the need even though it is not required in the coursebook. This finding contradicts the previous findings by Işık (2013) and Şahin (2014) in which the authors find out that the participants do not tend to use ICT tools in their lessons, rather they favor sticking solely to their coursebooks. The data from the current study further illustrates that while the participants try to follow their coursebooks, they are in search of digital tools to make learning more meaningful for the learners. This finding reveals something about the nature of their practices, which may result from the lack of flexibility that teachers feel and the limited resources which are at their disposal. This finding is also in line with what Lee and Jeon (2024) highlight regarding the significance of teachers' being agentic in their decision to use ICT tools. As Ece argues, the curriculum's ambitious goals are often unrealistic, given the time constraints and the varying levels of student proficiency. From that sense, the current study reflects broader concerns in the literature about the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities (Süer & Kınay, 2022). Teachers' efforts to adapt the curriculum by incorporating digital tools illustrate the potential for innovation yet also highlight the need for systematic changes that provide teachers with the resources, training, and flexibility required to meet these challenges effectively.

In response to the question about the amount of flexibility that teachers should have in following the curriculum, the participants state various opinions. The loaded curriculum and the technological infrastructure of the schools are mentioned as crucial factors in terms of applying digital tools. This echoes the concerns in that even when teachers are motivated to integrate ICT tools, the absence of infrastructure and institutional support can significantly hinder their efforts (Lee & Jeon, 2024; Preis & Geyer, 2023). Access to the tools effortlessly, on the other hand, has been found to increase curriculum fidelity, which confirms the previous findings by Chapelle and Sauro (2019) where they find that the availability of digital tools plays a major role in how much the participating teachers stick to the curriculum. A further key finding in the study is the potential impact of having a centralized curriculum across various school types in Türkiye. The participants state that teachers tend to make adaptations to the curriculum since the readiness of the students is not similar. This discrepancy between the readiness levels of students is also mentioned in an article by Özer (2021) who postulates that if the readiness levels of students are not taken into consideration in the curriculum, already disadvantaged students become more disadvantaged. Therefore, the participants hold the idea that at such schools, it is almost impossible to stick to the curriculum, so teachers need to make certain adjustments to make the curriculum suitable for students' proficiency levels and support digital learning. Based on this finding, it can also be suggested that the findings from the current study are inconsistent with the findings by Süer and Kınay (2022), which report that a centralized education curriculum in Türkiye limits teachers' ability to be creative in their lessons.

Conclusion and Limitations

The results of this study, with no intention to generalize, indicate that teachers have similar views and experiences in using their DL in the classroom although the digital sources that they

prefer vary. Regardless of the lack of reference to DL components in the English language teaching curriculum, the participants in the current study seem to be ambitious to integrate DL and related ICT tools into their lessons. Besides their keenness to utilize DL, the components of DL such as collaboration, e-safety, and creativity are explicitly addressed by the participants. From that perspective, the current study provides valuable insight as it reflects real classroom applications of EFL teachers with interests in ICT.

The other aspect of the current study is the adherence to the EFL curriculum regarding the utilization of DL and ICT tools. It is evident from the results of the study that the participating teachers cover the parts in their coursebooks which necessitate the integration of technology. More importantly, when they feel the need, they benefit from their DL and give place to ICT tools although the coursebook or the curriculum does not require teachers' integration of them into their lessons. Hence, flexibility is very much needed especially in contexts such as Türkiye where the curriculum is centralized and the coursebooks are the same all around the country and in all school types.

The results from this study offer valuable implications for policymakers, educators, and teacher training institutions. To start with, an implication of this study may be that different school types should be able to use books according to their readiness levels. Teachers may be given the opportunity to select their own coursebooks and make adaptations to the material they use according to their conditions. Additionally, the curriculum to be followed at various school types (i.e. vocational high schools, qualified Anatolian high schools, standard high schools) should be differentiated depending on the needs of the students and expected academic outcomes.

Moreover, some components of DL such as disinformation and e-safety can be integrated into the curriculum to inform both teachers and students about their confidentiality as the participants in the current study have been found to highlight those issues in the classrooms although they are not required to do so. Therefore, making it a curricular requirement will standardize these significant components of DL.

The current study has revealed some important findings; however, it has several limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the study has been conducted with participating teachers who are prone to using technology and have DL individually. In fact, the participants are all in their 30s; so, they were born into a digital age. Thus, another study with older participants with no special interest in technology may reveal different results. Secondly, only the perspectives of teachers have been involved in this study; however, it is believed that students' perspectives regarding DL and the use of ICT tools in the lessons, as well as teachers' adherence to the EFL curriculum, will bring new insights into the issue and enrich the results. Hence, further research is suggested in which students' voices are included. Lastly, this current study has been conducted with teachers working at state high schools in Türkiye, therefore, another study with teachers working at elementary or secondary school might yield varying results.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix 1

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1) How would you evaluate the use of Information and Communication Technologies in the English curriculum?
2) Are there sections in the books you use that require the use of technology? If so, do you use it? If you use it, how? If not, why? To what extent do you implement the program's recommendations in this area?
3) As English teachers, to what extent do you think the official curriculum matches the curriculum actually implemented in the classroom? Should teachers be provided with flexibility in the implementation of the official curriculum?
4) The concept of digital literacy has many subcomponents. Do you support creativity, one of these components, with the use of computers and technology? If you support it, how do you provide this support?
5) Do you implement any practices in or outside the classroom for the safe use of Information and Communication Technologies? Do you cover this subject in your lessons?
6) Do you use Information and Communication Technologies in evaluating the content and outcomes of your course?
7) Does Information and Communication Technologies have a role in collaboration and collaborative learning? If so, how do you use Information and Communication Technologies in your applications?
8) Do you do any class work on developing awareness of choosing the right information and creating awareness of disinformation?