



How TOEFL® Test Data Is Helping Educators in Turkey Adjust English-language Instruction to Meet Students' Needs

Organization: Goal Testing (Turkey)

Challenge: Get educators the assessment data they need to understand students' skills, determine learning needs and improve English-language instruction.

Solution: TOEFL Primary®, TOEFL Junior® and TOEFL ITP® tests

Results: Using TOEFL® test data about students developing English-language skills, schools have adjusted their instructional and professional learning programs. This has led to more customized lessons and improved student learning.

Goal Testing uses the TOEFL Young Students Series and TOEFL ITP tests as essential educational tools: teachers use assessment data to understand students' English-language skills — and to cultivate best practices to move their learning forward.

Remzi Canarslan, Founder and Managing Director of Goal Testing in Turkey, is a knowledgeable and avid proponent of research-based, standardized testing. As early as 2006, his company developed its own assessments for schools, with a goal of helping educators use assessment data to understand student skills, deduce students' ongoing learning needs and improve English-language instruction.

"Turkey is a testing country," he explained, pointing to the fact that Turkish schools have long used an 8th-grade assessment for students applying to high schools and a 12th-grade assessment for those applying to colleges. But a problem Canarslan ultimately saw with many available tests at that time — including his

own — "was they were not research-based, they were not standardized." And thus, they could not provide "trustable data for schools."

Around 2013, research on the matter led Canarslan to ETS, where he learned about the TOEFL ITP tests (for students age 16+) and the recently launched TOEFL Young Students Series — which includes the TOEFL Primary tests (for students age 8+) and TOEFL Junior tests (for students age 11+). He also learned about the value of research-based, standardized tests that produce the same reliable results for students around the world.

The exploration showed Canarslan why "it's not an easy process to create a standardized test," he said. "So I reshaped my business." He transformed the enterprise into what is now Goal Testing, and he determined the new business would only offer schools "these trusted assessment tools that are acceptable all over the world. I wanted to focus just on TOEFL business."

Since this turning point, Goal Testing has been ETS's official representative in Turkey and has been promoting the three tests to educators throughout the country. And yet, Canarslan does not think of himself as being in the assessment business. Rather, the former science teacher sees himself as an educator first — one who uses the TOEFL Primary, TOEFL Junior and TOEFL ITP tests to further Goal Testing's belief "that every learner should have access to a high-quality education, and every educator should feel confident about the decisions they make to help students learn and grow."

Goal Testing presents itself to schools as an assessment, data analysis and professional development package. Its representatives advocate for the use of the research-based TOEFL tests, but not as an end in and of themselves. Instead, they espouse the many ways teachers can use TOEFL assessment data formatively to help their students learn English.

"We are not selling tests," Canarslan stressed. "We are the schools' assessment solutions partner." And the cornerstone of this partnership is the accurate, reliable assessment data the TOEFL Young Students Series and TOEFL ITP tests provide about students' developing English-language skills, which teachers can trust to guide their instructional programs and professional learning, and to monitor student progress.

What using the TOEFL Young Students Series in the service of learning looks like

After contracting with a K–12 school, Goal Testing inserts itself into English-language learning as early as second grade. "We offer schools institutional services," Canarslan said. The company recommends that students progress through all levels assessed by the TOEFL Primary, TOEFL Junior and TOEFL ITP tests, as "this path makes English learning easy for them."

Goal Testing provides this testing at the beginning and end of each school year. At the start of each year, representatives analyze the TOEFL assessment data and meet with teachers to examine what the data says about the English-language skills of individual students, entire classes and the school as a whole, as well as about teaching practices. "We [try to] analyze



Remzi Canarslan, Founder and Managing Director, Goal Testing, Turkey

school needs according to their program," Canarslan said. Schools explain their annual goals for each grade, and Goal Testing points to areas where resources, curriculum and instructional practices can be improved to reach them.

After each end-of-year test, the consultants again meet with staff, this time to see if schools reached their program goals. The process is repeated iteratively, with Goal Testing helping staff incrementally improve English-language teaching and learning. "Schools update their programs according to our feedback," Canarslan said. And Goal Testing uses the accumulating data to provide ongoing comparisons that help schools determine, "Are the changes working?"

"Before us, there was no progress testing using an international test in Turkey," he noted. "So we started to offer schools TOEFL progress testing. And I think this is important. Afterward, the market tried to follow us. Our competitors tried to do the same thing. But they were not ready for it because they usually offered a test at the end of the year and gave out some certificates and ceremonies. And that's all. No institutional support or any other support. And this makes the difference between us and our competitors."

"Schools need something to get meaningful information about their English teaching performance," Canarslan explained, which the TOEFL tests provide. "We focus on this point."

TOEFL data can inform teacher learning to meet instructional challenges

After any given administration, TOEFL assessment data may affirm that students in certain classes are doing well in one area (reading, for instance), but struggling in others (such as speaking or listening). By looking collaboratively at the data and program, educators can identify the need for curriculum updates, more challenging resources and revised teaching practices to prepare students for the content and skills presented on the TOEFL tests.

Goal Testing uses TOEFL assessment data to provide informed professional development. For example, the company offers teachers training in differentiation, personalization and individualization to help them meet students' learning needs. "If teachers don't use TOEFL assessment data, it means that they are assigning the same activities to all students and it makes everything standard. But there are no standard students," Canarslan explained. "They are all different. And teachers should understand all students in their level and do something different for each one."

One of Canarslan's particular peeves is when he sees high-achieving students stop progressing because they have already met the year-end goals. Rather than think these students can be left alone, Goal Testing shows teachers how to direct them toward more enriching activities, so they can continue learning beyond the annual goals their peers are still striving toward.

The differentiation, personalization and individualization training is just one of many professional learning opportunities Goal Testing offers school staff. "We organize trainings with teachers and department heads and curriculum developers," Canarslan said. "We try to transfer our assessment expertise to them so it makes school programs stronger."

How using the TOEFL Young Students Series tests formatively impacts schools

Year by year, Goal Testing works with schools to tailor their English-language programs to the specific

learning needs of their students. "We help shape their English-language programs according to assessment data from these fair, valid and reliable TOEFL assessments," Canarslan said. "And we focus individually and institutionally — on both the macro and micro sides — to make school programs strong."

As instruction based on assessment data grows stronger, student learning accelerates and Goal Testing representatives find themselves recommending that schools "change their end-of-year goals, because students begin to reach the highest level in earlier grades."

When schools see the progress their programs make under Goal Testing's tutelage, the relationship between the entities solidifies: Goal Testing often provides "not one year's services, not two years' services — but educational life service," Canarslan said. "Year by year, the steps can transfer to their staff," but Goal Testing often retains a role.

Goal Testing has been working with some schools for as long as seven years. It maintains data to track not only the schools' progress, but the firm's progress as well, the founder reflected. "We have lots of data. I think it's the strongest part of our business."

The success of its client schools is Goal Testing's most significant accomplishment, because in keeping with Canarslan's data-driven, education-first business model, the company's primary focus is not tests. Instead, Goal Testing's ongoing commitment is to school improvement and learners' progress powered by TOEFL assessment data. "We review all the data, and we see the progress schools make," he said. "It's meaningful progress, meaningful change."

"We try to help schools see how to improve their programs for their students," he said. "We try to show them, if they use these trustable, research-based TOEFL assessments to measure students' progress, they can have meaningful data to update their programs and their curriculum and their teacher activities. Schools that want to improve their English-language teaching programs usually accept our offer."

TOEFL tests' remote accessibility was a vital asset during the worst year of the pandemic

Because the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools in Turkey in March 2020, Goal Testing was unable to provide year-end testing for the 2019–2020 school year. But as remote learning supplanted in-person instruction, Canarlsan quickly saw the potential for uneven learning and how vital ongoing TOEFL assessment data was going to be to get students back on track.

"Some schools thought that because of the pandemic, we could stop doing assessment," he recalled. "And I strongly stood against them. I told them: You should have assessments because you don't have enough connection with your students. They are not in class and you cannot observe their learning if you don't have assessment data. You cannot manage your teaching, you cannot manage your program. You need assessment data now more than ever."

Schools saw his point. And fortunately, ETS had the technology for remote testing ready to go, so Goal Testing rushed to "get everything online." When schools saw other testing companies unable to rise to the remote-proctoring challenge, they asked Canarlsan, "How can you administer this test?" he recalled. "And I said, we have different software. The TOEFL tests will provide the software. We have the expertise, the technical side."

"We trained our team and we did more than 30,000 home tests" in each of the last two years of the pandemic, he reported. "I think it's another success story because our competitors couldn't do it. Some of them had online testing tools, but there were lots of technical issues."

As soon as remote testing got underway, Goal Testing's school clients relaxed, Canarlsan remembered. "They realized that there was no need to worry. We administered the tests without any big problems."

Today, Goal Testing no longer has a need for large-scale remote testing but finds that small-scale remote-proctoring has become a useful tool for the administration of makeup tests, and for TOEFL testing of students who attend schools that don't offer TOEFL test in house.

Schools in Turkey are using the TOEFL Young Students Series and TOEFL ITP tests to effectively support English-language learning

Many public and private schools in Turkey use the TOEFL Primary, TOEFL Junior and TOEFL ITP tests to help monitor, guide and assess English-language learning in their classrooms. Here's a look at how that works in a few Turkish school systems:

Bilfen Schools

The Bilfen Schools are a national network of private schools offering instruction of various configurations within the K–12 spectrum.

Bilfen Middle Schools. According to Camlica Bilfen Middle School's Mediha Narin, who heads the English-language departments of all 20 Bilfen middle schools, Bilfen middle school students take the TOEFL Primary - Step 2 test in 5th grade, the TOEFL Junior Speaking test in 6th grade and the TOEFL Junior Standard test in 7th grade to measure how their language skills compare against the TOEFL global standard.

"In our English program, we combine all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing," Narin said. "Every year we examine the impact of our curriculum and program on student achievement, and we revise it to make it better if necessary. When we assess our students' knowledge, skills and abilities using TOEFL tests, we see that their scores fulfill our core communication goals in English, which makes us very happy."

In addition, Bilfen teachers use multiple best practices and a student-centered learning approach to teach English. "We stand behind the belief that students will perform better if classrooms are led by enthusiastic, inspired and well-trained teachers," Narin said. "We provide our teachers with training and innovative resources to enhance our curriculum and empower them to lead dynamic and effective lessons. We have a welcoming and encouraging environment for our students and we know that they can thrive in this kind of environment."

“TOEFL tasks are effective in measuring students’ language proficiency and are perceived to be developmentally appropriate for the students, allowing them to demonstrate their English-language abilities,” she noted. “It is an internationally recognized test, provides an independent evaluation of English-language proficiency and can serve as official evidence of the English-language levels of our students.”

Camlica Bilfen High School. At Camlica Bilfen High School in Istanbul, 9th graders and most 10th graders take the TOEFL Junior tests, while 11th graders and high-achieving 10th graders take the TOEFL ITP tests. The TOEFL Junior test is used to place incoming 9th-grade students in appropriate English-language classes.

English teacher Nilgun Demirkaya — who heads the English departments of nine Bilfen high schools — stresses how important English fluency is to her students, who are preparing for college. “Many of the top universities in Turkey teach through English and require students to pass a proficiency exam in English before they can begin an undergraduate degree,” she said. TOEFL scores are “often accepted in lieu of the proficiency exam.”

Consequently, TOEFL testing is used to monitor student progress and plan instruction that both targets and furthers students’ language skills. Teachers use TOEFL assessment data “as a guide for the needs of individual students,” particularly when differentiating instruction, she said. “TOEFL scores have consistently shown structure to be our students’ weakest point. Vocabulary is another area that causes scores to drop. We have tried to remain aware of this and provide relevant extra practice.”

Another observation teachers made by examining TOEFL data is that “although many students seem quite fluent and capable, they do not always achieve a perfect score in the speaking test,” she noted. “We saw that they needed to be more active listeners and work on their note-taking skills. This was an area we were able to focus on and increase students’ confidence.”

“It is very useful to have an objective measure of students’ language ability in different areas,” Demirkaya concluded. “It is beneficial for teachers and reassuring for parents. We can pinpoint weaknesses, give advice and/or act accordingly. Parents can be made aware

of their children’s progress and informed of what areas need more work. Nothing is done on a whim; everything has a solid foundation.”

TED Antalya College

TED Antalya College — a K–12 school in Antalya, Turkey — has been using the TOEFL Young Students Series since 2015, English teacher Tugba Salmaz reported.

Students, who begin English instruction in kindergarten, take the TOEFL Primary test for the first time in 4th grade, and again in 5th grade. In 7th grade, students take the TOEFL Junior test. “They take the tests in the beginning and end of the year to monitor their development in English language,” Salmaz said. “We encourage all our students to take the tests, but it is not obligatory.”

As a result of analyzing TOEFL test data, “we have paid more attention to adapting our normal curriculum” to encompass TOEFL learning outcomes, she noted. “In written exams, we make sure to add questions that monitor students’ listening skills, note-taking skills and critical thinking skills. Literature lessons were shaped to improve their critical thinking abilities. Reading lessons were focused more on students’ ability to read academically.” Other steps focused on English-language structure.

In addition, assessment data motivated staff to look at the resources available to support student learning. “After TOEFL tests became a part of our system, we started using digital resources more actively,” Salmaz recalled. The particular resources they subscribed to “allowed us to improve students’ reading, vocabulary, writing skills and listening skills.”

The combined efforts “helped the students to improve their scores,” she said. “As the English Department of TED Antalya, we all, as teachers, have the same mentality and motto: *Widening the horizons of our students*. TOEFL’s principles matched ours like a perfect fit and gave both the teachers and the students a mission to achieve this motto.”

SANKO Schools

The Sanko K–12 school system in Gaziantep, Turkey has been using TOEFL testing in its English-language program for about two years.

According to Middle School Principal Umit Ulger, students in grades 4 through 7 take the TOEFL Primary tests; 9th graders and most 10th graders take the TOEFL Junior tests; and 11th graders and high-achieving 10th graders take the TOEFL ITP tests. Students in grades 8 and 12 take no TOEFL tests as they sit for national examinations.

The schools use TOEFL assessment data “to monitor the improvement of students in target language learning,” she said, and to differentiate instruction. “It is important for us to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses and determine our teaching goals. It is a kind of support for us to make sure of the efficiency of our language program.”

“This year, we saw that our students needed to improve their reading skills,” Ulger noted. At the middle school level, “we are planning activities that support writing and reading skills together,” she said. “We believe that writing skill supports reading skill.” And in the high school, “we subscribed all our 9th- and 10th-grade students to an international magazine. These journals, which we integrated into lessons, included current worldwide issues. There were also words and expressions in the magazines that were not found in the textbooks.”

The principal was pleased to see many students do well on their TOEFL tests. “Some were even higher than the expected level,” she said, but “still we need to support the loss we had during the pandemic.”

Program Snapshot

- Website: www.goaltesting.com
- Email: info@goaltesting.com
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/goaltesting/>
- Began operating as Okul Yayın Danışmanlık Assessment Company in 2006
- Official representative of ETS in Turkey since 2013
- Administers the TOEFL ITP test and the TOEFL Young Students Series tests
- Headquartered in Avcılar, Istanbul, with additional offices in Zeytinburnu, İstanbul; the Netherlands; and Princeton, New Jersey

To find out how the TOEFL Young Students Series and TOEFL ITP tests can serve your program or institution, contact your local ETS Preferred Network (EPN) office.

www.ets.org/epn_directory



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