# English Level Determination Exam from the Perspectives of Primary School English Teachers

**Gülden İLİN**[*], **Rana YILDIRIM**[**]

## Abstract

One of the issues which has remained the same after the introduction of the new educational system so-called 4+4+4 is the central assessment procedure, namely the administration of "English Level Determination Exam" (ELDE). This study attempts to explore how teachers of English view this central exam as an assessment tool regarding its potential impact on methodology, materials, tasks, and assessment techniques, classroom management and teachers' relationship with students, parents and school administration. The study also aims to investigate teachers' perceptions related to how the new system will show itself in the current assessment procedure. Findings reveal discrepancy between what is proposed by the National Ministry of Education Curriculum and teachers' perceptions of their classroom practice, mismatch between the assessment techniques applied in the classroom and ELDE and that the majority of teachers do not have any idea about how the exam will manifest itself in the new education system.

**Key Words:** *English as a Foreign Language, Young language learners, Assessment.*

## İlköğretimde Çalışan İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Bakış Açısından İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavı

## Özet

Türkiye'de zorunlu eğitim 4+4+4 şeklinde ifade edilen yeni bir sürece girmesine rağmen, merkezi olarak yapılan İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavı yerini korumuştur. Bu çalışma, söz konusu merkezi sınavın yöntemler, materyaller, görevler, değerlendirme teknikleri, sınıf yönetimi ve öğretmenlerin öğrencilerle, ebeveynlerle ve okul yönetimleriyle olan ilişkileri üzerindeki etkilerini İngilizce öğretmenlerinin nasıl algıladıklarını araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, ayrıca yeni sistemin mevcut değerlendirme yordamına yansımalarına ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bulgular, İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavının sınıfta kullanılan değerlendirme yöntemleri ile uyumsuz olduğunu ve öğretmenlerin söz konusu sınava yeni eğitim sisteminin nasıl yansıyacağı konusunda fikir sahibi olmadıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular, ayrıca İlköğretim İngilizce dersi öğretim programının amaçları ile öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalarının bu sınavın olumsuz etkisi nedeniyle farklı olduğunu göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, Dil öğrenen çocuklar, Değerlendirme.*

## Introduction

Turkey has been going through a process of educational change for some time. Compulsory 8- year primary school education has left its place to a new system described as 4+4+4 (MoNE, 2012). English has been taught as a foreign language in the fourth year of these schools since 1997 (MoNE, 1997), however with the latest decisions made; students will be receiving foreign language instruction in the second year of the first four years (MoNE, 2012). In spite of all these changes made, one of the few remaining procedures from the previous system is related with the assessment procedure "English Level

[*] Yrd. Doç. Dr. Çukurova Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili eğitimi, ADANA
E-posta: guldenilin@cu.edu.tr
[**] Yrd. Doç. Dr. Çukurova Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili eğitimi, ADANA
E-posta: ranayil@cu.edu.tr

Determination Exam" (ELDE). ELDE has been administered as one of the subtests within the standardized test called Level Determination Exam (LDE) which has functioned as a form of placement test held at provincial levels in allocation of students from elementary to secondary education (MoNE, 2007). The nature of questions in ELDE collides with the English curriculum objectives. The number of questions, on the other hand, is determined on the basis of the weekly class hours. The distribution of questions is as follows; 13 questions for the 6th, 15 for the 7th, and 17 for the 8th grades (MoNE, 1997).

Despite a growing interest in whether the LDE serves its purpose, only a handful of studies have focused on the reliability and validity of the LDE (Anıl and Guzeller, 2010; Dogan and Sevindik, 2011; Karakaya and Kutlu, 2012) and thus that of the ELDE. Of the very few studies specifically focusing on the ELDE, Bas and Beyhan**,** (2012) examined the English questions asked in the exam according to the cognitive domain taxonomy and found that the questions were prepared to assess lower level of thinking skills of the students. In addition, Ilin and Yildirim, (2008) identified the wash-back effects of both the LDE and ELDE show that the exam system had to be revised as the focus was on some topics more than others and left no time for social activities, that it assessed student knowledge through one-shot exam which brought together negativity such as passing the exam became the only target to be reached, and this led to high levels of stress on the part of students. Drawing on these, this study aims to investigate how teachers of English view ELDE in the new 4+4+4 system as an assessment tool in terms of its potential impact on methodology, materials, tasks, and assessment techniques, classroom management and teachers' relationship with students, parents and school administration, and how, in their opinion, the latest improvements in the new system will show themselves in the assessment procedure.

**Language assessment**

Lambert and Lines (2000) describe assessment as "a) a fact of life for teachers, part of what teachers do ; b) an organic part of teaching

and learning c) a part of the planning process" (p.2). Erwin (1991) states that assessment is a process of collecting information on student achievement and performance, and documenting usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs. For Gipps (2002) however, assessment is "a wide range of methods for evaluating pupil performance and attainment, including formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, classroom based assessment carried out by teachers and portfolios" (p.vii).

Although assessment is defined in various ways in literature, it is agreed that it is an important part of teaching, by which teachers make a judgment about the level of skills or knowledge (Taras, 2005). Assessment is generally classified in two categories: summative and formative assessment. The former refers to assigning students a course grade at the end of a course or project. This type of assessment may have various functions such as shaping how teachers organize their courses but does not affect the learning process. Although the information that is collected from this type of assessment is important, it can only help evaluating certain aspects of the learning process. The latter, also known as assessment for learning, on-going assessment or dynamic assessment on the other hand, is defined as the use of assessment judgment about capacities or competences to promote the further learning of the person who has been assessed (Threlfall, 2005).

**Assessment of young language learners**

One of the main reasons why the age for learning English has been lowered in many European countries is the belief that earlier is better and a positive attitude towards foreign language learning should be fostered at an early age. However, teachers' hard work in establishing positive attitudes to learning English in the young learner language classroom can be severely damaged when it comes to assessment (McKay, 2006). However, as McKay (2006) puts forth, teachers' hard work in establishing positive attitudes to learning English in the young learner language classroom can be severely damaged when it comes to assessment. Rixon (2010) warns that procedures that are well known

for adults do not match those for younger ones. One of the reasons for the mismatch is the way young children learn. They construct knowledge in experiential, interactive, concrete, and hands-on ways (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1995 cited in Guddemi and Case, 2004) rather than through abstract reasoning and paper and pencil activities alone. Another reason concerns the age factor. Traditional assessment in the form of tests is not suitable for young language learners as they are considered poor test- takers due to their age (McKay, 2006). Put differently, the younger the child being evaluated, assessed, or tested, the more errors are made (Shepard, 1994; Ratcliff, 1995). A further reason for the difference between the assessment for young language and older or adult learners is related to affective concerns. Young learners may not perform to the best of their ability on formal standardized tests due to the time and pressure constraints (Bejarano and Gordon, 2009) because the use of tests affects the self-esteem of children based on the point whether they see themselves as 'successful' or not (Wortham, 2005). Thus, eventually this will affect their attitudes towards learning languages negatively. Shepard (1994) reported on a study which illustrated how testing of children in the past decades have been excessive and inappropriate leading to trauma. Similarly, Conner (2008) adds that summative assessment with poorly formed and administered paper and pencil test can be an enemy of language learning since this method of testing can be extremely stressful and lead to a loss of love in language learning. More importantly, it eats up valuable language learning and production time (Conner, 2008) as teachers often find themselves in the position where they are forced to teach the exam rather than the language itself. Rixon (1999) also claims that summative assessment through paper and pencil exams ignore communicative language use experienced by language learners in the classroom where they interact with their teachers and peers in a meaningful way.

The implications of young learner characteristics for the assessment of their language ability are discussed widely in the young learner literature (Halliwell, 1992; Vale

and Feunteun, 1995; Cameron, 2001; Rea-Dickens, 2000). On the basis of this discussion, there appears to be consensus that assessment procedures for young language learners should satisfy the following demands:

- Assessment should be in harmony with the age of the group and involve the element of fun.

- Variety in types of assessment should be maintained.

- There should be some kind of feedback provided by the results of assessment.

- The activities used in the classroom should be relevant to assessment (Orsdemir, 2010).

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Thirty-four English teachers working in 24 public primary schools located in Seyhan district of Adana participated in this study. Of the participant teachers, 23 were female while 11 were male. While the age of half of the participants ranged from 26 to 30, ten is between 21-25 years-old and seven is older than 30. Nineteen teachers stated to be working for 10-15 years and 15 teachers had one to three years of teaching experience. The grades of students that the participant teachers were teaching at the time of the study ranged from the 6th to 8th grade. Out of 34 teachers, 23 claimed to be teaching 7th grades, 13 8th grades and seven 6th grades.

**Instruments**

In this small scale descriptive study, data were gathered through open-ended questionnaires administered to and follow-up interviews held with randomly selected 20 participant teachers. In both elicitation tools, we aimed to find answers to the following questions:

1. Does ELDE, in any way, affect your classroom practices in terms of:
   a. your way of teaching methods
   b. materials that you use
   c. assessment techniques
   d. time management

e.   classroom management

f.   your relationship with parents

g.   your relationship with school administration

h.   your relationship with your students?

2.   Do you think that English Level Determination Exam really fills the gap between the philosophy the curriculum proposed and the actual practice in the primary schools? /Why/Why not?

3.   Do you think that ELDE is a suitable assessment means in terms of the characteristics of the group it addresses?

4.   Do you think that ELDE is a suitable assessment means to measure language proficiency of the students?

5.   How do you think the new 4+4+4 system will show itself in the assessment procedure?

6.   Does ELDE match your assessment philosophy as a teacher? Why/ why not?

7.   Based on your experiences, describe ELDE as an assessment means by using 3 adjectives and adding "because…" for the adjectives you use.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected from the teachers through an open-ended questionnaire which was developed drawing on the findings of the study previously conducted on the wash-

back effects of both the Level Determination Exam and the English section of this exam (Ilin and Yildirim, 2008). The questionnaires were first piloted with totally ten non-participant English teachers. Along with the results from the piloting process, necessary modifications were realized. Then, the questionnaires were administered through e-mail correspondence, and the participant teachers were asked to return their responses within two weeks. Following this process, 20 teachers which were randomly selected were interviewed in order to gain a deeper insight into the data gathered from the questionnaires. The interviews were also held on Skype and lasted for approximately 30 minutes each. The data which were acquired from both the questionnaires and interviews were subjected to content analysis. In the analysis, in line with the questions asked, the recurring themes were identified by the two researchers separately and discussed until reaching a consensus for reliability purposes. Then, the frequency of each theme was determined and presented in tables.

### Findings

The findings acquired from the questionnaires and interviews are presented in this section. Data obtained from the interviews have been displayed in the form of excerpts to support the data gathered from the questionnaires.

Regarding the potential influence of ELDE on classroom practice, it was found that the majority of teachers have negative perceptions as displayed in Table 8.

### Table 1. Influence of ELDE on classroom practice

|  | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Materials | 24 | 6 |
| Methods | 23 | 8 |
| Assessment | 20 | 9 |
| Time management | 20 | 10 |
| Teachers' relationship with administration | 18 | 11 |
| Teachers' relationship with students | 17 | 13 |
| Teachers' relationship with parents | 16 | 13 |
| Classroom management | 13 | 16 |

The most frequently cited negative influence of ELDE appears to be on materials (24 citations). The teachers claimed that they had to accommodate tests rather than materials of their own choice. The following remark seems to elaborate on this:

*Excerpt 1*

*Actually I feel obliged to buy and make the students buy some extra tests to be analysed in the classroom. It is a kind of burden both for the parents and teachers. I have to do something I do not want only because the system requires so.*

The teachers also articulated that the methods that they employed in the classroom went through a change due to ELDE (23 citations). One of the teachers explained how ELDE influenced her choice of methods which were contrary to her teaching philosophy as in the following:

*Excerpt 2*

*It certainly affects my choice of methods in the classroom. Just like a traditional teacher, I use grammar-translation method since I have to employ ELDE practice instead of tasks geared to developing students' communication skills.*

Other classroom aspects such as assessment and time management were also claimed to be influenced by ELDE (20 citations each). Regarding assessment, one of the teachers stated that he did not have the chance to use alternative assessment as suggested by the English curriculum:

*Excerpt 3*

*I cannot apply alternative assessment, for example portfolio. Instead I have to include in the written exams I prepare myself multiple choice questions or ELDE questions from previous exams.*

The following excerpt illustrates how ELDE limited the time that could have been devoted to more communicative tasks:

*Excerpt 4*

*I need to set extra time for ELDE preparation. It is so hard to devote adequate time for language tasks.*

The teachers further observed the negative influence of ELDE on teachers' relationship with administration (18 citations), with students (17 citations), and with parents (16 citations). The following clearly indicates how teachers found it hard to satisfy all the parties concerned:

*Excerpt 5:*

*To satisfy my headmaster and the parents, I have to have students score high in ELDE. This necessitates a more traditional approach to teaching, which makes the students unhappy. On the other hand, I have to follow the curriculum which requires more communicative teaching. Satisfying one group usually leads to dissatisfaction for the other group.*

Finally, they think that classroom management is also affected negatively by ELDE (13 citations). For example:

*Excerpt 6:*

*I usually have two student camps in my classroom: those who want to do tests and others who hate tests. When I try to satisfy one group, it becomes very difficult to control the other group. This creates a chaos in the classroom.*

The participant teachers' responses to the question if ELDE really fills the gap between the philosophy the curriculum proposed and the actual practice in the primary schools are presented in Table 1

Out of 34 participant teachers, 29 think that ELDE is far from really filling the gap between the philosophy the curriculum proposed and the actual practice in the primary schools. The reasons they propose for their opinion are that there is a mismatch between the content of curriculum and ELDE because of the fact that the four skills, especially the productive ones, are neglected in ELDE (38 citations). This finding is supported by the following opinion acquired from the interviews with the teachers:

*Excerpt 7*

I don't think so because this test forces the teachers to focus on grammar rather than productive skills. The key points in grammar are very important and having the correct

**Table 2. Views on ELDE and the new curriculum**

|  |  | f |
|---|---|---|
| No = 29 | Mismatch between | |
|  | Content of curriculum and that of ELDE | 38 |
|  | Classroom methodology and multiple choice test | 4 |
|  | Reality at schools and ELDE | 2 |
| Yes = 5 | Match between | |
|  | Content of curriculum and that of ELDE | 5 |

answers in the test is necessary to be deemed as successful. Accuracy is more important than fluency. According to the curriculum, the students must speak, listen, write and read in English but as ELDE doesn't test listening, writing or speaking skills, these skills are mostly ignored. The activities do not at all comply with ELDE.

Another contrast for them shows itself in the methods employed in the classroom (4 citations). That ELDE is far from the reality at schools was one other reason for the mismatch

(2 citations). Yet, five teachers claim that ELDE really fills the gap between the philosophy the curriculum proposes and the actual practice in the primary schools. The only reason put forward by those teachers is that the questions asked in ELDE are totally relevant to their text-book content (5 citations).

We also asked teachers their opinion as to whether ELDE is a suitable assessment means in terms of the characteristics of the group it addresses. Table 2 summarizes their responses:

**Table 3. Views on ELDE and student characteristics**

|  |  | f |
|---|---|---|
| No = 31 | Does not consider | |
|  | Age | 26 |
|  | Different learning styles | 11 |
|  | Regional differences | 5 |
|  | Five senses | 3 |
|  | Contextual differences | 1 |
|  | Nature of test | |
|  | Leads to rote-learning | 5 |
|  | Product-based | 4 |
|  | Mismatch between classroom assessment and ELDE | 2 |
| Yes = 3 | Questions parallel to what is covered in the textbook | |

While 31 teachers who participated in the study think that ELDE is not a suitable means in terms of the characteristics of the group it addresses, only 3 claim that it is suitable. The teachers in the first group put forward various

reasons for their opinion. The most frequently cited reason is that ELDE is not appropriate for the age of the group it addresses (26 citations). This is also evidenced by the opinions obtained from the interviews. The

following excerpt, for example, seems to show that ELDE is inappropriate when the age of learners taking it is considered:

*Excerpt 8*

*I think that it is not suitable when we think of the age and the common characteristics of the students. Initially it brings about the high anxiety problem, which even affects the daily life of students. Then they only focus on passing the exam. They do not want to do any listening or speaking activities. Most of the time, they are reluctant to participate in the activities if they are not directly related with ELDE questions, or grammatical patterns. They just expect you to teach grammar and vocabulary. This creates conflicts between the students and their teacher.*

The other reasons for inappropriateness of ELDE concern learners' different learning styles (11 citations), regional differences (5 citations), appeal to five senses (3 citations), and contextual differences (1 citation). There are also reasons related to nature of ELDE. Teachers think that preparing for ELDE leads to rote-learning (5 citations), the test focuses on the product rather than the process of learning (4 citations), and classroom assessment and ELDE do not match at all (2 citations). On the other hand, three teachers claim that ELDE is a suitable means of assessment. According to their beliefs, questions asked in this exam are parallel to what is covered in the textbook.

Table 4 indicates the findings related to teachers' perceptions of the appropriateness of ELDE as an assessment tool.

**Table 4. Views on ELDE as an assessment tool**

| | | f |
|---|---|---|
| No = 32 | Does not measure four skills | 37 |
| | Holds chance factor | 2 |
| | Not compatible with age | 3 |
| | Measures Ss' test-taking abilities | 2 |
| | Not compatible with classroom assessment | 5 |
| Partly =1 | Good for measuring vocabulary knowledge | |
| Yes = 1 | Need for assessment | 1 |
| | Has content and face validity | 1 |

Thirty-two teachers claim that ELDE is not appropriate as an assessment means. The most frequently cited reason concerns the teachers' claim as to the fact that ELDE does not measure learners' language proficiency in terms of the four skills (37 citations). The teachers also put forward reasons regarding that ELDE is not appropriate as an assessment tool because it "holds chance factor" (2 citations), is "not compatible with age" (3 citations), only "measures learners' test-taking skills" (2 citations), and is "not compatible with classroom assessment" (5 citations). The

following excerpts illustrate the discrepancy between the assessment accommodated in the classroom and ELDE:

*Excerpt 9:*

*ELDE is a multiple choice test consisting of 16 questions. However, the curriculum we follow does not propose the classroom techniques appropriate for multiple choice questions. Therefore, there emerges a difference between how we measure students' proficiency in the class environment and how this proficiency is measured by ELDE.*

*Excerpt 10:*

*To me, it isn't a suitable assessment tool to measure language proficiency. We speak English and encourage the students to speak English even at breaks. They are supposed to comprehend what they listen or read. Also writing is essential to language proficiency but ELDE only measures their grammar knowledge. And the exam is only based on multiple choice questions so there isn't any room for productive skills. In addition, there is always the likelihood to mark the correct choice even if students have no idea about the answer.*

Only one teacher claims that ELDE is appropriate as an assessment means as s/he thinks that there is always a need for assessment, and that it has content and face validity. Yet, another thinks that it is "partly" appropriate because it is good for measuring vocabulary knowledge.

Table 5 presents the findings acquired from the teachers' responses concerning how they think the new 4+4+4 system will show itself in the assessment procedure.

**Table 5. Teachers' anticipation of ELDE in the new education system**

| | | f |
|---|---|---|
| **Optimistic** | Hopeful about the future of English lessons | 4 |
| | Will soon be replaced with another test | 2 |
| | Switch from output based to process-based assessment | 2 |
| | Exams are a must | 2 |
| **No idea = 19** | | |
| **Pessimistic** | Nothing will change in a short time | 7 |
| | Unfortunate for the new generation | 5 |
| | Disaster | 2 |
| | Will lead to more problems | |
| | in teaching and assessment | 3 |
| | Has no strong basis | 2 |
| | Will feed political aims | 2 |

Some teachers seem to be optimistic and they say that they are hopeful about the future of English lessons (4 citations). Some others hold the belief that ELDE will soon be replaced with another test (2 citations).

According to some teachers' anticipation, the nature of ELDE will change, and there will be a switch from output based to process-based assessment (2 citations each). For some, however, exams are a must (2 citations). On the other hand, an overwhelming majority appears to be pessimistic on how they view ELDE. To elaborate, among the reasons cited, seven is concerned with the idea that nothing will change in a short time while five citations reveal that the teachers see ELDE as unfortunate for the new generation and even a disaster (2 citations).

Some are even more pessimistic about the number of exams to come in the new system as illustrated in the following excerpt:

*Excerpt 11*

*In the new system, the situation will be 4+ELDE 4+ ELDE 4+ELDE.*

One of the teachers talks about a hidden underlying political aim of ELDE (2 citations).

*Excerpt 12*

*I am negative about this system. I think it feeds different political aims in it. Students are not mature enough to realise this. However, it is not fair and nothing will change for better.*

The findings regarding teachers' perceptions of whether there is a match between their philosophy and that of ELDE are summarized in Table 6. Almost all participating teachers hold the belief that ELDE is inadequate to assess language proficiency (30 citations), values product not process (8 citations) not a reliable test, does not address the age (4 citations each) and does not cater for different language learning styles (2 citations). In addition, they point out that ELDE is not consistent with the curriculum requirements (3) and restrictive for teachers and students (2 citations). ELDE is also considered to hinder the creativity of students and teachers (2 citations). It is claimed to satisfy parents' and administrators' but not the students' needs, and finally, it is viewed as not real- life like. Few citations show positive or partially positive attitudes toward ELDE as displayed in Table 5.

**Table 6.  Match between teachers' philosophy and that of ELDE**

|  | ELDE… | f |
|---|---|---|
| Yes = 4 | exams are a must | 3 |
| | serves well for this large number of students | 2 |
| Partly = 4 | is good as long as it is modified | 2 |
| No = 26 | is inadequate to assess language proficiency | 30 |
| | values product not process | 8 |
| | is not a reliable test | 4 |
| | does not address the age | 4 |
| | does not cater for different language learning styles | 2 |
| | is not consistent with the curriculum requirements | 3 |
| | aims to satisfy parents and administrators | 1 |
| | is restrictive for teachers and students | 2 |
| | hinders the creativity of students and teachers | 2 |
| | is not real- life like | 1 |

Excerpt 13 displays how the philosophy of the teacher and ELDE contradict with each other.

*Excerpt 13*

*I do not approve any kind of assessment like ELDE. Instead, I would like to assess my pupils using a performance-based evaluation because the progress a pupil exhibits during the term is more important than a multiple choice test score s/he gets in an exam like ELDE.*

The teachers were also invited to describe ELDE. The adjectives that they used to make this description were categorised in terms of negative and positive remarks. Table 6 shows how teachers defined ELDE in negative terms.

The following excerpts serve to bring more depth to why they used these adjectives in their description:

*Excerpt 14*

*ELDE is stressful because they are always reminded that they are in a marathon.*

**Table 7. Teachers' negative description of ELDE**

|  | f |
|---|---|
| Stressful | 11 |
| Mechanical | 7 |
| Not appropriate for the age and level | 6 |
| No content validity | 5 |
| No face validity | 5 |
| Not comprehensive enough | 3 |
| Boring | 3 |
| Difficult | 3 |
| Limited | 3 |
| Not reliable | 2 |
| Useless | 2 |
| Exhausting | 2 |
| Too competitive | 2 |
| Not authentic | 2 |
| Aimless | 2 |
| Product- oriented | 1 |
| Time consuming | 1 |
| Not learner friendly | 1 |

*Excerpt 15*

*It is too traditional, in other words, out of fashion because in real life students will not encounter multiple choice pen and paper tests when they need to talk to foreign people.*

*Excerpt 16*

*ELDE is not learner – friendly as it poses great pressure on students.*

The teachers who used positive remarks to describe ELDE chose adjectives as necessary (3 citations), important (2 citations), having attractive pictures, being adequate, objective and finally motivating (1 citation for each).

**Table 8. Teachers' positive description of ELDE**

|  | f |
|---|---|
| Necessary | 3 |
| Important | 2 |
| Attractive pictures | 1 |
| Adequate | 1 |
| Objective | 1 |
| Motivating | 1 |

Excerpt 17 displays the reason why one of the teachers views ELDE as an objective exam.

*Excerpt 17*

*All students are asked to answer the very same questions so it is objective.*

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study aimed at investigating how teachers of English perceive ELDE as an assessment tool in terms of its influence on methodology, materials, tasks, and assessment techniques, classroom management and teachers' relationship with students, parents and school administration, and how, in their opinion, the latest improvements recorded in the new education system, namely 4+4+4, will show themselves in the assessment procedure.

The findings of the research reported on in this study revealed that ELDE, by an overwhelming majority of teachers participated in the questionnaires and interviews, is perceived to be in contrast with the actual practice in the English classrooms. In other words, the findings revealed the discrepancy between the language learning objectives proposed by the National Ministry of Education Curriculum and teachers' perceptions of their classroom practice. This finding coincides with the results of the study by Bal and Doganay (2010) which indicate the mismatch between the language assessment process and teaching-learning approaches suggested by the primary education curriculum.

Furthermore, almost all the teachers in the study stated that different aspects of their teaching and assessment are negatively influenced by ELDE. For example, while the teachers favor the methods which would encourage the communicative use of English, ELDE, according to them, does not allow for this because it leads both the teachers and students to do mechanical grammar and vocabulary practice. Materials used in the classroom were claimed by most teachers to be ELDE rehearsal worksheets. Because ELDE accommodates questions only at the recognition level, the majority of teachers stated that it has neither content nor face validity. This finding is supported by Baş and Beyhan (2012) whose study shows that the

questions employed in ELDE were mostly at the recognition level and that the objectives of the language curriculum are not adequately reflected on ELDE. This is also echoed in Cheng (2005, p.26) where she claims that "a match or an overlap in encouraged between the content and the format of the test and the format of the curriculum. The closer the fit or match between test content and curriculum, the greater the potential improvement on the test."

Another important finding of this study is that the teachers claimed to be unable to devote time to productive skills in the language, which is a contradiction between their philosophy of teaching English and that of ELDE. The assessment techniques applied in the classroom and ELDE were also reported by most teachers to mismatch. Concerning teachers' perceptions of ELDE, almost all conceived ELDE with negative connotations, which seem to show that ELDE is far from really filling the gap between what the curriculum proposes and what is actually done in the classrooms. However, some teachers appear to associate ELDE with positive connotations with reference to the function and format of the test. The findings acquired also showed that the majority of teachers do not have an idea about how ELDE will manifest itself in the new education system called as 4+4+4. The results revealing the teachers' perceptions imply that almost all are pessimistic about the future of ELDE although a few hold positive views regarding the issue.

The evidence acquired from the findings of this study seems to suggest that the participant teachers' negative views about ELDE outweigh positive ones. Therefore, the implication is that there is an urgent need for a substantial revision of ELDE in order to eliminate the mismatch between the primary level English curriculum requirements and ELDE. In the revision process, additional care should be taken to incorporate questions that would assess the learners' receptive, especially listening, and productive skills, namely speaking and writing. We acknowledge that it is not easy and might be costly if the number of students to take ELDE is taken into consideration. However, there are worldwide examples of language assessment tools that

measure the language holistically. These tools should be examined and various ways of applying similar assessment means should be sought for. Among many others, another implication of the findings of this study is related to an immediate action for raising English teachers' awareness of the new 4+4+4 system, particularly of the type of assessment to be employed. This finding is in line with the results reached by Demirci (2012) who concluded that the Ministry of National Education did not make any provision to inform the teachers about the modifications accommodated in the new system. Thus, teachers should be invited by the national and local Ministry of Education to training sessions where they can learn about the new system.

This is a small scale research which investigated the opinions of only 34 teachers. Although the study provided invaluable implications for the language assessment, future studies with a larger number of teacher and student participants and different data collection tools such as classroom observation are needed to support the present findings. In spite of the limitations mentioned, one final recommendation derived from the study would be what Cheng (2005) suggests in the following:

If teachers can be empowered (depending on the role of the examination) to use new forms of assessment to improve their teaching, and if they, together with educational policy makers can devise systematic approaches that integrate assessment into efforts to improve learning and instruction, perhaps the time for change in assessment practice to enhance its usefulness for instructional decision making and the display of standards of competent performance will be at last upon us. (p.253)

## Uzun Özet

### Giriş

Türkiye'de zorunlu eğitim 4+4+4 şeklinde ifade edilen yeni bir sürece girmesine rağmen, merkezi olarak yapılan Seviye Belirleme Sınavı yerini korumuştur. 2008 yılından beri SBS adıyla uygulanan bu sınav, öğrencilerin ilköğretimden ortaöğretime geçişlerinde uygulanan bir seçme ve yerleştirilme sınavıdır. Bu sınavda Türkçe, Matematik, Fen ve Teknoloji ve Sosyal Bilgiler alt testlerinin yanı sıra yabancı dil olarak İngilizce testi de bulunmaktadır.

### Amaç

Bu çalışma, söz konusu merkezi sınavın yöntemler, materyaller, görevler, değerlendirme teknikleri ile öğretmenlerin öğrenciler, ebeveynler ve okul yönetimiyle olan ilişkileri üzerindeki etkilerini İngilizce öğretmenlerinin nasıl algıladıklarını araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, ayrıca yeni sistemin mevcut değerlendirme yordamına yansımalarına ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışmaya ilköğretimde görev yapan 23'ü kadın ve 11'l erkek olmak üzere 34 İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Katılımcıların yarısının yaş aralığı 26-30 arasındayken, 10'u 20-25 arası ve kalan yedisi ise 30 yaşın üzerindedir. Katılımcı öğretmenlerin 19'u 10-15 yıl arası, diğer 15'i 1-3 yıl arası deneyime sahiptir ve hepsi çocuklara İngilizce öğretmektedir.

Çalışmanın verileri, yedi adet açık uçlu sorunun yer aldığı anket ve bulguların güvenilirliğini arttırmak için 20 katılımcı ile yapılan görüşme ile toplanmıştır. Anket ve görüşmelerde İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavı'nın hedef öğrenci kitlesine uygun olup olmadığı, dil yeterliğini ölçüp ölçmediği, bu sınavın öğretim metotlarına, dil öğretme materyallerine, ölçme değerlendirme tekniklerine, sınıf yönetimine ve öğretmenin idare, veli ve öğrencilerle ilişkisine olası etkileri ile ilgili sorular sorulmuştur. Ayrıca, 4+4+4 olarak ifade edilen yeni eğitim sisteminin bu sınav üzerindeki yansımaları ve öğretmenlerin söz konusu sınavla ilgili algıları araştırılmıştır. Toplanan veriler iki araştırmacı tarafından ayrı ayrı içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiş ve verilen cevaplar içerisinde tekrarlanan temalar sıklık dereceleri ile birlikte saptanmıştır.

### Bulgular

Bulgular, İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavının sınıfta kullanılan değerlendirme yöntemleri ile uyumsuz olduğunu ve öğretmenlerin söz konusu sınava yeni eğitim sisteminin nasıl yansıyacağı konusunda fikir sahibi

olmadıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular, ayrıca İlköğretim İngilizce dersi öğretim programının amaçları ile öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalarının bu sınavın olumsuz etkisi nedeniyle farklı olduğunu göstermiştir. Bunlara ek olarak, araştırma verileri, İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavının dil öğretimi ve ölçme ve değerlendirme sürecine olumsuz etkileri olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Öğretmenlerin genellikle dilbilgisi –çeviri yöntemini kullanmak zorunda kaldıkları ve kendi yaptıkları sınavlarda da dilin iletişimsel boyutunu göz ardı ettikleri görülmüştür. Katılımcı öğretmenlerin büyük çoğunluğunun bu sınava ilişkin görüşlerinin olumsuz olduğu saptanmıştır.

**Tartışma**

Çalışmada İngilizce öğretim müfredatında belirtilen kazanımların İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavı ile eşgüdüm içinde olmadığı saptanmıştır. Bu eşgüdümü sağlamak için sınavın titizlikle incelenmesi gerektiği, göz ardı edilen kazanımların belirlenip sınava yansıtılmasının önemli olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bireyin bir dili ne kadar öğrendiği ile o dili ne kadar etkin bir biçimde kullandığının doğru orantılı olduğu gerçeği göz önüne alınırsa, sınavda yer alan soruların sadece kavrama düzeyinde kalmayıp uygulama düzeyinde de hazırlanması gerekliliği ortaya çıkar. Bu çalışmanın bir diğer önemli çıkarımı da, İngilizce Seviye Belirleme Sınavının yeni eğitim sisteminde nasıl uygulanacağı konusunda öğretmenlerin bilinçlendirilmesi amacıyla farklı hizmet içi eğitim programlarının düzenlenmesi gerekliliğidir.Bu çalışma sadece 34 öğretmenin katılımı ile yapılan küçük ölçekli bir çalışma olmakla birlikte, çocuklara İngilizce öğretiminde ölçme ve değerlendirme konusunda önemli çıkarımlar sunmuştur. Gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalarda, katılımcı sayısının arttırılması ve veri toplama araçlarına sınıf içi gözlemin eklenmesinin yararlı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

## REFERENCES

Anıl, D. and Güzeller, C. O. (2010). *Seviye belirleme sınavı yedinci sınıf fen ve teknoloji alt testi ile diğer alt testler arasındaki ilişkinin yol analizi ile incelenmesi.* Paper presented at Eğitimde ve Psikolojide Ölçme ve Değerlendirme II. Ulusal Kongresi, Mersin, Turkey.

Baş, G. and Beyhan, Ö. (2012). Evaluation of English questions in level determination examination according to cognitive domain taxonomy. *Akademik Bakış Dergisi, 31,* 1-18. Retrieved November 23, 2012, from http://www.akademikbakis.org/31/12.pdf

Bal, P. and Doğanay, A. (2010). İlköğretim beşinci sınıf matematik öğretiminde ölçme değerlendirme sürecinde yaşanan sorunların analizi. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Yönetimi*, 16 (3), 373-398.

Bejarano, Y. and Gordon, C. (2009). *Consideration for teaching and assessing young learners learning english as a foreign language.* Retrieved December 28, 2012 from http://www.ericdigests.org/1997-4/young.htm

Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Cheng, L. (2005). *Changing language teaching through language testing: A washback study.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Conner, O. (2008). Testing as a catalyst for progress and development. *The International TEYL Journal.* Retrieved January, 2011 from http://www.teyl.org/article7.html

Demirci, M. K. (2012) Eğitim Sisteminde Yapılan Yeni Düzenlemelere İlişkin Eğitimcilerin Görüşlerinin Değerlendirilmesi. Retrieved April, 2012 from http://www.bilka.org.tr/uzm-dan-psi-meryem-kulaber-demirci_85.ytml

Doğan, N. and Sevindik, H. (2011). İlköğretim 6. sınıflar için uygulanan seviye belirleme sınavı'nın uygunluk geçerliği. *Eğitim ve Bilim, 36(160),* 309-319.

Erwin, T. D. (1991). *Assessing student learning and development: A guide to the principles, goals, and methods of determining college outcomes*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Gipps, C.V. (2002). *Beyond testing: Towards a theory of educational assessment.* London, Routledge Falmer.

Guddemi, M. and Case, B. J. (2004). *Assessing young children* (Assessment Report)San Antonio, Pearson Inc..

Halliwell, S. (1992). *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom.* London, Longman.

Ilin, G. and Yildirim, R. (2008, October 17-18). *Level Determination Exam: Contribution or Hindrance to Learning English?* Paper presented at IATEFL (TEA) Special Interest Group Conference, Dublin, Ireland.

Karakaya, İ. and Kutlu, Ö. (2012). Seviye belirleme sınavındaki türkçe alt testlerinin madde yanlılığının incelenmesi. *Education and Science, 37 (165)*, 348-362.

Lambert, D. and Lines, D. (2000). *Understanding assessment: purposes, perceptions, practice.* London and New York, Routledge Falmer.

McKay, P. (2006). *Assessing young learners.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

MoNE (1997). İlköğretim birinci kademe İngilizce öğretim programı. *Tebliğler Dergisi* no. 2481.

MoNE. (2007). *Ortaöğretim kurumları öğrenci seçme ve yerleştirme sınavı kılavuzu.* Ankara, Eğitim Teknolojileri Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları.

MoNE (2012) 12Yıllık Zorunlu Eğitime Yönelik Uygulamalar Genelgesi no. 28261.

Orsdemir, E. (2010). *Alternative assessment in Turkish primary EFL classrooms: An investigation into the performance tasks*. Unpublished master's Thesis, Çukurova University, Turkey.

Ratcliff, N. (1995). The need for alternative techniques for assessing young children's emerging literacy skills. *Contemporary Education*, *66 (3),*169-171.

Rea-Dickens, P. (2000). Assessment in early years language learning contexts. *Language Testing 17*,115-22.

Rixon, S. (Ed.). (1999). *Young learners of English: some research perspectives*. Harlow, Longman.

Rixon, S. (2010). *Assessment of young learners of English.* Retrieved December 23, 2012, from http://ebookbrowse.com/as/assessment-for-young-learners

Shepard, L. A. (1994). The challenges of assessing young children appropriately. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76 (3),* 206- 212.

Taras, M. (2005). Assessment – summative and formative – some theoretical reflections. *British Journal of Educational Studies 53 (4)*, 466–78.

Threlfall, J. (2005), The formative Use of Assessment Information in Planning- the Notion of Contingent Planning, British Journal of Educational Studies, 53 (1), 54-65.

Vale, D. and Feunteun, A. (1995). *Teaching children English.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Wortham, S. C. (2005). *Assessment in early childhood education*. USA, Pearson.