

## Cross-country comparison of foreign language curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey

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### Abstract

In an ever-increasing global world, foreign language teaching (FLT) has been in the agenda of many countries. The purpose of this study is to compare the FLT curriculum at compulsory education in Germany (Berlin) and Spain (Madrid) with the curriculum in Turkey. Qualitative in nature, the study is designed as a multiple (collective) case study. Maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling, a purposeful sampling strategy, is used to compare the FLT curriculum in Germany and Spain with Turkey, aiming at capturing and describing common patterns accross a variety of cases. The results show that with the latest revisions in Turkey's curriculum, the curriculum in three countries are similar to one another in terms of design, main philosophy, content, assessment and evaluation approach, as well as the language teaching approach. This paper concludes that the structural differences depending on the language family could be one of the reasons behind Turkey's situation in FLT.

**Keywords:** Comparative education, curriculum, foreign language teaching, primary education, cross-country.

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation is a defining concept in the 21st century and its impact is observed in all areas of our lives. Learning foreign languages and understanding the culture of the people speaking other languages is a 21st-century skill to be successful in the global world. Various international language policies encourage multilingualism and cultural diversity and thus emphasise the importance of learning foreign languages from an early age. With that in mind, many countries are making efforts to teach a foreign language but most cannot reach the desired level. This includes Turkey as well. Although updates and revisions are made to the existing curriculum, Turkey's situation on international level is behind what is desired. Therefore, this study compares all elements of the foreign language teaching (FLT) curriculum in the three countries mentioned to offer all stakeholders, including policymakers and curriculum developers, a perspective on the current practices in other countries for Turkey in the future.

Comparative studies in education look into practices in different countries while looking for solutions in a country. Therefore, in such studies, the education systems in different countries are examined, similarities and differences are identified and similar solutions are offered for similar issues. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to comparatively examine the goals and policies, the structure, main educational philosophy, overall objectives, content, language teaching and assessment and evaluation approach of the FLT curriculum in Germany and Spain with that of Turkey.

In line with this main objective, the guiding research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are the goals and policies in FLT in Germany, Spain and Turkey?
2. What are the structures, main philosophies and overall objectives of FLT in Germany, Spain and Turkey?
3. What are the topics in the FLT curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey?
4. What is the FLT approach in Germany, Spain and Turkey?
5. What are the assessment and evaluation approaches in Germany, Spain and Turkey?

## 2. Review of the literature

All official documents and studies of the present day indicate the bare necessity of learning foreign languages. To give an example, in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which is revealed this year for the next 7 years, from 2021 to 2027, multilingualism has been considered a powerful symbol of the European Union's (EU) aspiration for being united in diversity. Also, it is indicated that speaking foreign languages helps to equip people for the labour market and thus, it is the EU's goal to give the opportunity for all citizens to acquire at least two foreign languages at an early age. In the same document, it is also given that a lack of language skills is an important barrier to participation in EU programmes (European Commission, 2021).

Looking at Turkey, the country's FLT curriculum has been revised in 2006, 2012 and 2018 based on the international trends; and since 2012, FLT starts at second grade. With the revision in 2018, traditional approaches have been replaced with activities such as drama and role-play which enable the functional use of the language. Although students start learning a foreign language at a very early age, even those students who complete their undergraduate study, cannot use the language at the basic user level. Also, in the international language indexes, Turkey ranks among the least successful countries. For instance, in the English Proficiency Index (EPI), which is an online test based on measuring reading and listening skills of the participants, Turkey ranked 69th among 100 participating countries in 2020 and in the 'low' proficiency band among five proficiency bands which are as follows: 'very high', 'high', 'moderate', 'low' and 'very low' (EF, 2020).

In light of what has been mentioned, when the comparative studies in education are analysed, it is seen that the FLT curriculum at primary schools have been compared in terms of their overall features, structure and functions, objectives and learning outcomes, content, learning experiences

and evaluation (Alkan & Kartal, 2018; Aslan, 2016; Irican, 2017; Mustafa, 2011; Sahin & Aykac, 2019; Tok, 2006; Torunoglu, Caliskan, Sahin & Kart, 2019). Sahin and Aykac (2019) examined the main features, structure, goals, content, educational design and evaluation procedures in primary school foreign language programmes in Germany, Austria, Finland, The Netherlands and Poland and concluded that while Turkey had a centralised curriculum, the rest of the countries had decentralised programmes. Torunoglu et al. (2019) looked into the comparative studies on the English-teaching curriculum in Turkey and compared it with the Finland, Germany, The Netherlands and Japan. They also concluded that Turkey had a centralised curriculum while Germany, The Netherlands and Finland had a framework curriculum. In addition, while the curriculum implemented in Turkey focuses on the four language skills, the curricula in Finland, Germany and The Netherlands focuses more on oral and communicative skills. In their study, Alkan and Kartal (2018) compared the English-teaching system in Turkey with that of Denmark, Hungary and Portugal in terms of general educational systems, aims and goals, content, teaching and learning processes and evaluation. They concluded that Turkey has a centralised structure and the aim of FLT in primary school is to develop a positive attitude towards language. Besides, they indicated that four language skills were focused on in Turkey, while the communicative aspect was emphasised in other countries. Irican (2017) analysed the basic English language teaching curriculum in Turkey and Finland and concluded that the main objective in Finland is not only to teach students language skills but to introduce them with interdisciplinary areas and themes. Aslan (2016) compared the primary education foreign language curriculum in Turkey with Germany and The Netherlands in terms of objectives, content, teaching process and evaluation and found that the curriculum in Turkey was more comprehensive and elaborate, while the others were more flexible allowing more freedom to the teachers. Similarly, Tok (2006) looked into the English-teaching curriculum in primary and lower secondary education in Germany, Czech Republic, France, The Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Hungary and Greece and concluded that mainly listening and speaking are focused on in primary education in all countries except for Turkey. In addition, while the objectives related to sociocultural elements and intercultural understanding exist in EU countries' curriculum, such objectives are not included in the curriculum in Turkey.

Apart from these studies, Kilic (2019) looked into the top-scoring three countries in EPI in order to look into the correctness of the hypothesis that Turkey fails in FLT and offered a different perspective by trying to assess the success–failure criteria objectively. Increasing the number and scope of the studies looking into different elements of the FLT curriculum in Turkey and comparing it with other countries could be guiding for both policymakers and academics in solving the ongoing issues in FLT in Turkey.

### **3. Method**

This study, which aims at an in-depth comparative analysis of FLT (English) curriculum at compulsory education in different countries, is a collective (multiple) case study.

#### **3.1. Sampling**

Choosing the countries for the study is important; therefore, maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling aiming at capturing and describing central themes and common patterns are used. Accordingly, certain criteria were set in choosing the countries, whose FLT curricula were examined. These criteria are as follows:

##### **3.1.1. First criterion: the language family of a language**

Speakers of a particular mother tongue learn some languages more readily. The more distant a language is linguistically from the mother tongue, the longer it takes to learn it. So, moving from this conception, the more similar the mother tongue and the target language, the easier it is to learn the target language (Corder, 1993).

### **3.1.2. Second criterion: countries where English is taught as a foreign language**

The second criterion in the study involves choosing countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Therefore, countries are chosen accordingly.

### **3.1.3. Third criterion: countries' success in foreign language (English) teaching on an international scale**

This is the third criterion used in the study. To this end, EPI is used. EPI groups countries under five proficiency bands. The countries included in this study are chosen from different proficiency bands.

Based on these criteria, the countries included in this study are as follows:

- Germany, where German, which belongs to the Indo-European Language Family, Europe branch, German–Scandinavian group, is spoken;
- Spain, where Spanish, which belongs to the Indo-European Language Family, Europe branch, Roman–Latin group, is spoken;
- Turkey, where Turkish, which belongs to Altaic Language Family, is spoken.

As indicated earlier, in addition to the language family, countries where English is taught as a foreign language is used as a criterion. The third criterion is EPI proficiency bands. Accordingly, the following are included:

- Germany in the 'very high' proficiency band;
- Spain in the 'moderate' proficiency band;
- Turkey in the 'low' proficiency band.

Thus, to ensure maximum variation, countries from different language families and different proficiency bands are included.

## **3.2. Validity and reliability**

### **3.2.1. Internal validity (credibility)**

To ensure internal validity of the research, the research process and results should be open, consistent and possibly confirmed by other researchers (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). There are strategies to increase credibility such as adequate engagement in data collection, triangulation, respondent validation, peer review and long-term interaction (Meriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). In this study, the researchers had an adequate engagement in data collection and the documents have been revisited as new ones have been added.

### **3.2.2. External validity (transferability)**

Unlike quantitative research, in qualitative research, it is believed that results from the study group cannot be generalised to the population (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). Instead, in qualitative research, the extent of transferring the findings of a study to similar situations is mentioned. To this end, Meriam and Tisdell (2015) suggest maximum variation and rich, thick descriptions. Accordingly, the data were described in detail by sticking to the raw data at hand as much as possible. Also, to strengthen transferability and maximise variation, a maximum variation strategy was chosen for sampling.

### **3.2.3. Reliability**

Reliability is the extent to which findings can be replicated. In qualitative studies, it is not possible to get the same results when a study is repeated. Instead, the important thing is to what extent the results are consistent with the collected data. In other words, when an outsider concurs that the results make sense when given the data, it is an indication of reliability (Meriam & Tisdell, 2015). To do that, the research process and data are presented clearly and in detail to enable others to evaluate.

### 3.3. Data collection instrument

Of the four data collection instruments in qualitative research that are observations, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials, documents are used to collect data through Google Scholar, Google and ScienceDirect databases. In addition, documents are collected through correspondence with relevant authorities in the countries. Documents include framework curriculum, dissertations, scientific studies, reports and books.

### 3.4. Data analysis

In the current research, the cross-case synthesis technique for multiple case studies is used. In case studies, the analysis of the data includes a detailed description of the situation. Supposing two or more cases are included in the study, then using the cross-case synthesis is suggested. In this technique, the researcher could create word tables to display the data from individual cases based on a uniform framework and later analyse the similarities and differences. In the last phase, based on the cross-case analysis, some generalisations are made. Accordingly, the findings under each research question in this study are presented in tables, and the similarities and differences are analysed, and generalisations are made based on these similarities and differences.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Goals and policies in FLT in Germany, Spain and Turkey

The first guiding question in the study is ‘What are the goals and policies in FLT?’ To this end, the policy documents and keywords that could be related to FLT in these documents are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Goals and policies in FLT**

Country	Policy documents	Goals
Germany	Report and Resolution of KMK (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equip students with basic communication skills.</li> <li>- Develop intercultural communicative ability to act.</li> <li>- Multilingualism.</li> </ul>
	Council Recommendation dated 22 May 2019 on the Learning and Teaching of Foreign Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teaching of at least two foreign languages.</li> </ul>
	General Organic Law of the Education System (LOGSE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- FLT from primary education to high school.</li> </ul>
	Organic Law of Education (LOE).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis on linguistic communication competence.</li> <li>- Teaching of foreign language as of an early age.</li> </ul>
Spain	The Law for the Improvement of Education Quality (LOMCE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multilingualism.</li> </ul>
	11th Development Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Diversifying teaching materials.</li> <li>- Developing a system towards assessing all four language skills.</li> <li>- Organising in-service trainings to improve the qualifications of foreign language teachers.</li> </ul>
Turkey	Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moving to a competency-based foreign language education that considers student needs based on age, school type and programme.</li> </ul>

Plan	
Lifelong Learning (LLL) Strategy Document	- Developing FLT.
2023 Education Vision Document	- Customising foreign language education nationwide according to school levels and types. - Giving students the opportunity to experience the English-speaking world with the use of new sources. - Improving teacher proficiencies and qualifications in foreign language education.

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#### **4.1.1. Germany**

While explaining goals and policies in FLT in Germany, it would be convenient to illustrate EU's perspective towards FLT. Within the framework of supporting intercultural awareness and mobility, language learning is an important priority because multilingualism is an important element of the EU's competitive power. In this respect, the teaching of at least two foreign languages is encouraged from an early age (Heriard, 2019).

The EU's language policy is based on respect for linguistic diversity. Therefore, learning languages is promoted. Communication in another language apart from one's own mother tongue is a key competence for EU citizens. Although improvements have been made, developing the language competencies of young people is still an important issue for many EU countries (EU, 2019).

As for Germany, the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) (The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs) is responsible for the coordination and development of education in the country. KMK is a consortium of ministers responsible for education and schooling, institutes of higher education, research and cultural affairs. In this capacity, the KMK formulates the joint interests and objectives of all 16 federal states ([www.kmk.org](http://www.kmk.org)) and KMK's resolutions constitute a common ground for FLT in all landers. The report and resolution of the KMK dated 2013 on the status and concept of foreign languages in primary school is one of the main policy documents on FLT in Germany. In this document, it is given that FLT is offered in primary schools in all landers. It begins in grade three in most landers and in six landers it begins in grade one. Schools generally have 2 hours per week for FLT in grades one to four (KMK, 2013). In Berlin, the teaching of foreign languages starts at the third grade. In the lander, the foreign languages taught at primary school are English and French (KMK, 2019). Although these two languages are the main languages taught, English is predominant. According to the research carried out in the 2002/2003 academic year, 69.1% of German students learnt English, while 16.8% learnt French (Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006).

In the lander, based on a competence-oriented FLT in primary schools, the principle of learning language is in real-life situations, authentic language and action-based methods. All qualification levels from primary school to upper secondary are defined by CEFR levels and all lessons are mainly based on competence-oriented curriculum. When students complete fourth grade, they are expected to reach CEFR A1 level, which means communication in a simple manner, understanding and using everyday expressions and simple sentences (KMK, 2019).

In KMK's resolution dated 2013, the goal of FLT is basic communicative skills and to develop the intercultural communicative ability to act.

#### **4.1.2. Spain**

With the organic education laws since 1990, big steps have been taken in the Spanish education system in terms of FLT. With the LOGSE passed in 1990, FLT extended from primary education to high school. With the LOE in 2006, linguistic communication, which corresponds to official and foreign languages, has been listed as a key competence that students are expected to acquire. Also, in the same law, communication in at least one foreign language is among the objectives, and this is



encouraged to start as of the second cycle of preschool education. Another relevant law is LOMCE passed in 2013. Among the principles in this law is the promotion of multilingualism.

In line with the importance attached to FLT through the laws, although not compulsory, FLT is suggested to start in the second cycle of preschool education. Weekly class hours could be increased by the authorities under certain conditions. English is the most often selected language as the first foreign language. Listening, oral interaction and oral expression are prioritised in primary education.

While looking into the goals and policies in FLT in Madrid's autonomous community in Spain, it would be right to look into the legal framework valid for all autonomous communities in the country. In LOE dated 2006, the second article where the aims are given, the capacity to communicate in one or more foreign languages is mentioned among the aims. Also, under the 17th article of LOE, where the objectives of primary education are listed, item *f* highlights the acquisition of communicative competence in everyday situations. As is it seen, communication in one or more foreign languages is included in the basic law on education in Spain.

The foreign language curriculum for primary education is developed in the Royal Decree 126/2014, of February 28, which establishes the basic curriculum of primary education (Ministerio de Educacion, Cultura y Deporte, 2014). On pages 39–45, the contents, assessment criteria and learning standards for the first foreign language are given. Although the first foreign language in Spain can be chosen among French, English, German, Italian and Portuguese, it is mainly English that is taught as the first foreign language at schools.

Autonomous regions, on the other hand, have their own framework curriculum that is based on the Royal Decree 126/2014. Madrid has established its curriculum of primary education for the Community of Madrid under decree 89/2014. In Madrid, it is believed that English proficiency is essential for the future of the youth; accordingly, significant efforts are made to educate young people as bilingual (Labrador & Jimenez, 2016). As in other communities, Madrid implements content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in certain selected schools and in this scope, some courses are delivered in English. Since 2004, selected schools in Madrid not only teach English as a foreign language but also receive curriculum instruction in English in other subjects.

#### **4.1.3. Turkey**

The documents guiding the goals and policies in FLT in Turkey can be listed as: 11th Development Plan, Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan, LLL Strategy Document (OECD, 2013) and 2023 Education Vision Document.

Both the 11th Development Plan and the 2023 Education Vision Document emphasise on improving the quality of foreign language teachers as a goal. Another goal in the development plan is enriching the materials used in FLT and developing a system to assess four language skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading). A similar objective is given in the 2023 Education Vision Document as allowing students to experience the English speaking world via new sources. Another objective in the same document is structuring FLT to different grade levels and school types.

The services of the MoNE in the strategic plan covering 2019–2023 are given under eight topics. The ninth item under the products and services in FLT indicates: 'Carrying out activities towards improving foreign language skills'. Also, based on the SWOT analysis in this document, some goals and objectives are given, one of which is transferring to a competency-based foreign language system.

In the LLL strategy document, on the other hand, 'improving FLT' is one of the objectives under the three strategic main objectives. Also, this document emphasises the learning of at least two foreign languages in formal education as important for people to use the existing opportunities and to communicate with people from other countries.

Based on the given information for the three countries on the goals and policies in FLT, it can be said that in Germany and Spain, overall goals are emphasised such as the teaching of at least two

foreign languages in line with EU’s multilingualism policy, teaching of languages at a young age and the use of language for communicative purposes, while in Turkey, specific issues are included in policy documents such as the teaching materials, teacher quality, structuring the teaching to grade levels and school types.

#### 4.2. Major design, main philosophy and overall objectives of the FLT curriculum

The second guiding question of the study is ‘What are the major design, main philosophy and overall objectives of the FLT curriculum?’ The findings under this question are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Major design, main philosophy and overall objectives of the FLT curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

Countries	Major design	Main philosophy	Overall objectives
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The interests and inclinations of the learners are taken into account.</li> <li>- Take up students’ interest to support development of their personality.</li> <li>- The knowledge and experiences of the students are consistently linked, activated.</li> <li>- Special stages of development are taken into account and students actively participate in the lesson design.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing intercultural competences, encouraging dialogue and cooperation with people from different cultural backgrounds.</li> <li>- Taking special stages of development in which the children and young people find themselves into account and letting students actively participate in lesson design.</li> <li>- Perception and empowerment of girls and boys in their gender-specific differences and individuality.</li> </ul>	Developing intercultural ability to act, development of multilingualism and communication
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Content related to students’ own experiences, needs and interests in predictable everyday contexts or related to areas of personal, public and educational areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know and appreciate the values and norms of coexistence, respect human rights and pluralism.</li> <li>- Develop individual and team work, effort and responsibility in studying, self-confidence, critical sense, personal initiative, curiosity, interest and creativity in learning, and an entrepreneurial spirit.</li> <li>- Know, understand and respect the different cultures and differences between people.</li> </ul>	Efficient communication
Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Material should be related to students’ everyday lives</li> <li>- Focus on activities that necessitate real communication such as group games</li> <li>- Authentic materials used in the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making learning environment enjoyable and motivating.</li> <li>- Developing learner autonomy and problem-solving skills.</li> </ul>	Efficient communication



classroom as used in real life

-Focus on communication rather than memorising.  
- A curriculum centring upon students' interests.

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#### **4.2.1. Major design of the FLT curriculum in German, Spain and Turkey**

##### **4.2.1.1. Germany**

When the FLT curriculum in Berlin (Germany) for grades 3–6 and 7–10 is analysed in terms of the major design:

- Under the 'learning experiences' section, it is indicated that the school ties in with the learning experiences of the students and take up their interest to support the development of the students' personality.
- Under the 'Internal School Curriculum' section, it is once again indicated that when creating the school internal curriculum, the interests and inclinations of the learners are taken into account in addition to regional and school-specific features.
- Under the 'topics and content' section, it is mentioned that in equipping students with intercultural foreign language skills, topics and text that are of particular interest to young people are chosen.
- Under the 'Principles of Lesson Design' section, it is highlighted that when developing new content, the knowledge and experiences of the students are consistently linked, activated and new things are integrated into existing knowledge according to the individual learning process.
- Under the 'Learning Culture' section, it is said that special stages of development of young people are taken into account, and they actively participate in the designing of lessons.
- Under the 'Project work' section, it is said that in the planning and organisation of projects, pupils actively participate in accordance with their age (Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family, t.y).

In light of the information above, it can be concluded that Berlin's FLT curriculum is created as a child-centred design.

##### **4.2.1.2. Spain.**

In Spain, the primary education curriculum for all the courses is developed in the Royal Decree 126/2014.

The 'First Foreign Language' section of the curriculum indicates that, especially during primary education, it is necessary to refer to familiar contexts for students of this age, consider their existing knowledge, skills and experiences for communicative interaction, comprehension and production of texts. Accordingly, the contextualised use of language is promoted within the framework of communicative situations. Also, it is emphasised that particularly during the early years, the use of games and performance of joint tasks will lay the foundations of language acquisition.

Under the same topic, in Content, Assessment Criteria and Learning Standards, the content, assessment and learning standards related to one's own experiences, needs and interests in predictable everyday contexts or related to areas of personal, public and educational areas are given. On the other hand, the curriculum of primary education for the Community of Madrid indicates similar things. For example, under the Methodological Suggestions section of the curriculum, it is emphasised that the use of such activities as songs, games and storytelling are useful for the students. In addition, it is indicated that one thing of interest to students in language learning is the lifestyle of the countries whose language they learn and, therefore, in order to get students' attention, topics related to the English culture are included.

Based on the information given in both documents, it is possible to conclude that the Spain's FLT curriculum is created as a child-centred design, which appears more frequently in the early stages of education like preschool and elementary education. In this design, play is an important vehicle in learning. In addition, this design is based on lives, needs and interests of the students and students are allowed to craft their own experience.

#### **4.2.1.3. Turkey.**

Looking into Turkey's curriculum for FLT covering the second to eight grades, it is seen that under the 'Structure of the Curriculum' section, it is given that no single methodology is designated, and instead, an action-oriented approach has been adopted considering the descriptors of CEFR.

On the other hand, under the 'General Objectives of the Curriculum' section, it is given that for meaningful learning, the material should be related to students' everyday lives; and therefore, as scholars suggest, language learning must be carried out in context, in the course of everyday interactions for communication. Also, it emphasises that the focus is not on grammatical structures but instead on activities that necessitate real communication, such as group games; that the materials used in the classroom are authentic to demonstrate English as used in real life indicates that Turkey's FLT curriculum is child-centred in which students create their own experiences; in which the needs and interests of the students are taken into account and in which play is an important vehicle for learning.

When all three countries' curricula are considered in terms of their design, it is seen that all curricula are designed considering the students and their needs and interests.

### **4.2.2. Main philosophy of the curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

#### **4.2.2.1. Germany.**

When Berlin's FLT curriculum is analysed in terms of the main philosophy it adopts, it is seen that certain points are emphasised under different topics. This includes the emphasis on the development of intercultural competencies and encouraging students to get actively involved in dialogue and cooperation with people of different cultural backgrounds. It is also highlighted in the curriculum that the idea of one's living based on knowledge acquired during adolescence is replaced by a dynamic model of competence development and the purpose of this model is to successfully cope with a variety of challenges in everyday life and later professional life.

Under the 'Media and Technologies' section of the curriculum, it is given that students use them to develop, process, produce and present different content, as well as for interactions. Also, under the 'Learning Culture' section, it is indicated that special stages of development in which the children and young people find themselves are taken into account and that learners are increasingly allowed to take on responsibility and actively participate in the design of lessons. In addition, there is a separate section named 'Girls and Boys' and under this section, it is claimed that particular attention is paid to the perception and empowerment of girls and boys in their gender-specific differences and individuality and sex education that takes relevant questions into account across disciplines also contributes to this (Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family, t.y).

Berlin's curriculum, where the student is the focus and take an active role in their learning; cooperation is emphasised; students take an active role in the designing of the lessons; problem-solving skills are developed; students are given the opportunity to learn democratic living skills; and they are equipped with digital skills through an emphasis on media and technologies, which is based on the progressivist philosophy.

#### **4.2.2.2. Spain.**

When Spain's FLT curriculum is examined in terms of the main philosophy, things that stand out in the seventh article of the Royal Decree 126/2014, where objectives of primary education are given as follows:

Primary education will contribute to developing in boys and girls the capacities that allow them to:

- know and appreciate the values and norms of coexistence, learn to act in accordance with them, prepare for the active exercise of citizenship and respect human rights, as well as the pluralism, typical of a democratic society;
- develop habits of individual and teamwork, effort and responsibility in studying, as well as attitudes of self-confidence, critical sense, personal initiative, curiosity, interest and creativity in learning, and an entrepreneurial spirit;
- know, understand and respect the different cultures and differences between people, equal rights and opportunities for men and women and non-discrimination against people with disabilities.

Also, under the key competences, it is given that ‘the educational administrations will promote the learning of the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts in all areas of personal, family and social life, as well as the values that sustain freedom, justice, equality, political pluralism, peace, democracy, respect for human rights, as well as effective equality between men and women. In addition, the role of the teacher is considered fundamental in terms of designing tasks or learning situations for problem-solving, apply the knowledge learned and promote student activity’ (Ministerio de Educacion, Cultura y Deporte, 2014).

Similarly, Madrid’s curriculum of primary education under decree 89/2014 refers to similar topics. In article four of this decree, the objectives of primary education are listed, which includes the same objectives as given in the Royal Decree. The use of ICT is also included among the objectives (Regional Ministry of the Presidency of the Community of Madrid, 2014). In the curriculum, under the methodological guidelines section, it is indicated that theatre and group activities favour the learning of language through the expansion of vocabulary and improving pronunciation and intonation.

Based on this analysis, Madrid’s curriculum, which encourages learning the skills for a democratic society, individual and team work, cultural awareness, critical thinking, taking initiative and creativity in learning, and an entrepreneurial spirit, as well as the use of ICT, is designed as a progressivist curriculum.

#### **4.2.2.3. Turkey.**

Turkey’s FLT curriculum has a separate section named ‘Major Philosophy of the Curriculum’. Under this section, it is given that the FLT curriculum has been revised in accordance with the recent changes in the educational model (4 + 4 + 4) and to offer quality education. Accordingly, in the revised curriculum, FLT starts from the second grade rather than the fourth grade as in the previous curriculum; and therefore a new curriculum accommodating the second and third grades was necessary (MEB, 2018). It is also given under this topic that while designing the new FLT curriculum, the principles and descriptors of the CEFR were closely followed. Also, an action-oriented approach to allow students to use English as a means of communication was adopted and since developing a positive attitude towards language from the earliest stages is important, fostering an enjoyable and motivating learning environment was aimed at (MEB, 2018).

Apart from this separate section in the curriculum, clues on the main philosophy curriculum is based on can be found under different sections. For example, it is indicated that in each stage, developmentally appropriate learning tasks are offered to ensure learner autonomy and problem-solving skills, necessary for communicative competence; that teachers aim at authentic use of language to enable students to be engaged in active real-life communication and to do that, they give students interesting contexts and homework; and that instead of reading and memorising a text from a book, they are given the opportunity to communicate in real-life situations in the classroom. In addition, in different sections in the curriculum, it is said that students’ interests at different developmental stages are taken into account to make learning English more interesting and fun.

Looking at these, Turkey's FLT curriculum, in which students' interests are centred upon, which aims at teaching problem-solving skills and encourages self-discipline and does not solely rely on textbooks and memorising, is designed based on progressivism philosophy.

To sum up, when all three countries' FLT curricula are examined in terms of the main philosophy behind them, it is seen that all three countries' curricula are based on progressivism philosophy. This philosophy aims at developing intercultural skills of the students as well as strengthening individual differences, individual and group work, critical thinking and problem solving skill, creativity and entrepreneurial skills.

#### **4.2.3. Overall objectives of the FLT curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

##### **4.2.3.1. Germany.**

Under the 'Tasks and objectives of English class' section of the curriculum, first, the importance of developing intercultural ability to act in a time of increasing international connections is an important duty of the school and society and in this context, learning foreign languages plays an important role as it is a prerequisite for understanding and communication, getting to know each other, professional mobility and the ability to cooperate. Therefore, the development of multilingualism (mother tongue + at least two languages) is an important task of Berlin schools. Also, under the same section, the necessity of learning English as lingua franca in many fields including international trade, politics, scientific and technologic development, social and cultural exchange, work and leisure is emphasised (Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family, t.y)

So, it is understood that the overall objectives of the FLT curriculum in Berlin, Germany is communication in private and professional life to ensure intercultural awareness and understanding.

##### **4.2.3.2. Spain.**

In Spain's curriculum covering all subjects, acquisition of basic communicative competence in at least one foreign language is listed among the objectives of primary education. Accordingly, in Madrid's curriculum, under the Methodological Guidelines, it is indicated that by the end of primary education, CEFR A1 level should be reached, which is basically the satisfaction of basic communication needs in everyday life. So, it is possible to conclude that Madrid's curriculum also aims at equipping students with basic communication competences during their primary education.

##### **4.2.3.3. Turkey.**

Under the 'General Objectives of the Curriculum' section of Turkey's curriculum, the indispensability of English in today's world and the importance of learning English is emphasised. Following this, it is given that the most efficient way to do it is to expose students to real-life situations where they can use the language in context. It is also indicated that the communicative approach forms the basis of the curriculum but also different strategies, assessment and evaluation approaches are used considering that the curriculum covers ages 6–13, a range of developmental stages. It is also emphasised that as motivation is important in student success, the curriculum aims at making language learning interesting and fun for students of different developmental stages (MEB, 2018).

Looking at the overall objectives of the curriculum in the three countries, it is seen that they all emphasise communication competences and in addition, in Germany and Spain, multilingualism, an EU policy to ensure diversity, seems to be an important objective.

#### **4.3. Content of the FLT curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

The third guiding question in the study is 'What are the topics included in the FLT curriculum?' Using the content in the curriculum in Germany, Spain and Turkey, content organisation strategies are identified. The three countries' curricula are examined in terms of content organisation, and the information on the topics in the FLT curriculum is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Topics included in Germany, Spain and Turkey’s FLT curriculum**

Countries	Topics in FLT
Germany	Me and my environment, the immediate experience of young people, social life, social and cultural life.
Spain	Products that interest young people, giving directions, telling price, interesting topics like music and sports, body parts, introducing yourself, thanking and apologising etc.
Turkey	Colours, numbers, body parts, pets, greeting, family, animals, toys, games, daily activities, city we live in, friendship etc.

#### **4.3.1. Germany**

In Berlin, it is seen that the curriculum for all grades is built around four themes as topics and each topic has expanded content for early stages as well as advanced stages. They are as follows:

1. Me and my environment;
2. The immediate experience of young people;
3. Social life;
4. Social and cultural life.

There are topics under each theme for beginner and advanced classes. So, the same themes are revisited at different grades with increasing levels of difficulty.

When the topics are looked into, it is seen that binding and optional content, which is interesting, helps students to express themselves, will serve as a basis for future education, will help them struggle with issues in the future, will prepare them for professional life and is offered in a spiral nature. The topics are revisited with new knowledge relating to it.

#### **4.3.2. Spain**

There is no specific section including the topics offered in the curriculum; however, there is a section on English culture, which has a common content in all grades. It is indicated that topics on customs and cultural traditions of English-speaking countries, songs, dialogues, debates and children’s literature in the English language (stories, poetry, rhymes and simple theatrical performances), history and characters of English-speaking countries are offered as content. The same is mentioned under the Methodological Guidelines section, indicating that it is important to know lifestyle of a country when learning a language, so content on English culture is included.

Also, looking at the competences in the curriculum, one can get an idea of the content offered. They include the following:

- Products interesting for students (such as games, computer, CD etc.);
- Simple everyday transactions (instructions, directions, requests and notices);
- Instructions, directions or other information (for example, numbers, prices, hours, at a station or in a department store);
- Short, simple conversations involving familiar topics such as self, family, school, free time, description of an object or place;
- Familiar topics or topics of interest (for example, music, sports etc.);
- TV programmes or other audiovisual materials (for example, in which young people or well-known characters are interviewed), everyday subjects (for example, what they like to do in their free time) or in which they are informed about leisure activities (theater, cinema, sporting event etc.);
- Parts of the body etc.

Looking into the topics given in each grade under each competence area, it is observed that the topics related to self, family, environment, areas of interest are revisited in different grades with an extended structure, which indicates that the curriculum has a spiral nature.

#### 4.3.3. Turkey

In Turkey, the themes used for each grade from two to eight are given as follows:

**2nd Grade:** Colours, numbers, pets, fruits, basic vocabulary on body parts etc.;

**3rd Grade:** Greeting, family, feelings, toys and games, my house, my city, transportation, weather etc.;

**4th Grade:** Classroom rules, nationality, cartoon characters, free time, science, jobs, clothes, nationalities etc.;

**5th Grade:** Greetings, my town, games and hobbies, daily routine, health, movies, fitness etc.;

**6th Grade:** Life, breakfast, weather and emotions, occupations, holidays, democracy etc.;

**7th Grade:** Appearance, personality, sports, biography, wild animals, TV shows, celebrations etc.;

**8th Grade:** Friendship, teen life, in the kitchen, on the phone, internet, tourism, science, natural forces etc.

Looking at the curriculum in terms of content organisation, it is clear that everyday topics of interest to students are revisited in each grade level, with potential areas of interest added. So, in terms of content organisation strategy, it can be concluded that Turkey’s curriculum is a spiral curriculum.

In all three countries, the content is spiral, which involves revisiting the same topics throughout different levels. It helps to reinforce the information by re-engaging with it repeatedly.

#### 4.4. Language teaching approach adopted in Germany, Spain and Turkey

The fourth guiding question in the study is ‘What are the language teaching approaches adopted?’ The three countries’ curriculum is examined to determine the language teaching approach and the results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Language teaching approach adopted in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

Countries	Language teaching approach
Germany	The use of language as a communication tool, creating authentic communication situations using traditional and modern media
Spain	By the end of primary education, acquisition of communicative competences (CEFR A1), acquiring the basic communicative competence that allows them to express and understand simple messages and function in everyday situations
Turkey	Emphasis on language use in authentic communicative environment, creation of authentic communication opportunities in the classroom by forming groups and playing games.

##### 4.4.1. Germany

When Berlin’s curriculum is examined to understand the approach adopted, the emphasis on the use of language as a tool for communication stands out. For instance, under ‘Intercultural Competence’, it is indicated that intercultural foreign language ability to act is developed and expanded by dealing with a wide range of subject areas and by acquiring individual linguistic skills but especially in real and classroom communication situations. Also, under the ‘Methodological Competence’ section, an emphasis is made on the creation of authentic communication situations through the use of media. In another section in the curriculum, it is given that intercultural foreign



language skills not only help students to directly communicate with native speakers but also with other second and foreign speakers of English and thus help to improve intercultural competences. In light of the given information, it is possible to conclude that the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, in which the main purpose is making communicative competence the goal of teaching, is adopted.

#### **4.4.2. Spain**

There are two approaches adopted in the FLT in Madrid. First of all, the approach adopted in Madrid's curriculum of the primary education under the decree 89/2014 and is implemented in all primary schools. In this curriculum, it is indicated that at the end of primary education stage, students must have acquired the communicative competences defined by the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, in oral comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension and written expression. Also, in the same document, it is given that by the end of primary education, students will acquire, in at least one foreign language, the basic communicative competence to express and understand simple messages and function in everyday situations. So, it is seen that an emphasis is made on communicative competence. Also, it is given that in the first years of language learning only speaking and listening activities are included. Based on the given information, it can be concluded that the communicative language teaching approach is adopted in which the primary function of language is interaction and communication.

On the other hand, since 2004, the State Bilingual Education programme is implemented in Madrid. Students in this programme not only learn English as a subject but also learn other subjects in English to acquire the language more naturally and effortlessly. The programme was implemented in 26 state primary schools initially and today there are 594 primary schools, of which 384 are state schools, implementing the programme (Comunidad de Madrid, 2019). The state primary schools, where the programme is implemented, are chosen by the Regional Ministry of Education and Youth. The programme starts in the first grade and is extended till the end of primary education. In these schools, at least three other subjects, apart from English, are taught in English except Maths and Spanish Language and Literature.

A similar programme, the MECD/British Council Bilingual programme, is implemented in 10 primary schools in Madrid as well. This programme started in 1996 in Spain, and it aims to provide children from 3 to 16 years old with a bilingual, bi-cultural education through an integrated Spanish/English curriculum (MECD, 2015).

To sum up, Madrid uses both the Communicative Language Teaching approach and CLIL within the scope of the two bilingual programmes.

#### **4.4.3. Turkey**

When Turkey's FLT curriculum is examined in terms of the approach adopted, it is seen that under different sections there is an obvious emphasis on the communicative language teaching. Under the overall objectives section, to emphasise the role of language in expressing needs and wants as well as opinions and beliefs, building relationships etc., the new model is said to focus on language learning for communicative purposes. It is also mentioned here that in communicative approach target language is not only an object of study but a tool to interact with others and that the focus is on authentic use of language rather than grammatical structures (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2006, cited in MEB, 2018). In this approach rather than reading a dialogue given to them in the classroom, students form groups and play with their classmates and thus experience real-life communication opportunities. Turkey's curriculum is based on the communicative language teaching approach, which focuses on equipping students with communicative competences and in which language is not only based on grammatical features but on the functional use of language for communication.



Looking into the three countries' FLT curricula in terms of the adopted approach, it is possible to conclude that the traditional approaches are left behind in their curriculum and instead, the communicative language teaching approach, one of the modern approaches is adopted. In addition, certain public schools in Spain also use the CLIL approach to teach a foreign language.

#### **4.5. Assessment and evaluation approaches in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

The fifth guiding question in this study is 'What are the assessment and evaluation approaches in FLT curriculum?' The curriculum is analysed in this respect, and the results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Assessment and evaluation approaches in FLT in Germany, Spain and Turkey**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Assessment and evaluation approaches in FLT</b>
Germany	Class work, oral exams, individual and group presentations, project and learning diaries, portfolios, classroom observations.
Spain	Adoption of a formative and summative assessment and evaluation approach.
Turkey	Alternative, process-oriented, self-assessment based assessment as well as written exams, homework and project work.

##### **4.5.1. Germany**

Under the 'Performance assessment and performance evaluation in English class' section in Berlin's FLT curriculum, the task forms and formats section explains the assessment types, which can be grouped as a process-oriented alternative assessment, based on self-assessment and peer-assessment. The assessment is not only towards assessing the learning outcomes but also the process. The forms used, accordingly, are listed as:

- Selective learning success checks, in particular class work and oral exams, to check the learning outcomes of a lesson sequence,
- Individual and group presentations on self-set or given tasks,
- Project diaries and learning diaries that document the learning process over certain periods of time,
- Portfolios,
- Short and long-term classroom observations (Senate Department for Education, Youth and Family, t.y). These examples indicate that both formative and summative assessment are used in FLT in Berlin.

##### **4.5.2. Spain**

Information on the assessment and evaluation approach of Madrid's FLT is found in ORDER 3622/2014, of December 3, of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Community of Madrid, which regulates certain aspects of organisation and operation, as well as evaluation and application documents in Primary Education. Article 12 of this Order states that the evaluation of students' learning in Primary Education will be continuous and comprehensive and will take into account their progress in all areas of the curriculum; it will be formative, summative and guide the learning process (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Community of Madrid, 2014).

##### **4.5.3. Turkey**

In Turkey's FLT curriculum, it is emphasised that the curriculum's assessment and evaluation approach should be consistent with the curriculum and that CEFR is based on assessment and evaluation. An alternative, process-oriented, self-assessment-based assessment approach are adopted in addition to written exams and project works which indicates the use of both formative and summative assessments (MEB, 2018).

Looking into the three countries' FLT in terms of assessment and evaluation approaches, it is seen that in line with their modern FLT approach, they all use both formative and summative assessments in the process.

## 5. Discussion and data interpretation

Looking at the goals and policies of FLT in the mentioned countries, in Germany, the Report and Resolution of KMK 2013 was found as one policy document. This document indicates that the purpose of FLT is to equip students with basic communication skills and develop the intercultural communicative ability to act considering the fact that children in Germany are now born into a country where a variety of languages are spoken. It is seen that rather than specific objectives given in Turkey's policy documents, the overall goal of communication is emphasised in this document. Also, the Council Recommendation of EU dated 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages was examined as a policy document and multilingualism stood out as an important point emphasised in this document.

In Spain, on the other hand, the documents analysed in this study were LOGSE, LOE and LOMCE. In all these documents, the use of language for communicative purposes, learning of languages from an early age and similar to Germany, in line with EU policies, promotion of multilingualism stood out. In Turkey, goals for FLT are found in the 11th Development Plan, MoNE Strategic Plan, LLL Strategy Document and 2023 Education Vision Document. In addition to overall goals, Turkey has specific objectives in those documents based on existing issues such as diversifying teaching materials and improving teacher quality. It is also seen that the goals in the development plan are reflected in the 2023 Education Vision document. All in all, in all countries included in this study, it is seen that the past's grammar-based traditional approaches are left behind and the practical use of language through communication is emphasised. Also, the emphasis on multilingualism in Germany and Spain, as EU countries, matches with EU's multilingual and multicultural structure.

When the design, main philosophy and the overall objectives of the three countries in question are examined, it is concluded that in line with modern educational approaches, all three countries' curriculum are designed as progressivist curriculum and with a student-centred approach. Within the framework of this structure, the objectives of the curriculum are effective communication and multilingualism. The content in all countries' curriculum has a spiral nature with topics revisited at different levels. The language teaching approach in those countries was communicative language teaching, and in Spain, in addition to that, CLIL has been used in some schools as well.

When the curriculum is examined to see the assessment and evaluation approaches adapted, it is found that all three countries use both formative and summative assessment in the teaching process. Looking at all these findings, it can be concluded that curriculum in all countries are prepared based on modern educational philosophies and approaches in which communicative competence is prioritised. On the other hand, studies still indicate a low level of foreign language attainment (Costa & Albergaria-Almeida, 2015; Gazzola & Mazzacani, 2019). It is given that only 4 out of 10 learners in secondary education reach 'independent user' level in the first foreign language, indicating an ability to have a simple conversation and that most EU states face challenges in the field of languages (EU, 2019). Also, it is indicated in the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 Programme Guide that lacking language skills is a barrier to participation in EU's education and youth programmes.

In Berlin's curriculum, although the four language skills are included, it is seen that in third and fourth grades, it is mainly speaking and listening skills that are focused on. Also, in Madrid's curriculum, it is indicated that listening and speaking skills are prioritised in the early years. Although four skills are included as of first grade, reading and writing are limited. When it comes to Turkey's curriculum, it is seen that earlier studies indicate the beginning of FLT at early years and that only speaking and listening should be focused on (Tok, 2006). With the revision in 2012, the teaching of foreign languages starts as of the second grade, and this is still the case after the 2017 revision. It is

also seen that the communicative purposes are emphasised; and accordingly, in the first three grades, the main emphasis is on listening and speaking, rather than the grammatical structures, four language skills, but reading and writing are restricted (MEB, 2018).

One criterion set in this study was countries' success in FLT on an international scale based on EPI results. When the results of the three countries in EPI 2020 are examined, it is seen that Germany ranks as the 8th country in the 'very high' proficiency band, while Spain ranks 34th in the 'moderate' proficiency band and Turkey ranks 69th in the 'low' proficiency band. What should also be considered here is the other criterion in this study, which is the language family of the chosen countries' language. German together with English, Swedish, Dutch, Danish, Belgian Dutch and Norwegian belongs to Indo-European Language Family, Europe branch and German–Scandinavian group.

As for Harbert (2007), the Germanic languages are more alike than different and have many similarities as they are from the same language family. Although Spanish belongs to Indo-European Language Family, Europe branch, it is in the Roman–Latin group. Turkish, finally, belongs to a completely different language family, i.e., Altaic. When the other top-ranking countries in EPI are examined, the first five countries are The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway (EF, 2020). All these countries' languages belong to Indo-European language Family, Europe branch, German–Scandinavian group. Spanish, on the other hand, belongs to a different group (Roman–Latin) under the same language family. Looking at the country's ranking in EPI (34th), it is found that it is in the 'moderate' proficiency band together with Italy (30th), which also belongs to the Roman–Latin group. Also, France, which belongs to the same Roman–Latin group ranks close to Spain and Italy as the 28th country in the ranking.

When the countries in the 'low' proficiency band are looked into, it is seen that together Turkey and Japan both belong to the Altaic language family; Iran, where Farsi is spoken belongs to Asia (Indo) branch, Iran group, a completely different branch under Indo-European language family; UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and Bahrein where Arabic is spoken belongs to the Semitic group under Hamitic–Semitic language family. Looking at this picture, it can be concluded that the more similar the mother tongue is to the target language, the greater help it could offer in learning the target language, and the more distant it is, the longer it takes to learn it (Corder, 1994).

Similarly, Kilic (2019) compared the success of teaching English in certain countries with that of Turkey. He found that among the top-ranking four countries in EPI between 2011 and 2018, the three of them, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, belonged to the same language family, branch and group (European Language Family, Europe branch, German–Scandinavian group). Moving from this, he showcased the similarities of these languages in terms of both source and morphological, lexicological and syntactic characteristics.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

The purpose of this study was to compare FLT curriculum at compulsory education in Germany (Berlin) and Spain (Madrid) with the curriculum in Turkey. The comparison covered the goals and policies, the overall structure, main philosophy, objectives, the topics included, FLT approaches and assessment and evaluation approaches in FLT in compulsory education in Germany (Berlin) and Spain (Madrid) with the curriculum in Turkey. In this scope, the FLT curriculum at compulsory education in Berlin in Germany and Madrid in Spain was examined and compared with that of Turkey.

The results indicate that with the latest revisions in Turkey's curriculum, the curriculum in three countries are similar to one another in terms of design, main philosophy, content, assessment and evaluation approach, as well as the language teaching approach. This shows that in all countries, modern approaches are adopted in FLT instead of traditional ones. This also indicates that the suggestions brought by previous cross-country comparison studies in Turkey on FLT have been implemented in the latest curriculum. On the other hand, there are not enough studies evaluating the curriculum in terms of the criteria used in this study. In this respect, while following up the latest

developments in FLT in different countries and implementing the most up-to-date practices, all stakeholders of curriculum development could work alternative methods and techniques because of learning difficulties that may arise due to structural differences between languages arising from the language family a language belongs to as it is observed in the current study that this could be a major reason behind the difficulties experienced while learning a foreign language.

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