



## A study on Turkish EFL teachers' beliefs about assessment and its different uses in teaching English

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### Abstract

Teacher cognition research, which primarily focuses on identifying what teachers think, know and believe, is crucial to understanding teachers' perceptual structure as it relates to their instructional practices. Thus, teachers' cognition on assessment constitutes a significant research field not only in order to understand the foreign language teachers' beliefs and practices, but also to account for their needs with regards to the assessment element. The current study categorizes the purposes of assessment in English as a Foreign Language classes under four main domains: (a) formative assessment, (b) summative assessment, (c) self-assessment of students, and (d) assessment to improve teachers' instruction. Based on this framework, this study aims to find out EFL teachers' beliefs about the uses of assessment in teaching English and how their reported beliefs relate to their undergraduate departments and teaching experience. 70 Turkish EFL teachers who work at the Prep Class of a state university participated in the study. A 20-item 5-Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results of this study reveal that the participants' beliefs on assessment are strong on using assessment for formative purposes. Self-assessment procedures are given the next highest importance. Neither do participant teachers' undergraduate departments nor do their years of experience have an effect on participants' assessment preferences. Besides the significant findings it has produced, the data collection tool of the current study is a significant contribution to the literature.

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*Keywords:* EFL teachers; beliefs; assessment; formative; summative; self-assessment; assessment for instruction

## 1. Introduction

Empirical evidence suggests that teachers build their understanding about teaching upon practical theories shaped by a range of interacting factors, both inside and beyond the classroom (e.g. Bailey 1996; Burns 1996; Borg 1999). Thus, teacher cognition research, which primarily focuses on identifying what teachers think, know and believe, is crucial to understanding teachers' perceptual structure as it relates to their instructional practices. Within this framework, however, foreign language teachers' beliefs about the role of assessment in their instruction is one of the least studied topics. In any

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educational setting, assessment is one of the main pillars of instructional cycle together with objectives, materials-activities and methodology. Moreover, assessment imposes different underlying practices for different educational settings. Thus, teachers' cognition on assessment constitutes a significant research field not only in order to understand the foreign language teachers' beliefs and practices, but also to account for their needs with regards to the assessment element. This study is conducted upon this necessity.

### *1.1. Literature review*

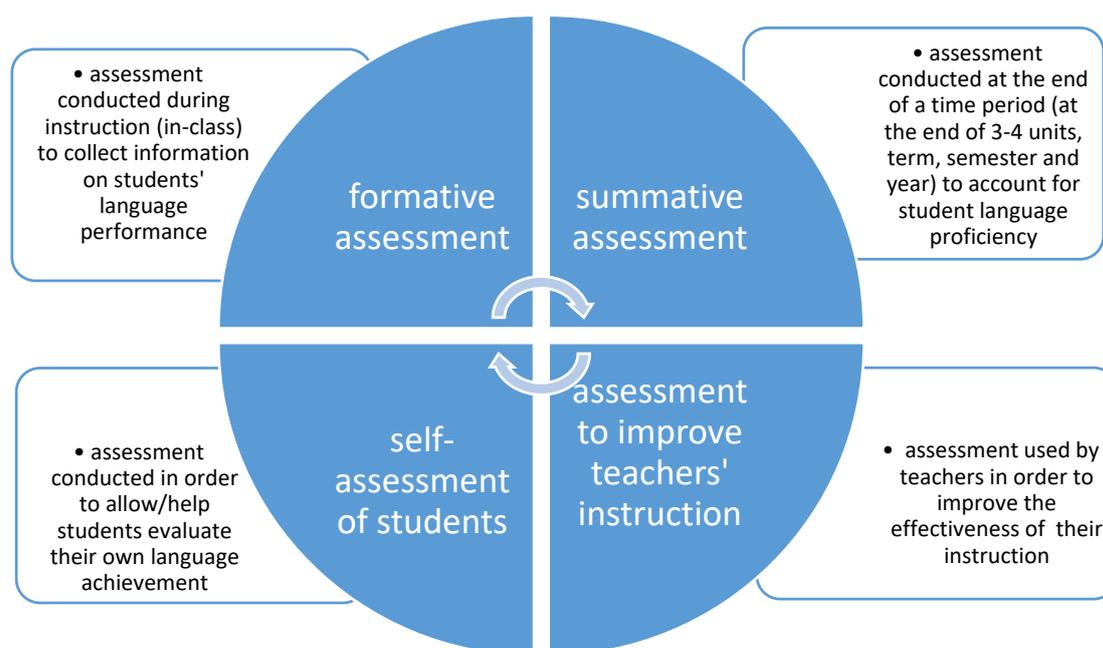
Although teacher conception on assessment is generally defined as the ideas and attitudes that teachers have toward what assessment is and what it is for (Brown & Gao, 2015), different purposes that assessment serves might create confusion among teachers. In other words, teachers' perceived conception of assessment in language teaching and its purposes may be defined differently by different researchers (Biggs, 1998). Torrance and Pryor (2001) describe the purposes of assessment as "observation of process and products", "giving feedback and judgement" and "questioning" (p. 624). In another example, the aims of assessment are described as "selection", "increasing the teachers' effectiveness" and "increasing the students' benefits" (Heaton, 1988, p.136). According to Brown (2004), these purposes mainly rally under following dimensions: "improvement of teaching and learning", "making students accountable for learning" and "accountability of schools and teachers". Other common definition of these purposes is listed as (a) adjustment of the effectiveness of the learning process and teacher training, (b) to ensure accountability of the schools' performance, (c) to give information about the learning process of the students to those who are concerned such as parents or the students themselves, and (d) to adjust the standards of national education system (Alhareth & Ibtisam, 2014).

This conceptual vagueness may be due to the fact that researchers and teachers bear different ideas on the purposes of assessment in education. These purposes should be explained carefully, as some of the concepts such as giving feedback, increasing effectiveness of student learning or teacher training and school accountability have several common components such as students, parents, teachers and administration. To this end, several explanations have been made by different researchers. One of these explanations is made by Earl & Katz (2006) as: "assessment for learning" (AFL), "assessment of learning" (AOL) and "assessment as learning" (AAL). According to them, AFL's function is "helping to identify how to plan instruction"; AOL's function is "documenting what students have achieved"; and AAL's function is briefly "engaging students and teachers in worthwhile educational experiences in and of themselves" (Earl & Katz, 2006, pp. 41-43).

However, this categorization has some overlapping elements. While purposes of AFL may mean both assessment to develop instruction and assessment to monitor the learning process of the students (Gonzales & Aliponga, 2011), purposes of AAL may mean both giving feedback to students, which is also seen as an important function of formative assessment (Crooks, 1988; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Wiliam, 2011), and to teachers applying self-assessment procedures to their students (Taras, 2010). Besides, giving feedback is a concept not only about students, but also about parents (Stiggins, 2002) and school administration (Sheppard, 2000). Thus, such a classification seems to be superficial and needs to be further developed.

Therefore, this study uses a more function-based categorization of assessment in language teaching. The current study categorizes the purposes of assessment in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes under four main domains: (a) formative assessment, (b) summative assessment, (c) self-assessment of students, and (d) assessment to improve teachers' instruction. Based on the focus group discussions with participant teachers, formative assessment in this study refers to assessment conducted

during instruction (in-class) to collect information on students' language performance. Next, summative assessment refers to assessment conducted at the end of a period of time (3-4 units, a term, a semester or a year) to account for student language proficiency. Subsequently, self-assessment of students corresponds to assessment conducted in order to allow/help students evaluate their own language achievement. Lastly, assessment to improve teachers' instruction is a dimension in which teachers use assessment procedures to increase the effectiveness of their own teaching skills and classroom environment (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Uses of Assessment in EFL classes

## 1.2. Research questions

Informed by the literature on teacher conception on assessment and the EFL teacher stance in language teaching field, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What beliefs about the uses of assessment in teaching English are reported by Turkish teachers of English?
2. How do the reported beliefs about uses of assessment by the participants relate to their (a) undergraduate departments, and (b) teaching experience?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

70 Turkish EFL teachers who work at the Prep Class of a state university participated in the study. Of all the participants, 45 (64.3%) were novice teachers (newly graduate or in the first year of their teaching career) and 25 (35.7%) had either two or more years of experience. After the official permission was granted from the language institution to conduct a questionnaire-based study, all of the 70 participants were handed a printed version of the questionnaire with the informed consent. The sample

group consisted of 19 (27%) male and 51 (73%) female teachers. In order to collect overall information of participant teachers' occupational and educational background, questions aiming at eliciting participants' qualifications and years of experience were included in the questionnaire. All of the teachers had either a certificate or a diploma that qualified them as English teachers. 51 (73%) of the teachers were graduates of English Language Teaching Departments of the universities. 19 (27%) of them were graduates of other English related departments and obtained a certificate to teach English after graduation (Table 1). In terms of experience in the field, 45 (64%) teachers were in the first year of their career, who may be named as novice teachers, 25 (36%) of them had experience of more than 1 year. These percentages show that a significant number of participants were at the beginning of their career in the field, which meant that these participants would supposedly recall what they learned on language assessment. Information on participants' teaching experience in ELT is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 1.** Undergraduate Departments of the Participants

Undergraduate Departments	Frequency	Percent
ELT graduate	51	73
Literature	15	21.2
Translation	2	2.9
Linguistics	2	2.9
Total	70	100

**Table 2.** Experience of the Participants in ELT

Experience	Frequency	Percent
Novice: Newly Graduate or in the 1st year	45	64.3
2 or More Years of Experience	25	35.7
Total	70	100

In terms of education level, 48 (69%) of them had a bachelor's degree, and 22 (31%) teachers earned or are on-going to either their master's or doctorate degrees. Table 4 shows the distribution of the sample group in terms of their education levels. Additionally, participants are also expected to provide information about the courses they took on language assessment. 11 (15.7%) of the participants reported that they attended a course on language assessment after graduation, while 52 (74.3%) of them attended such a course during their bachelors' education. However, 7 (10%) of them had never attended a course on language assessment (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Participants' Attendance to Courses on Language Assessment

Taken Courses on Language Assessment	Frequency	Percent
After BA	11	15.7
During BA	52	74.3
No course taken	7	10
Total	70	100

## 2.2. Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two parts. Part 1 elicited participants' demographic information and educational background. The data obtained from this part are used to provide general idea about the sample group and the variables of the second research question. Part 2 was a questionnaire developed specifically for this study by the researchers to collect information about the teachers' beliefs on the uses of assessment in language teaching. The questionnaire had 20 items that addressed four key issues in language assessment. These issues are namely "formative assessment", "summative assessment", "self-assessment of students" and "assessment to improve teachers' instruction". These constitute the four sub-dimensions of the questionnaire (see Table 4 for questionnaire items). Each sub-dimension has 5 items. The items were jumbled for face validity concerns. Each participant was expected to mark the most proper response for each item on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, unsure, agree, and strongly agree).

## 2.3. Data analysis

Statistical analyses of the questionnaire responses were conducted using SPSS 21. In order to account for participant teachers' beliefs about different uses of assessment, frequency counts of the participants' responses to the questionnaire items and the mean scores of each dimension were first calculated. As for the second research question, the sample was divided into groups according to their undergraduate departments and their experience in the field. The mean values were used for the comparison of these groups.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Descriptive Results as to the Questionnaire Items

The frequency counts of participants' responses for each individual item in the questionnaire have produced significant results. Table 4 shows percentages of participant responses for each item in the questionnaire. It should be noted that although the items were given in a jumbled order in the actual questionnaire, the items here are grouped according to the sub-dimensions in Table 4 for purposes of clearer presentation and comparison. Items 1-5 are on formative assessment; 6-10 are on summative assessment; 11-15 are on self-assessment of students; 16-20 are on assessment to improve teachers' instruction.

**Table 4.** Participant Responses to the Questionnaire– Research Question 1

Questionnaire Items	Percentages (%)				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Give feedback to students in order to improve their learning processes in class.	0	0	0	23	77
2. Assist students to improve in-class performance.	0	0	3	44	53
3. Provide students opportunities to show what they have learned in class.	0	3	0	33	64

Questionnaire Items	Percentages (%)				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
4. Allow students to perform task-based activities in the class more than paper- and-pencil tests.	0	3	19	33	46
5. Help students to find out their learning strengths and weaknesses in class.	0	1	3	44	51
6. Evaluate the level of competence of students at the end of a unit.	0	4	11	44	40
7. Determine the level of accomplishment of desired learning outcomes at the end of a semester.	1	1	3	54	40
8. Make final decisions about student proficiency level at the end of a program.	0	17	26	50	7
9. Assess student performance at the end of a term.	0	6	6	54	34
10. Provide information to parents and school administration about the performance of the students at the end of the year.	4	20	41	21	13
11. Help students develop clear criteria of a good learning practice.	0	1	1	44	53
12. Guide students to set their goals and monitor their own learning progress.	0	4	3	27	66
13. Set the criteria for students to assess their own performance in class.	0	3	19	43	36
14. Determine how students can learn on their own in class.	0	4	37	37	21
15. Provide examples of good self-assessment practice for students to examine their own learning process.	0	0	1	53	46
16. Improve the quality of instruction for the next teaching term or school year.	1	0	10	50	39
17. Raise the quality of classroom instruction.	0	4	17	46	33
18. Find out effective classroom teaching methods and strategies.	3	4	14	41	37
19. Gather data from students to improve instructional processes.	0	3	6	53	39
20. Create effective teaching activities for my class.	1	3	9	43	44

### 3.2 Comparison of Mean Scores of Sub-dimensions – Research Question 1

Participants' mean scores of the four sub-dimensions in the questionnaire are reported in Table 5. Results show that the mean score of formative assessment is 22.53, the mean score of summative assessment is 19.33, the mean score of self-assessment is 21.34, and finally the mean score of assessment to improve teachers' instruction is 20.90. The difference between the mean scores draws an attention.

**Table 5.** Mean Scores of Sub-dimensions

Sub-dimension	N	Mean	S.d.
Formative Assessment	70	22.53	1.98
Summative Assessment	70	19.33	2.44
Self-Assessment of Students	70	21.34	2.51
Assessment to Improve Teachers' Instruction	70	20.90	2.85

In order to further investigate if these differences are statistically significant, additional analyses were conducted. Repeated measures one-way ANOVA is usually used to compare three or more mean scores of a sample group. However, one assumption of this analysis is that all of the scores should be normally distributed. Thus, normality tests of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk were conducted (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Normality Tests Results

Sub-dimension	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Df	p	Shapiro-Wilk	df	p
Formative Assessment	.185	70	.000	.908	70	.000
Summative Assessment	.132	70	.004	.969	70	.075
Self-Assessment of Students	.113	70	.028	.952	70	.010
Assessment to Improve Teachers' Instruction	.114	70	.025	.935	70	.001

Besides normality tests, Q-Q plots of each sub-dimension were investigated. Although the plots of summative assessment and self-assessment sub-dimensions showed normal distribution, the other two sub-dimensions were not normally distributed. For that reason, Friedman Test, a non-parametric alternative for the repeated measures one-way ANOVA, was conducted to compare the mean scores (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Friedman Test Results of Sub-dimensions

Sub-dimension	Mean Rank	Median	N	X <sup>2</sup>	Df	P
Formative Assessment	3.30	23.00	70	69.24	3	.00
Summative Assessment	1.59	19.00				
Self-Assessment of Students	2.66	21.50				
Assessment to Improve Teachers' Instruction	2.46	21.00				

The results of the analysis show that there is a significant difference between the mean scores [ $X^2$  (df=3, n=70)=69.24,  $p<.001$ ]. Median scores show that while teachers prefer using assessment procedures for formative assessment (Md=23.00) more than others, self-assessment is preferred in the second place (Md=21.50); and using assessment procedures for summative assessment is the least preferred among others (Md=19.00). In order to investigate the direction of these differences, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test is applied and results are given in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Wilcoxon Mean Ranks Tests Results

Pairwise Comparisons		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z	p
Summative – Formative	Negative Ranks	59	36.02	2125.00	-6.53**	.000
	Positive Ranks	7	12.29	86.00		
	Ties	4				
Self-assessment – Formative	Negative Ranks	41	30.94	1268.50	-4.21*	.000
	Positive Ranks	14	19.39	271.50		
	Ties	15				
Assessment to improve instruction – Formative	Negative Ranks	44	30.66	1349.00	-4.88**	.000
	Positive Ranks	11	17.36	191.00		
	Ties	15				
Self-assessment – Summative	Negative Ranks	11	22.32	245.50	-5.25*	.000
	Positive Ranks	52	34.05	1770.50		
	Ties	7				
Assessment to improve instruction – Summative	Negative Ranks	15	29.50	442.50	-4.14*	.000
	Positive Ranks	50	34.05	1702.50		
	Ties	5				
Assessment to improve instruction – Self-assessment	Negative Ranks	35	32.64	1142.50	-1.18**	.240
	Positive Ranks	27	30.02	810.50		
	Ties	8				

\*based on negative ranks

\*\*based on positive ranks

The results show that there is a significant difference between summative assessment mean ranks and formative with higher formative assessment scores ( $z=-6.53$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Formative assessment mean ranks are also higher than self-assessment mean ranks ( $z=-4.21$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and mean ranks of assessment to improve instruction ( $z=-4.88$ ,  $p<.001$ ). It is concluded that formative assessment mean ranks are significantly the highest among others. Additionally, the differences between summative assessment and self-assessment mean ranks ( $z=-5.25$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and between summative assessment and assessment to improve instruction mean ranks ( $z=-4.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ) are significant with lower summative assessment scores. On the other hand, the difference between mean ranks of assessment to improve teachers' instruction and self-assessment is not statistically significant ( $z=-1.18$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

### 3.3 Comparison of Mean Scores of Groups – Research Question 2

In order to account for the second research question, which focuses on the effects of demographic variables on teachers' perceptions, the mean scores of each sub-dimension are compared according to the participants' a) undergraduate department, and b) experience. To this end, independent samples T-test is required for the analyses. However, as the data obtained from the participants is not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U Test, a non-parametric alternative of T-test analysis, is conducted for the analyses of the two demographic variables.

### 3.4 Comparison of Mean Scores according to the Undergraduate Departments

As for the first part of the second research question, how the reported beliefs about uses of assessment by Turkish teachers of English relate to their undergraduate departments, is investigated. The mean scores of ELT graduates and graduates of other departments are analyzed by using Mann-Whitney U Test. The results of the analysis are demonstrated in Table 9 below. As the results of the analysis reveal,

the differences among the mean ranks of ELT graduates and graduates of other departments show no significant difference in terms of the sub-dimensions ( $p > .05$ ). In other words, the graduation department of Turkish teachers of English has no effect on their beliefs about the uses of language assessment in teaching English.

**Table 9.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results according to the Graduation Departments

Sub-Dimension	Graduate Department	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Summative Assessment	ELT	51	36.26	1849.50	445.500	.602
	OTHER	19	33.45	635.50		
Formative Assessment	ELT	51	35.45	1808.00	482.000	.973
	OTHER	19	35.63	677.00		
Self-assessment of Students	ELT	51	33.72	1719.50	393.500	.225
	OTHER	19	40.29	765.50		
Assessment to Improve Teachers' Instruction	ELT	51	36.40	1856.50	438.500	.540
	OTHER	19	33.08	628.50		

#### 4.5 Comparison of Mean Scores according to Experience

In order to see whether the experiences of the participants have an effect on their beliefs on the purposes of language assessment, Mann-Whitney U Test was used. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 10. The results show that there is no significant difference among the mean ranks of novice teachers and experienced teachers in any of the sub-dimensions ( $p > .05$ ). In other words, the experience level of participants has no effect on their beliefs on the uses of assessment in teaching English.

**Table 10.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results according to the Experience

Sub-Dimension	Experience	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Summative Assessment	Novice	45	36.23	1630.50	529.500	.682
	2 or more years	25	34.18	854.50		
Formative Assessment	Novice	45	36.32	1634.50	525.500	.645
	2 or more years	25	34.02	850.50		
Self-assessment of Students	Novice	45	34.37	1546.50	511.500	.528
	2 or more years	25	37.54	938.50		
Assessment to Improve Teachers' Instruction	Novice	45	34.16	1537.00	502.000	.455
	2 or more years	25	37.92	948.00		

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion of the study is presented with the focus on the two research questions. Firstly, the perceived beliefs of the participant teachers on the different uses of assessment in teaching English will be discussed. Then, the discussion will be further developed focusing on the relationship between these perceived beliefs and their demographic differences.

The findings of this study reveal that the participants' beliefs on assessment are strong on using assessment for formative purposes. Self-assessment procedures are given the next highest importance.

What is more, using assessment in order to improve the quality of the instruction is perceived to be as important as self-assessment according to the teachers as there is no significant difference among the mean scores of these two purposes. On the other hand, teachers' reports indicate that they attach the lowest level of importance to the summative use of assessment in language teaching. In other words, participants are more inclined to use assessment in order to collect information about their students' language performance during instruction (students' in-class performances). Next, teachers want to use assessment mechanisms both to collect feedback about their instruction and to improve it. Finally, teachers prefer summative assessment the least. These results support the current literature which suggests that teachers primarily prefer using assessment to collect information about their students' performance during instruction or raising their students' metacognition about their performance and quality of the instruction (Muñoz, Palacio & Escobar, 2012; Saefurrohman & Balinas, 2016)

The findings also show that neither participant teachers' undergraduate departments nor years of experience have an effect on their assessment preferences. Graduated from an ELT department or from another English related one, they possess similar beliefs about the uses of assessment in teaching English. Similarly, the teachers' reported beliefs on assessment are not affected by their years of experience whether novice or experienced. These results are in line with the findings of a similar study conducted by Calveric (2010).

Consequently, results show parallelism with the common belief in literature supporting the idea of using assessment during instruction (in-class) to collect information on students' language performance no matter which educational background they have or how many years of experience they possess. In Turkish educational system in which summative assessment is prioritized in language teaching, the tendency of EFL teachers to highlight process over product in language learning is remarkable. The fact that the teachers strongly favor formative assessment over others may be due to the pedagogical training that the teacher candidates went through before or after graduation. This may also result from the other actors in the educational setting (e.g. institutions, administrators and parents). The institution in which the study was conducted had a special department for assessment, where all summative tests used in the program such as the end-of-the-term proficiency test and other midterm exams were prepared and administered by a separate group of teachers. This might be another reason why the participant teachers had a higher tendency to use assessment for formative purposes.

It must be acknowledged that these results may not be totally representative of teachers' actual practices since the study focuses on the teachers' reported beliefs. The responses of teachers can be supported by actual classroom observations and interviews in order to better account for the reported perceptions. Such complementary data will give a better idea of teachers' assessment practices. Another limitation of the study is that the beliefs of the teachers reported in this study may not be representative of all Turkish EFL teachers as the sample is limited in only one institution. Actual observations of a greater and a more representative sample might produce more comprehensive results about the assessment preferences of EFL teachers. Finally, the data collection tool of the current study is a significant contribution to the literature. This questionnaire should be improved by further studies with more empirical data.

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## Türk İngilizce öğretmenlerinin değerlendirme hakkındaki inançları ve İngilizce öğretiminde farklı kullanımları üzerine bir çalışma.

### Öz

Öncelikle öğretmenlerin ne düşündüğünü, bildiğini ve inandığını belirlemeye odaklanan öğretmen biliş araştırması, öğretmenlerin öğretimsel uygulamalarıyla ilgili olarak algısal yapısını anlamada çok önemlidir. Dolayısıyla, öğretmenlerin değerlendirme konusundaki bilişleri, sadece yabancı dil öğretmenlerinin inanç ve uygulamalarını anlamak için değil aynı zamanda değerlendirme unsurları ile ilgili ihtiyaçlarını da hesaba katmak için önemli bir araştırma alanı oluşturmaktadır. Mevcut çalışma, İngilizce'de değerlendirme amaçlarını dört ana alanda bir Yabancı Dil sınıfı olarak sınıflandırmaktadır: (a) biçimlendirici değerlendirme, (b) özet değerlendirme, (c) öğrencilerin kendi kendini değerlendirmesi ve (d) öğretmenleri geliştirmek için değerlendirme talimat. Bu çerçeveye dayanarak, bu çalışma, İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngilizce öğretiminde değerlendirmenin kullanımları hakkındaki inançlarını ve rapor edilen inançlarının lisans bölümleri ve öğretmenlik deneyimleriyle nasıl ilişkili olduğunu ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmaya, bir devlet üniversitesinin Hazırlık Sınıfı'nda çalışan 70 öğretmen katılmıştır. Verilerin toplanması için 20 maddelik 5-Likert ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, katılımcıların değerlendirme konusundaki inançlarının, biçimlendirici amaçlar için değerlendirmeyi kullanmada güçlü olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bireysel değerlendirme prosedürleri bir sonraki en yüksek önem verilir. Katılımcı öğretmenlerin lisans bölümleri ne de yılların deneyimlerini katılımcıların değerlendirme tercihleri üzerinde bir etkisi yoktur. Elde ettiği önemli bulguların yanı sıra, mevcut çalışmanın veri toplama aracı, literatüre önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* İngilizce öğretmenleri; inançlar; değerlendirme; biçimlendirici; özetleyici; öz değerlendirme; öğretim için değerlendirme

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