

**MEDIATING THE EFFECT OF MOTIVATION AND SELF-REGULATION ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGS (HIGH SCHOOL ENTRANCE) EXAM****ÖZ DÜZENLEME VE MOTİVASYONUN LGS (LİSELERE GİRİŞ SINAVI) SINAVINA YÖNELİK ÖĞRENCİ TUTUMLARINA ETKİSİNİN İRDELENMESİ****Ferhat KARANFİL<sup>1</sup>***Article History: Received: 04.05.2020 / Accepted: 24.05.2020**Makale Geçmişi: Geliş: 04.05.2020 / Kabul: 24.05.2020***Abstract**

In Turkey, there is a competitive environment in education and students want to study at institutions in which more successful students are accepted. These schools mostly have a limited capacity so there is always an exam which 8th-grade students have to take in order to get education at these institutions. Although the name of the exam and question types changed many times, there is still an anxiety-provoking exam and students feel nervous about this exam. This article describes the impact of self-regulation and motivation on the students' attitudes to LGS (High School Entrance Exam). Motivational Strategy Scale, developed by Pintrinch and De Groot (1990) and adapted to Turkish by Üredi and Üredi (2005), was used as the data collection instrument. The participants of the research consisted of 71 students attending the 8th year classes of secondary schools. To analyse the data of the research, multi regression analysis was used. The results showed that the LGS causes anxiety in all students and they do not want to answer English test questions. Also, their self-regulation and motivation levels are quite low which results in low success in LGS.

**Key Words:** High stakes tests, assessment, teenagers, motivation, test anxiety.

**Özet**

Türkiye'de eğitimde rekabetçi bir ortam mevcuttur ve öğrenciler daha başarılı öğrencilerin eğitim aldığı kurumlarda öğrenci olmayı tercih ederler. Başarılı öğrencilerin gittiği okulların kapasitesi sınırlıdır, bu nedenle 8. sınıf öğrencilerin liselere geçiş sınavı uygulanır. Sınavın adı ve soru türleri birçok kez değişse de sınav hala öğrenciler için kaygı tetikleyicidir. Bu araştırma makalesi, özdenetim ve motivasyonun öğrencilerin LGS sınavına karşı tutumları üzerindeki etkisini açıklanmaktadır. Veri toplama aracı olarak Pintrinch ve De Groot (1990) tarafından geliştirilen ve Üredi ve Üredi (2005) tarafından Türkçe'ye uyarlanan Motivasyon Stratejisi Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu, ortaokulların 8. Sınıflarında öğrenimlerine devam eden 81 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmanın verilerini analiz etmek için çoklu regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, LGS sınavının tüm öğrencilerde endişeye neden olduğunu ve öğrencilerin İngilizce test sorularını cevaplamak istemediklerini göstermiştir. Ayrıca, öz-düzenleme ve motivasyon seviyeleri oldukça düşüktür ve bu da LGS

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Öz düzenleme, motivasyon, sonuçları yüksek önemli sınavlar, ortaokul öğrencileri.

## **1. Introduction**

Since educational levels of societies are considered as the key criteria in determining their development levels, societies attempt to narrow the gaps between them, in terms of development, through education (Astokhova et al., 2016). In Turkey, the central exams play a key role in educational lives of students as their admissions and placements in high schools and universities depend on the exam scores achieved, which means that they may become students of education bodies either with high or poor education standards. Once the student has achieved a good score in the central exam, s/he will have the privilege to have an education in a school where the quality of education is better. For this reason, families make a great effort within their facilities to provide their children with a qualified education as part of their short-term goals, and therefore with a bright future as part of their long-term goals.

While the exam-oriented education system gives rise to the mentioned effect upon the parties concerned, it creates a negative effect on the system which inhibits achieving the desired student profile. However, success in education should not be perceived as the performance displayed in exams only (MEB, 2016a). Taking this into consideration, the Ministry of National Education abolished the Placement Test called SBS (the student selection exam for admission to secondary education) in 2013- 2014 Academic year to relieve students of the exam stress. A new transitional system abbreviated as LGS (High School Entrance Exam), i.e. transition to secondary education from primary education in Turkish, has been introduced to replace the exam abolished. The new system aims to present a pluralistic approach eliminating the conventional one which was raising monotype individuals through secondary education. Instead, the new system aims at showing respect to differences as well as securing students. The new system allows 6th, 7th and 8th-year students school test scores to be included in calculating their final scores to be used in their admissions to secondary education bodies besides their scores achieved in centrally designed and applied Turkish, Mathematics, Science and Technology, History of the Turkish Revolution, Religion and Morals and Foreign Language tests each term (MEB, 2013b). In the SBS system, the questions were more like logic and critical thinking questions and students have to go to private courses to learn these new skills. However, in the LGS, all questions are chosen among the information covered in the curriculum and teacher's marks also are counted while calculating the final score. By this way, the importance of the school is emphasized and increased.

### **1.1. Why did the previous systems change to the LGS system?**

There were many aims in the change of SBS to LGS. SBS exams were held once in a year and students must answer all questions in one session. However, in LGS, students answer twenty questions about different courses in forty minutes. By this way, the anxiety of one long session was divided into six sessions for six lessons. Secondly, there was a gap between private institutions and government schools as private schools could designate more time for critical thinking questions with more professional teachers and now there is a very fixed curriculum and equality is aimed among the schools. Also, now students are taking the exam in their schools, not in other schools and the wrong answers are not penalized and subtracted from the total score. Furthermore, thanks to LGS, we can follow if the aims of the curriculum

are achieved. Another student-friendly decision is that students can take make-up exams if they can submit a medical report to their schools. All these new decisions sound incredibly positive and helpful, but as we can infer people with higher levels of test anxiety show a lower rate of success than those who experience less test anxiety (Cassaday, 2004) and test anxiety negatively affects students' achievement (Steinberg, 1996) and Akman (2017) regarding high school entrance exam, indicate that the views of the students about the high school examinations were generally positive, but negative opinions also appeared. Although the names are changing, the anxiety of the exams such as; LGS (Entrance Examination for High Schools), OKS (Selection and Placement Examination of Secondary Education Institutions), SBS (Placement Examination for High Schools), TEOG (Basic Education to Secondary Education Exam) and finally again LGS (remains same. Although their names and periods are different from each other, the basis for entrance to secondary education is reduced to evaluation according to several exam results. Applications are generally aimed at increasing the quality of education or increasing or decreasing the number of exams rather than creating a Transition from Basic to Secondary Education under the name of the system of transition to secondary education) exist. However, in crowded countries like Turkey, as stated by Sarier (2010), selection examinations have always existed as a result of the desire of receiving better education and the inability of covering the demand for the education completely and it seems selection examinations will continue to cope with the desire to receive a better education.

LGS examination and English lessons in terms of self-regulation and motivation are chosen as a research topic because there is a repeated failure in English test in LGS. For example, in spring LGS the mean score was 57.60 in Turkey which is exceptionally low in comparison to the other lessons. Another expected result was the mean score in the success rate of girls is 61.97% and of boys 51.71%. Also, there is a common complaint that the English test is exceedingly difficult, so the researcher will examine the effects of self-regulation and motivation as well as the reactions of students to the exam and their attributions to the success or failure in English lesson. Although there are a lot of studies on high stakes English test, there are few studies which explore the effect of motivation in LGS classes. In order to seek the attitudes of the 8<sup>th</sup> graders towards LGS exam, the following research questions were formulated

- To what extend LGS candidates have self –regulation skills?
- To what extend LGS candidates are motivated to learn English and be successful?
- What are the reactions of 8th-grade students to the exam? What is the attribution of failure in this exam?
- What are the suggestions of students to improve the current testing system?

## **2. Literature Review**

Many factors that could influence the course achievement or exam achievement of the students. The concept self-regulation, which plays an effective role in students' learning process, lies on the focal point of the researches done on academic success in recent years (Üredi and Üredi, 2005). Self-regulation, which is defined by a great number of theoretical

points of view, has been defined by Pintrich (2000) as an effective and constructive process in which the students determine their learning purposes, try to arrange their cognitions, motivations and behaviours, and are directed and limited by their targets with the contextual features in their environment". It is defined by Risemberg & Zimmerman (1992) as determining targets, developing strategies to realize these targets and, managing whatever gained thanks to these strategies". Self-regulation skill is considered as a mechanism that assists in explaining the differences of achievement among the students, and this means an increase of the achievement (Schunk, 2005). Even though the concept self-regulation is interpreted through various theoretical points of view, researchers have focused on two elements in the organization of the learning process of individuals which are self-regulation strategies and motivational beliefs which are the sources of motivation enabling the usage of these strategies. Self-regulation strategies, according to Zimmerman (1990), are the processes implemented by students which they believe will be of help to them and serve as a tool in gaining the knowledge, with skills required to meet their objectives. These processes are the cognitive strategies such as self-regulation, which contains the meta-cognitive strategies for the planning, monitoring and changing the cognition, and students managing their efforts to do an academic assignment in the classroom and repeating, making sense and organizing for us to learn, remember and understand (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). However, in addition to the usage of the cognitive and metacognitive strategy to achieve success, the individual should use not only the cognitive strategies, but also the belief, will, power and affective factors so that the self-regulation processes will be effective (Pintrich, 2000). Motivational beliefs are the beliefs of learners about the event and the object, or the topic (Boekaerts, 2002). Individuals opinions on their abilities to learn are beliefs linked to one another, which are being certain about their knowledge and skills, the judgment of proficiency, output expectation and appreciation of academic duties (Pintrich and De Groot, 1990). The beliefs of students related to their own management and proficiency levels may provide an important clue in predicting their future applications and participation. In the field literature, Alan has put forward the fact that self-regulating learning strategies and motivational beliefs influence achievement in researches that examine the relationship between self-regulation and achievement (Won et.al, 2018; Üredi and Üredi, 2005). According to the data of the Program of International Student Assessment, PISA 2012, arranged by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and which is one of the most comprehensive educational researches of the world, when the self-regulation and motivational beliefs in Mathematics lesson are examined, although the intrinsic motivation or the approach towards the lesson is above the OECD average in Turkey, this positive attitude did not reflect on the results as academic success, and our country took a place in the last rows in Mathematics Achievement. The same scenario is also valid for English lesson and students often display a positive attitude to English lessons which are very communicative and resist the multiple-choice test in the LGS.

There are previous studies conducted by few researchers to explore LGS and SBS exam. For instance, Ötken (2012) examined the effects of variables like parents and teacher on students' success on 7th grade the placement exam (SBS) and concluded that parents and teachers could have a positive influence on students' SBS success. Tomul and Savaşçı (2012)

concluded that an increase in family income level has a positive effect on the academic success of students and that decrease in income level leads to a decrease in academic success. Similar results were found in the study of Doğan (2015). Süer (2014) examined the effect of Self-Regulation skills on LGS exam success and it was concluded that self-regulation skills had a positive effect on LGS exam scores. There are also several studies emphasizing the effectiveness of preparation on high stakes tests (McGaghie et al., 2004; Popham, 2001;).Preparation courses were ubiquitous in Turkey, being found in almost every town for every nationwide exam but this year all private exam preparation courses were closed down, so students joined the courses in their schools. Within the literature on academic achievement, the following variables were found to be significant: exam anxiety (Koçkar, Kılıç, & Şener, 2002), sex (Özkal & Çetingöz, 2006), learning styles (Deniz & Kelecioğlu, 2005), and attitudes toward learning (Akbaba-Altun, & Çakan, 2008). There are also studies on the effect of teaching for large scale exams on achievement (McGaghie et al, 2004).

The present study will shed light on the effectiveness of self –regulation and motivation on the attitudes towards LGS and it is considered to fill a research gap by uncovering the reasons of failure and success and the impact of inner motivation on success in LGS.

### **3. Methodology**

In the current study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. In order to measure the motivational strategy, use the questionnaire “Motivational Strategy Scale” was used. It was developed by Pintrinch and De Groot (1990) and adapted to Turkish by Üredi (2005). An open-ended part was added at the final section of the instruments and in that part, students are encouraged to express their ideas about self-regulation strategies, motivation, ideas about the management of the school, the teacher, and the coursebook (Upturn8). Besides, ten students were interviewed and were asked further detailed questions.

#### **3.1. Context of the Study**

Both schools are located in suburban areas of İstanbul and Elazığ. The families have low level of socioeconomic status and many students come from divorced parents. The schools are among the least successful ones in their districts and they are compulsory service schools for new teachers. The students in both schools are often bilinguals, they speak Kurdish, Romany, Zaza, Kirmançi. At the time of the study, some changes were put into effect at without prior notice, so students were going through new implementations which may make them more anxious.

#### **3.2. Participants**

The participants are 8<sup>th</sup> graders in a public school and they study for the LGS exam. They receive four hours of English instruction. The participants are voluntary students who accepted to be involved in the study. Although the questionnaire was administered to 105 students in the school, only 71 of them were appropriate for analysis. The rest of them (N=34) were discarded from the analysis since they contained incomplete parts. The discarded ones are generally from the other classes that the researcher does not teach. Therefore, the total population consisted of thirty females and forty-one males. They have 35 hours of lessons in a

week with some extra courses after school. They were 8<sup>th</sup> graders in 2015-2016 and 2017-2018 educational years.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data collected through the interviews and the open-ended part of the questionnaire were analysed through content analysis. The researcher reviewed all the questionnaires and looked for responses to the guiding questions. The patterns of themes frequently mentioned in the questionnaires and interviews were also identified. The salient themes and responses identified by the researcher were checked against the content of the questionnaire by an external colleague to avoid bias, to ensure inter-rater agreement as the researcher is the classroom teacher and receive personal feedback. The ideas of the external colleagues are taken into consideration. The selective coding of the researcher and the external researcher was consistent. The five-point Likert items were analysed using SPSS 20. The Cronbach Alpha was found 0,853 so it is a reliable questionnaire and validity analysis of the instrument was already done by Üredi and Üredi (2005).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Assistance of teacher in exam preparation

The attitude of the participants to the teachers was generally positive and they responded the statement “My English teacher helped me to get ready for the exam” in a very positive way both in questionnaires and interviews.as seen in the table below, 56.3% of the students expressed that the teacher helped them to prepare for the exam.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive results of teachers' help to prepare the students for the exam.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	8	11.3	11.3	11.3
	Disagree	7	9.9	9.9	21.1
	Neither disagree nor agree	8	11.3	11.3	32.4
	Agree	8	11.3	11.3	43.7
	Strongly agree	40	56.3	56.3	100
	Total	71	100	100	

One participant expressed her ideas in the interview about the teacher as follows:

*“Our teacher is very friendly and knowledgeable this year. He always uses smartboard for extra activities and videos. We solve lots of LGS questions on IWB (Interactive White Board). We had problems with the teachers in the fifth, sixth grade because they were extremely strict and boring.” P3*



#### 4.2. Self-Regulation Skills

Another finding of the self-regulation skills is that students experience great difficulty in finding the main themes of the subject they are studying. This might stem from the fact that their classes are generally not student-centred, and they rarely decide on their learning process. However, there are areas that they are aware of themselves. The statistical results are presented below in table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Descriptive results of students' capacity to find the main theme in the material they are studying (Self-regulation)*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	18.3	18.3	18.3
	Disagree	9	12.7	12.7	31.0
	Neither disagree nor agree	15	21.1	21.1	52.1
	Agree	15	21.1	21.1	73.2
	Strongly agree	19	26.8	26.8	100.0
	Total	71	100.0	100.0	

As stated in table 2, 26.8% of the students strongly agree that they experience difficulty in finding the main ideas in the material they are studying. This finding is in line with Zimmerman's (2008) findings. One student says:

*"I am terrible at Maths and English because I did not fully learn what I was supposed to learn in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. (P5)*

Also, one of the less successful interviewees responded to the question "What hinders you when you study English?" as follows:

*"If I do not have previous knowledge about something and I cannot get the main idea, I do not want to study it. For example, this year you tried to teach us comparative and superlative forms of the adjectives, but I do not know the meaning of many adjectives so I cannot learn the new information, it is extremely difficult to understand the idea of comparatives." (P3)*

Another problem which the students complained about is teachers' designing the other courses (Science, Maths, Religion,) according to the test specifications, which causes students to remember the test all the time and feel anxious. Similarly, Abrams et al. (2003) state that teachers design their classroom assessment in parallel with the high-stake tests may cause apprehension.

Also, students reported the problems of the teaching style of their teachers. Accordingly, in 5-7 graders, teachers prefer to ask grammar questions in the exams, but in LGS, there is no explicit grammar question and nearly all questions test vocabulary knowledge. One of the students complain that:

*“We were never encouraged to learn vocabulary in previous grades and in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we were expected to know a lot of vocabulary items. The private colleges luckier than us because they know more lexical items than we learn in our schools and we take the same test.” (P2)*

Similarly, Read (2000:2) emphasizes the place of vocabulary in teaching and testing: “vocabulary can be seen as a priority area in language teaching, requiring tests to monitor the learners’ progress in vocabulary learning and to assess how adequate their vocabulary knowledge is to meet their communication needs”.

Furthermore, in the open-ended part of the questionnaire, many students complained about the school management and teachers who always compare them with other students, which makes them feel underestimated. They mostly speak about their children in other schools in a complimentary way and teachers have really low expectations from the students, which makes the students demotivated and nervous. One student states that:

*“We cannot buy test books for LGS and we do not have a private tutor at home as our principal and some teachers have. The principal always talks about her daughter in a boastful way and this is unbearable.” (P1)*

Likewise, there are findings that show a consistent and stronger relationship between teacher expectations and student success (Özkal *et al.*, 2002). In a similar vein, according to some teachers, the prejudice developed by environment towards school, by school staff towards students lie behind the failure of school (Silver, 2004).

### 4.3. Exam anxiety

The table below presents the results related to students’ feelings of anxiety about the LGS exam.

**Table 3.**

*LGS exam and level of anxiety*

		I like what I learn in English lesson but LGS makes me anxious	In LGS English exam, I feel nervous
N	Valid	71	71
	Missing	0	0
	Mean	3.9014	3.7746
	Mode	5.00	5.00
	Variance	2.376	2.006
	Kurtosis	-.504	-.726



Std. Error of Kurtosis	.563	.563
Sum	277.00	268.00

Two questions about test anxiety were asked on different pages of the questionnaire and, students reported remarkably high nervousness. The mean score was 3.90 and 3.77 successively which point at exceedingly high anxiety. In the open-ended part of the questionnaire, students were asked to make suggestions about the LGS exam format. One student expressed his/her suggestions as follows:

*“We can have oral interviews with the inspectors, and they could give us marks. Teachers should guide us and advise us to go to high schools according to our abilities and preferences. 8<sup>th</sup> grade is late for the decision of high school. I want to be an English teacher, but my family forces me to study at Science High School just because it is prestigious.” P9*

The shift from one teacher in primary schools to many teachers at secondary schools may also serve as an explanation for a young person's loss of interest in his or her lessons. The interest shifts to their own body, and the opposite gender, as well as test anxiety, all of which might be classified as issues in secondary schools. In the study conducted by Yüksel et al. (2018) it was revealed that the test anxiety and selective attention skills of the adolescents who took the TEOG examination formed 47% of the test performance ( $R=.69$ ;  $R^2=.47$ ;  $p<.001$ ). The secondary school teachers should be informed about how to sustain the well-being of their students and overcome test anxiety.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

The current study is designed to seek the attitudes of students towards LGS exam and it was found that students with a higher level of motivation and self-regulation became students in the schools which students with higher scores could attend and they want English lesson should be a part of the LGS. The study offered many implications that should be taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

To begin with, in the east part of Turkey, students are not totally competent in Turkish and they cannot find a logical reason to learn English. MOE should organise some competitions, tours, quiz shows to raise awareness about the importance of English in their professional life. Regional differences in Turkey would require tailor-made provisions (Lynn et.al,2015).

Secondly, Maths and English lessons are the most difficult ones for students in the exams, so students rarely feel a sense of achievement in these lessons. Maths and English lessons should be thought by the professional teachers who graduated from Faculty of Education However, in some cases, hourly-paid teachers some of whom are the graduates of other majors which are not related to education teach these challenging lessons. Thirdly, principals of schools, teachers, parents should always encourage students and never compare them with others.

Next, multiple-choice questions in the LGS should be discrete items and test only one thing at a time. In the observer experience together with student's interview results, it can be

stated that students may be successful in productive and written exams, but not in a multiple-choice test. However, the books (Upturn and Mastermind 8) employ a communicative approach, but the washback effect of the test does not match with the current teaching paradigms (Çakır, 2017; Kılıçkaya, 2016)

Another implication is related to language teachers: they should foster intrinsic motivation and self-regulation skills throughout the year and language teachers also need empowerment (Köksal & Ulum, 2018) to be benevolent for their learners. Last but not least, students complain they take six difficult exams over two days with ten minutes breaks and it is very tiring. It would be better if students should take an exam each day. Finally, in the course materials, the use of learner autonomy, self-regulation, self-assessment, and self – reflection strategies should be encouraged. Students should feel they are involved in the decision-making process of their own learning.

This research is not without limitations. Although the questionnaires were administered to 105 voluntary students, 34 of them were discarded because they did not provide complete answers to the questionnaire; namely, there were missing parts. It would have been better if the researcher had a chance to visit all classes while the questionnaire was being conducted or give the questionnaire to another school the data collection has to end up in May as the students did not attend the school after the exam. Some post-exam interviews would provide insights to the researcher, but it was not possible.

The study was conducted in two schools where the students do not have intensive preparation year or extra English classes. Different student groups will undoubtedly yield peculiar results.

Recently, Çelikel and Karakuş (2017) found a significant relationship between the success of the high school entrance exams and the academic success of the mathematics course so attending the gate-keepers exams like LGS somehow urge students to study.

As a suggestion for further research, prospective researchers may conduct experimental studies in which treatment groups receive self-regulation strategies and more tasks which increase motivation. and examine the difference. Studies similar to this research could be carried out with larger study groups, and the results could be compared and discussed. Exam achievements of the students who attend different types of schools and their self-regulation skills could be examined via a comparative study

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