



Standardized testing in Turkey: EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences on Cambridge Young Learner Exams (YLE)

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Abstract

This study evaluated EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences on Cambridge Young Learners (YLE) Exams. The study aims to investigate Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions of the general implementation process of Cambridge YLE Exams and their knowledge, experience, and institutional expertise on these tests. A qualitative research design was utilized in the study. The participants included 24 EFL teachers who work in private and state schools and were determined with maximum diversity sampling method that ensures a wide variety of participants. Research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. The data obtained as a result of the interviews were analyzed by the content analysis method. The findings highlight the three core views on standardized testing. First, Turkish EFL teachers had positive perceptions towards Cambridge YLE exams, yet they had a very limited experience and expertise in Cambridge YLE exams. Secondly, they had concerns about low learner proficiency levels, the cost of these tests, and the gap between standardized tests and the testing system in the local context. Lastly, it was evident that while some institutions prepared their learners and provided parental guidance for such standardized tests, others fell behind these institutions. This study addresses the research gap in the limited understanding of standardized testing from teachers' perspectives and provides some critical implications. The first implication is that assessment literacy, teachers' experiences towards these tests, and classroom assessment practices of Turkish EFL teachers should be improved through in-service or pre-service teacher training, and secondly, the testing system in Turkey should be redesigned to adapt to the standardized tests used globally.

Keywords: Standardized testing; Cambridge YLE exams; Perceptions; Experiences; EFL teachers

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the problem

Assessment is regarded as a cornerstone of the educational system, with a significant impact on processes such as teaching, learning, and decision-making (Coombs et al. 2018). In this process, teachers are the most important factor both in teaching and assessment. Their opinions and perspectives related to assessment have a direct and significant effect on their teaching and are of paramount importance to improve learners' teaching and learning processes. Teachers having a deep understanding of the field can more effectively combine assessment and instruction to better guide their students to learn (McMillan, 2000). The research in this area reveals that instructors' assessment and evaluation abilities are inconsistent with the standards of overall evaluation practices (Galluzzo, 2005; Mertler, 2004). This result also applies to future teachers, many of whom employ traditional and far from communicative competencies in evaluation and assessment in the EFL context (Bachor & Baer, 2001; Campbell & Evans, 2000), so the development of assessment tasks that would stimulate students' higher-order thinking skills or assess their progress and advancement toward competency is seen as an important aspect of teaching, and it is believed that teachers need to be equipped with competencies in assessment and evaluation through programs for teacher education and professional development opportunities (Cizek, 2000). In addition, Marzano (2000) states that understanding and employing useful and most widely accepted classroom assessments worldwide by educators are crucial to increase student achievement in the assessment process. One of the most important links in the chain that connects assessment quality to student accomplishment is teachers' ability to comprehend and interpret assessment results. As additional information, other researchers have noted that there is a trend in the field of teacher education known as reflective teaching, which is also an important way of thinking that enables educators to be aware of their own experiences and to critically examine their teaching methods (Fatemipour & Hosseingholikhani, 2014) and adapt their tools, test items and practices towards standardized tests. In other words, the issue most frequently mentioned in the research is that exploring teachers' knowledge and perspectives about standardized tests is crucial in the testing process (Shoyamy, 2020; Bonner et al, 2018; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; . One of the standardized tests conducted globally is the Cambridge English exams, and Cambridge Press has many examinations to assess the English skills of both young and adult learners for each proficiency level. The Cambridge English exams (YLE), which are specifically designed to assess English proficiency levels of learners from different age groups have been conducted by 2800 exam centres in over 130 countries since 1997 (Cambridge English Qualifications, 2021). The qualifications are divided into three levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Cambridge English: Starters (YLE Starters) is designed for students at the pre-A1 level, Cambridge

English: Movers (YLE Movers) for students at CEFR Level A1, and Cambridge English: Flyers (YLE Flyers) for students at CEFR Level A2.

On the other side of the coin, it is an indispensable fact that teachers' views, perceptions, and practices on assessment have a pivotal role in teaching and learning issues. Language teachers' theoretical knowledge, experience, and expertise having sufficient knowledge in assessment, and abilities to plan, apply and assess large-scale standardized, and/or classroom-based tests play a pivotal role (Fulcher, 2012), and all these qualifications and competencies in assessment are highly engaged with their assessment literacy. More specifically, assessment skills and literacy are a series of competencies of teachers "related to testing production, test score interpretation, and use, and test evaluation in conjunction with the development of a critical understanding about the roles and functions of assessment within society" (O'Loughlin, 2013, p.39). In addition to the aforementioned teacher qualifications, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers play a crucial role not only in teaching but also in linear and follow-up assessments ranging from small-scale tests to international standardized English tests. This role seems to have a highly significant backwash effect on testing and teaching, which is defined by Hughes (1989), as the impact of language testing on teaching and learning, and it is important to note that language testing can have both positive and negative effects on teaching and learning. Each of these effects and roles may have unique roles in EFL classrooms, however, in a globalized world, having experience on standardized tests has gained an important place, and this will change a traditional and local EFL classroom to a universal one. With the globalized world and the standardization in teaching with the Common European Framework of reference for languages (CEFR), the prevalence of standardized tests and other forms of assessment has gradually made schools and teachers more accountable (Sahlberg, 2006). Turkey is an important country with approximately 11 million young learners in primary and secondary schools (MoNE, 2013). In this respect, Turkey aims to catch up with the latest developments both in teaching and assessing English as the target language in schools. With these aims, bridging the gap between traditional, teacher-centered assessment and standardized tests is of primary importance, and this process is mainly related to the perceptions and experiences of EFL teachers on standardized tests, in this context, Cambridge YLE exams. One of these standardized tests in preparing young learners is Cambridge Young Learners English (YLE) exams. These exams, which are designed for children between the ages of 7 and 12, assess students' skills and ability to understand and use English in a variety of contexts (Cambridge Assessment English, 2020). However, EFL teachers may have various perceptions and experiences when it comes to preparing students for these exams. Some teachers may find them to be beneficial in providing a clear goal for students to work towards, and as a way to motivate students to learn English (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994). Others may find them too stressful or irrelevant to their students' needs (Brown & Hudson, 1998). However, teachers are

regarded as the most important factor and decision maker for the success of any educational institution. In this step, having awareness on standardized English tests plays a vital role in the success of the language learning and assessment process. Furthermore, a lot of studies have shown that using assessment as a tool to encourage learning in the classroom has a positive effect on students' academic outcomes, making assessment procedures a crucial part of the teaching process (Earl & Katz, 2006).

1.1. Studies focusing on the Turkish context

Although classroom-based assessment studies have increased in ELT in the last quarter, research into teacher development and competencies has been slightly ignored (Fulcher, 2012; Tsagari & Csépes, 2011). From this perspective, EFL teachers need to improve their assessment literacy skills and take an action on this issue, therefore, in the Turkish EFL context, some studies conducted contributed to the field in the last decade. One of the studies was conducted by Hatipoğlu (2015) with 124 student-teachers to investigate their assessment knowledge and expectations. The result of the study showed that student-teachers of English had a limited number of assessment knowledge in general. Another investigation was done on Turkish EFL teachers' perspectives on in-class language testing and classroom activities. It was found that the participants knew the basic terminologies and practices related to assessment; however, they had some difficulties while reflecting on their knowledge in the classroom testing activities (Öz & Atay, 2017). Similarly, Ölmezer-Öztürk and Aydın (2019) conducted a study to examine 542 EFL teachers' language assessment knowledge of both general and skills-based. A similar result was found that participants had a lack of language assessment knowledge. All those findings echoed the suggestion that the assessment literacy level of language teachers is insufficient and needs to be developed (Şişman & Büyükkarcı, 2019). Another study conducted by Sadeghi et al., (2021) investigated the backwash effect of TOEFL IBT and a local proficiency test on learner motivation, autonomy, and language learning strategies and results revealed no washback of TOEFL IBT test on students' motivation.

Although the literature contains studies related to testing, evaluation, and assessment in the EFL context in Turkey, studies on standardized English language tests are much more limited, and the studies above were conducted with teachers in higher education. When it comes to investigating the standardized high-stakes tests for primary and secondary school English level, there have yet been no studies conducted in Turkish context, so considering this gap, the current study aims to investigate some dimensions on the knowledge and perspectives of Turkish EFL teachers on Cambridge YLE exams, which are; (a) the general implementation process of these tests, (b) perspectives, knowledge and experience they have about these tests; as these tests are not covered in the national curriculum and both teachers and learners need extra time and materials (c)

institutional support, experience and expertise on Cambridge YLE Exams, and to investigate teachers' knowledge on test content and items (d) the content of these exams.

To achieve the above-mentioned aims, the research questions explored in the study are as follows:

1. What are the opinions of EFL teachers on the overall procedures of Cambridge YLE exams?
2. To what extent do EFL teachers have knowledge and experience on the assessment policies and process of Cambridge YLE exams?
3. Do institutions have enough experience and expertise on Cambridge YLE Exams?
4. To what extent do EFL teachers have knowledge and experience on the content of Cambridge YLE exams?

2. Method

Research design, and participants of the study

The qualitative descriptive approach was used in the present study. In conducting a basic qualitative descriptive approach study, it is sought to discover, and understand a phenomenon, a process, perspectives, or a worldwide related to a specific situation (Merriam, 2002). As the data collection tool, an online survey was used to investigate EFL teachers' opinions and perspectives on Cambridge YLE exams. Online qualitative surveys have the openness and flexibility to answer a variety of research questions of interest to researchers because the technique provides access to data with a focus on everything from people's opinions, experiences, or material practices to representational or meaning-making practices (Braun et.al, 2021). The primary goal of basic qualitative research is to explain how individuals form interactions between their real and social lives. In qualitative studies, the goal is to have knowledge of the specified subject or to inform those who do not (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, researchers analyze people's lives and the meanings attributed to their experiences with their lives (Merriam, 2009). In addition, qualitative studies investigate factors related to the situation and focus on how they affect the situation or are affected by the situation (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Participants

An in-depth approach necessitates researchers purposefully selecting information-rich cases, as they will provide researchers with an in-depth understanding of issues that are critical to the research purposes and problems (Patton, 2002). In addition, purposive sampling can enhance the richness of the data set that is gathered and thereby raise the likelihood of discovering different realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, in this study, purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide insights on

Cambridge YLE exams. One important criterion in selecting participants was that all participants would be willing to provide such insights and be teaching to young learners as this study focuses on Cambridge YLE exams. Another important selection criterion was the variety within the samples in terms of educational background, and institution type they were working to discover the varieties in findings to be able to compare and contrast state schools and private schools. Finally, to gather data from various locations in Turkey, participants were included from different cities in Turkey. The study group of the present research consists of 24 participants working in various primary and secondary schools in different cities in Turkey, which are Istanbul (4), Konya (3), Denizli (3), Uşak (3), Mersin (3), Erzurum (3), Van (2), Bartın (2), and Şırnak (1), and Turkey. When the school type is examined, it was found that 15 participants were teachers in secondary schools and 9 participants were working in primary schools, and 20 of them held B. A and M.A. in English Language Teaching department, and 4 of them held B.A in English Language and Literature department. Teachers took part in the study voluntarily, and they were given codes between P1-P24. Table 1 illustrates demographic information about the participants.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

	Gender	Age	Education Level	Institution type	Experience
P1	Male	28	BA (ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P2	Male	25	MA (ELT)	Private S.(Primary)	6-10 years
P3	Female	28	MA (ELL)	State S. (Secondary)	6-10 years
P4	Female	25	BA (ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P5	Female	25	BA (ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P6	Female	24	MA(ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P7	Male	24	BA(ELT)	State S. (Primary)	1-5 years
P8	Female	24	BA (ELL)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P9	Male	24	BA(ELT)	State S. (Primary)	6-10 years
P10	Female	26	BA(ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P11	Female	25	MA(ELT)	Private S. (Primary)	1-5 years
P12	Male	25	MA(ELT)	State S. (Primary)	1-5 years
P13	Female	24	BA(ELT)	Private S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P14	Male	31	BA(ELT)	State S. (Primary)	6-10 years
P15	Female	50	MA(ELT)	Private S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P16	Female	25	BA(ELL)	State S. (Primary)	1-5 years
P17	Female	25	BA(ELL)	State S. (Primary)	1-5 years
P18	Male	25	MA(ELT)	Private S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P19	Female	24	MA(ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P20	Female	25	BA(ELT)	State S. (Secondary)	1-5 years
P21	Female	22	BA(ELT)	Private S. (Secondary)	11-15 years
P22	Female	26	BA(ELT)	Private S. (Secondary)	6-10 years
P23	Female	33	BA (ELL)	Private S. (Primary)	1-5 years
P24	Female	39	BA(ELT)	Private S. (Secondary)	6-10 years

2.1. Data collection instrument

The data for the study were gathered through a written response form from participants developed by the researchers. The standardized open-ended protocol consists of a series of pre-planned and sequenced questions that are asked in the same form and order to all participants (Patton, 2014). While instantaneous attitude and flexibility are limited in this approach, surveys have preset and standardized questions the advantage of limiting interviewer influence and subjective judgments (Seidman, 2006). For the preparation of the survey protocol, the following steps were taken: The researchers developed the questions while keeping the study's purpose and sub-purposes in mind. The next step was to send the form to experts for review, comment, and suggestions. A pilot interview was conducted with four participants. Following the interviews, new questions were added to the survey, and the final form was made ready for use. The form is divided into two sections. The first section contains demographic information on the participants, while the second section has open-ended questions about the participants' perspectives on Cambridge YLE Exams. Before the interview, teachers were informed about the purpose of the study, and the online survey form was distributed electronically to the participants via "Google Forms," and the participants' responses were received in written form.

2.2. Data analysis

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data. "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2016). In addition, in qualitative research, "Data are not coded, they are recorded (Saldaña, 2016)." As the first step, the data were made ready for analysis, the data were read line by line and were assigned a code label or term to the text segment to gather in-depth data by the participants (Creswell, 2016). The collected data were transcribed and analyzed with the help of content analysis manually. The first stage of coding involved reading the data. Themes were created in the second stage by combining related codes. The third stage involved selective reading to uncover new codes that might be related to the themes. The researchers' codes and themes were evaluated, and a consensus was reached in the final stage. The key points that were mentioned commonly or frequently were noted. The main themes emerging from the data were coded and they were divided into categories, and themes are created by identifying common aspects.

2.3. Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, each stage of the analytical process, including preparation, organization, and reporting of results, must be scrutinized for credibility (Elo et al.,

2014), and in qualitative studies, What is largely absent in the literature for researchers in qualitative research design is certainty concerning whether they should make an agreement based on codes, themes, or both codes and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In qualitative research, it is suggested that participant control, triangulation, longitudinal field observation, rich and intense description, peer review, and external control be used (Creswell et al., 2007). In the current study, peer review and participant control methods were used. As the first step, research data and findings for peer review were shared online with an expert in the field. Following the meeting, final checks were completed. Secondly, to obtain the most reliable data, six participants were chosen and interviewed over the phone. During these interviews, the codes, subthemes, and themes derived from the analyses and peer review were discussed. When the data gathered were compared, the compatibility percentage between the two codings was calculated to be 92%. During this process, encoder compatibility is expected to be between 85 and 90% (Miles et al., 2014). Based on the processes used for validity and reliability, the findings of the study can be considered as valid and reliable.

2.4. Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of studies has been ensured for many years by doing the research thoroughly or following certain criteria, although many critics do not recognize the reliability of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), some significant factors make trustworthiness a fundamental problem: How can a questioner persuade his or her listeners—including himself—that the results of an inquiry are important enough to pay attention to and consider? In the present study, it was determined that it is important to consider some important issues on trustworthiness, and the trustworthiness of qualitative analysis is in the current study demonstrated through (1) Credibility, (2) Transferability, (3) Dependability, and (4) Authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.290). For credibility, the researcher first informed the participants about the aim of the study, obtained the permission of the participants, and informed them that they could leave the study anytime. In addition, peer scrutiny was used to analyze the data. Using multiple researchers provides a diverse range of viewpoints and perspectives, aids in avoiding single-person biases, and aids in comprehending the data's complexities (Hill et al., 1997). As a result, the researcher and another rater coded the data independently, then met to discuss their ideas and analyze the data to ensure credibility. Secondly, to ensure transferability, descriptive data were gathered to compare them with other studies in the literature, and the content was presented in accordance with the Turkish context.

To ensure the consistency of the data and findings, the researcher explained the research design and data collection process of the study in detail, and the analysis and interpretation process of the data was reported with complete transparency. A data

collection design appropriate for the purpose of the research and research questions was used to ensure authenticity.

3. Findings

In this study, the aim was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of Turkish EFL teachers about Cambridge YLE exams. To collect data, semi-structured interviews in the form of descriptive and open-ended questions were conducted to elicit participants' opinions related to Cambridge YLE exams and perceptions on these tests. The interviews consisted of five parts and the result will be presented in five parts.

3.1. RQ 1. What are the perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers on the general implementation process of Cambridge YLE exams?

The first part was about the implementation procedures of Cambridge YLE exams. With this aim, participants were required to respond to 8 sub-questions under this theme. Table 2 shows the participants' answer distribution towards the questions that were included in the implementation process dimension.

Table 2. Perceptions on the general implementation process

Dimensions	Implementation				
Familiarity with the procedures	- Previous experience/ knowledge (10)	- No idea (14)			
Registering process	- Online/at schools (9)	- No idea (15)			
Institutions conducting Cambridge YLE Exams	Cambridge Exam centers (20)	- No idea (4)			
Cambridge YLE Exam Fees	- Assuming that the fees are expensive (6)	- No idea (18)			
Frequency of Cambridge YLE Exams	- Once a year (6)	- No idea (18)			
Validation of Cambridge YLE Exams	-Self-assessment (6)	- International exam (5)	- Proficiency level (10)	- No idea (18)	
Implementation of the Cambridge YLE exams at an early age	-Observing Proficiency level (8)	-Reliable-valid source (9)	-To Expensive (4)	- No idea (3)	
Importance and Necessity of Cambridge YLE exams	-Important	-Self-confidence (2)	-Not necessary (7)	-Good for private schools (2)	- No idea (7)

The first question indicated that more than half of the participants had no idea about the application procedures for those exams and 10 of them had previous knowledge that are currently working in private institutions or had an experience in those. The others

did not have any familiarity with the procedures for applying for Cambridge YLE exams. The second question was related to registration, how and where to apply for these exams. 9 of the participants thought they can be applied online from the website of the exams or private schools can apply for the exams and the other 15 participants had no idea. Who conducts these tests was the third question of the interview. Most of the answers as 20 participants were from Cambridge Exam centers. The following questions were about fees and the frequency of these exams 6 of the participants stated that the exam fees are too expensive and the other 18 participants stated that they do not have any information about the exam fees. Similarly, 6 of the participants mentioned that the exam is held once a year and the rest 18 participants had no idea about the frequency of the exam.

To mention an important element of the implementation process, the table above gives us the opinions of the participants about the validation of these exams and the reasons why they are taken. The first theme is assessment; six of them stated their ideas under this theme. The following sentences can be given as examples of this theme.

...good way to assess learners (P1)

To test yourself with the results... (P3)

The second theme for the questions is an international exam. Four of them believed that Cambridge YLE exams are worldwide valid and professional exams. Here is an example:

I think it is a standardized test and accepted globally, you can use it everywhere. It is Cambridge-based, reliable and valid. (P9)

...to assess the English language skills of children, Cambridge English encourages children... (P21)

Seven opinions stated by the participants were gathered under the theme of proficiency level. The opinions of the participants under this theme are related to these exams to help prove their English level and determine their proficiency skills in English. The following sentences can be given as examples of the opinions of the participants on this theme.

They have an international certificate showing their level of English. (P10)

It determines the English proficiency of the learners. In my opinion, they can see their level of English and show it. (P17)

It is a certificate showing your language level... (P24)

Four participants' opinions were categorized under the theme of others. They stated that they had no idea about this question.

Table 2 also shows the answers to the question which is about participants' thoughts on the implementation of the Cambridge YLE exams at an early age. Opinions of the

participants were gathered under the four themes which are proficiency level, usefulness, not necessary, and other. In the first category, eight of the participants stated their opinions related to the proficiency level of the young learners. Generally, their opinions were related to testing their levels of English; see their current language proficiency at an early age. Some examples can be given.

It is important to learn English at an early age and it just measures the level...(P17)

I think it's an ethical, standard, and step-by-step path of assessing English knowledge of YLE (P21)

Some of the participants believed that these exams were useful in some ways.

"I think they are useful, and they are valid in many institutions, and they have a certain reliability and validity so it is useful." (P6)

"I think it is beneficial for them to take the exam at an early age because they can practice and be tested in the target language in an effective way."(P24)

"I know Cambridge YLE exams for children are fun, colorful, and activity-based. They encourage kids to learn, it is a good source to teach and learn English." (P9)

On the contrary, four participants stated negative thoughts on the implementation of the Cambridge YLE exams at an early age. In general, they thought these exams are not necessary since they are expensive and not necessary for state schools. The following examples can be given.

Not necessary for the state schools, there is a huge gap between students and families in terms of Socio-economic Status, It is a kind of privilege for learners in private schools or students in high socio-economic status. (P7)

I believe these tests are not necessary because it is expensive. Poor kids can't take this exam. For specific purposes, students can take this exam. (P17)

I believe it is useless for young learners it is expensive for learners to take these tests. (P19)

For the last theme, 2 of the participants stated no ideas and one of them stated that learners should take these tests after the age of ten since they are too young to be tested.

The last question in part two was if they think that Cambridge YLE exams are necessary and important, why or why not. Most of the answers had similarities with the previous question. 6 of the participants stated that it is important to see learners' English level. Moreover, 2 participants believed that these exams increase learners' self-confidence; they may gain awareness on what they have learned so far and they can practice and communicate in English with others. Some participants had the opposite ideas. 7 of them stated that these exams are not necessary and important because they

are stressful for young learners. 2 participants stated that Cambridge YLE exams are useful and necessary for schools in high socio-economic areas but not for the village ones due to their cost to learners and families. One participant stated that s/he had previous knowledge of Cambridge YLE exams, and s/he claimed that Starters and Movers exams are not necessary, but the Flyers exam is okay because it tests A2 level. For the A1 level learners, there is no need to test learners with low proficiency. 7 participants had no idea because they had no opinions about Cambridge YLE exams.

3.2. RQ 2. To what extent do EFL teachers have knowledge and experience in the assessment process of Cambridge YLE exams?

The second part of the interview questions consisted of perceptions of EFL teachers on the assessment process of Cambridge YLE exams. This part has 6 main questions related to knowledge and experience in the assessment process of Cambridge YLE exams process.

Table 3. Knowledge and Experience in Cambridge YLE Exams

Dimensions	Assessment Process		
Evaluation of Cambridge YLE Exams	-Previous experience (2)	Heard about it (4)	-No idea (18)
Who and How Many Assessors?	-Teachers work for Cambridge (11)	-No idea (13)	
Announce of the Cambridge YLE Exams results	-Guessing different periods (4 weeks, 2 months.) (6)	-No idea (18)	
The rubric of Cambridge YLE Exams	-There should be (18)	-No idea (6)	
Examiners for Speaking skill assessment	-3 examiners (2)	- 1 or 2 examiners (6)	-No idea (16)
The usefulness of Cambridge YLE Exams	-Proficiency level (20)	- Not useful (3)	-No idea (1)

The first question asked under this theme was whether the participants had any idea about the assessment process of Cambridge YLE exams. Only 2 of the participants mentioned that they had some previous knowledge or experience in the evaluation process. Additionally, 4 of the participants stated a wide range of thoughts that they have heard about the exam from their colleagues and the other 18 participants had no idea about it. The second question was about the assessors of the exams who they are, 13 of the participants had no idea again and 11 of them thought they are teachers who work for Cambridge and Cambridge staff. However, the majority of the participants had no idea about how long it takes to announce exam results and 4 of them guessed different time periods (4 weeks, 2 months, or so.). The following question was whether there is a rubric while evaluating the exams and whether they have some knowledge on it and 18 of the participants stated that there should/must be. They believed that rubric is vital in

the evaluation process and 6 of them stated no idea about the rubrics. The next question was about the speaking part in Cambridge YLE exams, and it was asked if they knew how many examiners there are and they mostly (as 16 of the participants) claimed that they had no idea about the examiners. 6 of them guessed one or two assessors can be involved in the speaking assessment process and only 2 of the participants stated that 3 assessors were involved in the speaking assessment. The last question in this part was whether the Cambridge YLE exams have a positive backwash effect on the learners' English ability. Their answers were gathered under three main categories which are useful for the proficiency level, which was stated by 20 participants, not useful by 3 participants, and only 1 participant stated that s/he had no idea about the usefulness of the exam. Most of them stated that it is a useful measure to test their students' level and see their international level.

We can see their situations in all aspects of English not only reading or grammar like in the traditional way. Thanks to this exam we can test their four skills (P9)

The statements above showed us the participant thought that Cambridge YLE exams focus on testing four skills not only one aspect of English. P11 stated that Cambridge YLE exams are useful because it creates a positive washback effect, and these exams encourage learning English.

On the other hand, one participant did not state any opinion and 3 of the participants stated that Cambridge YLE exams are not useful for their learners for various reasons.

It is not useful because my students' levels are too low (P5)

No not useful. they are not motivated, they don't have money, not even a computer, and, not surprisingly, they can't be successful in this exam. (P7)

3.3. RQ 3. Do institutions have enough experience and expertise on Cambridge YLE Exams?

This part aims to unveil the experience and expertise of educational institutions EFL teachers are working on Cambridge YLE Exams. The findings are illustrated in Table 4.

The first question under this theme was whether their school is incorporating Cambridge YLE exams, and 7 of the participants that are working at private schools stated that their school incorporates for Cambridge YLE exams and their institutions have enough experience and expertise on Cambridge YLE Exams. In addition, only one of the participants claimed that their school was planning to incorporate Cambridge YLE exams. The other 16 participants mentioned that their school was not incorporating Cambridge YLE exams. The follow-up question was if their school is preparing or any intention to give these exams to their students, and if their institutions have, how long their school has been preparing students for Cambridge YLE exams. 4 participants stated that their school has been incorporated for different periods of less than 4 years

and 3 participants stated that their schools have been incorporated for more than 3 years. The other question was whether their institutions motivate and encourage learners to take these standardized tests. Only 6 of the participants claimed that their school was encouraging the stakeholders to take these tests. The other 18 participants stated that participants' schools did not encourage any kind of standardized English proficiency tests to be administered at their schools and be taken by learners in their schools. It can be claimed that these exams are not applied at state schools by respondents. Only 5 of the participants stated that there was a meeting to inform parents about Cambridge YLE exams at the beginning of the semester. 1 of them stated that her school will inform parents about these exams. The participants who work at state schools said that parental guidance is necessary for these tests and families need to have some knowledge on the importance of these tests.

Table 4. Institutional Experience and Expertise

Dimensions	Institutional Experience				
Incorporation of Cambridge YLE exams in your school	Yes (7)	- Planning to (1)	- No (16)		
If yes, how long?	- A year (1)	- 2 years (1)	- 3 years (2)	- 3+ years (3)	
Exam encouragement of school to the stakeholders	- Yes (6)	-No encouragement (18)			
Informing parents about the Cambridge YLE Exams	-Arranging meetings (5)		- No (19)		
Extra hours to prepare students for Cambridge YLE Exams	- Once a week (2)	- Twice a month (1)	-After school (1)	- No extra hours (20)	
The necessity of your institution improvement for Cambridge YLE Exams	-Necessary (6)	-Not necessary (14)	Teacher training (4)		
Advantages of preparing for Cambridge YLE Exams	Institutions:	Teachers:	Students:	Parents:	-No idea (3)
	-Marketing (3)	-Proficiency level of sts (4)	-Proficiency Level (3)	-Proficiency level of their children (3)	
	-Academic Position (2)	-Objectivity (1)	-Improving listening and speaking skills (5)	- Feeling proud (3)	
Disadvantages of preparing for Cambridge YLE Exams	Institutions:	Teachers:	Students:	Parents:	-No idea (1)
	-No disadvantages (4)	-Extra work time/burden (4)	-Pressure (5)	-Financial problems (3)	
		-Expectations (2)	- Stress (9)		

The next question was related to preparing students for Cambridge YLE exams. 20 of them stated they don't have extra hours to prepare their learners for these exams. The

other 4 participants mentioned different time periods as once a week, twice a month, and after school hours. Another question was about the necessity of their institutional improvement for Cambridge YLE Exams. 6 of the participants claimed that their institutions need improvements and 4 of the participants mentioned teachers need training on standardized English tests. The other 14 participants stated no necessity is needed for their institutions for these tests.

Under the theme of advantages for the school, there were 6 responses. The participants believed that Cambridge YLE exams are prestigious for private schools because it helps learners meet with these standardized tests.

Parents give importance to learning English from early ages, and Cambridge certificates help private schools to show off. (P16)

For schools, because of the marketing issues, it is important. (P18)

When it comes to the teacher's perspective, the advantages of preparing for Cambridge YLE exams vary. Four of the participants stated that these exams were a good chance for teachers to see their students' level of English. Only 1 participant stated that these exams were an objective way of testing young learners so that teachers can see their students' real level of English. Another opinion under this theme was teacher motivation. 4 participants stated that teachers can be more motivated after their students were successful on this exam and they feel that they can teach English. Teachers who prepare students for the Cambridge YLE exam have a chance to teach real-life topics was another idea for this category by 4 respondents.

“Teachers can also improve their English and teaching skills thanks to preparing for Cambridge YLE exams because they may need to do research on some topics and their learning never ends.” (P20)

In terms of advantages for students was the next category. Under this one, there are several ideas. The first advantage for students as they can see their level which is stated by 3 participants. The second advantage was related to improving their English. These examples can be given.

...they are learning English they can improve their English.(P14)

...students can improve their English, especially listening and speaking skills..(P12)

10 of the participants stated that students study hard to be successful, so they improve their level of English. When they see they can achieve something, they become motivated and willing to learn English; this was also stated by respondents under this theme. In addition, improving the self-confidence of the learners was another advantage stated by 3 participants.

The last category was advantages for preparing for Cambridge YLE exams for parents. All of the answers were related to being proud of their children and seeing their kids' level of English. The following sentences can be given as examples.

...for family, they can be proud of their children. (P11)

...for parents it can be important, they can follow their kids learning, and see their English level. (P19)

Finally, 3 participants did not state any idea about this question, which was shown in the 'no idea' category.

The table above lastly shows the opinions on the last question about the institutional experience. The last question was possible disadvantages of preparing for Cambridge YLE exams for the school, the teacher, for the students, and the parents. Under the disadvantages of the school theme, none of the participants expressed any opinions, and four of them stated there are no disadvantages of preparing for Cambridge YLE exams for school at all.

In terms of disadvantages for the teachers, some ideas were stated. The first one was related to extra work for the teachers. As seen from the sentences of respondents below, for teachers these exams are seen as extra work and a burden, they need to spend extra hours and it can be demanding.

The teacher needs to work extra after school and it can become a burden on their shoulders. (P2)

...there must be extra hours for Cambridge English. The teacher must spend extra time preparing and this could be a burden. (P8)

Another point was from the participants' responses, teachers may feel pressure. Students who take Cambridge YLE exams need to get good results; otherwise, the school administration and parents put pressure on teachers, and this point was also another drawback for the teacher.

From the students' point of view, there were possibly some disadvantages for them. The most commonly stated opinion was stress. Eight participants stated that students can be stressed while preparing for these exams and waiting for their exam results, they are young and they may feel overwhelmed. Moreover, they may feel extreme pressure if their parents pressure them to get a good result on Cambridge YLE exams. Competition can also be another disadvantage for young learners.

"They are too young to be completed, this competition can be harmful to their social and emotional development and their friendship can be damaged if they take this exam seriously, if they get lower scores than his/her friends, they can then cry over it for days."(P2, P18)

The final theme was the disadvantages of for preparing Cambridge YLE exams for the parents. In this theme, participants were most concerned about money issues. Here are the example sentences for this opinion.

Cambridge YLE exams are expensive and the books are also expensive. This can be hard to afford for the parents, as they may need extra budget for these exams. (P16)

Even if private school parents did not want to pay extra money for the exams because of economic issues, these exams and preparation process can be problematic for the parents. (P17)

3.4. RQ 4. To what extent do EFL teachers have knowledge and experience on the content of Cambridge YLE exams?

The last part of the semi-structured interview form was related to investigating participants' knowledge about the content of Cambridge YLE exams. The findings are illustrated below.

Table 5. Knowledge and Experience on Test Content

Dimensions	Content			
Content of the Cambridge YLE Exams	-Previous knowledge (10)	-No idea (14)		
Focused skills and aspects/sections of Cambridge YLE Exams	- 4 skills (20)	-4 skills + vocabulary and grammar (1)	-Listening and Speaking (1)	-No idea (2)
Test items of Cambridge YLE Exams	-open-ended, multiple choice, matching, coloring (24)			
Number of the questions in each part of Cambridge YLE Exams	-5-10 (1)	- 25 for listening (5)	- No idea (18)	
Working experience as a Cambridge YLE Exams Examiner	-Yes (1)	-No (23)		
Implementation of study plan for Cambridge YLE Exams	- Once in an academic year (2)	- Twice a month (1)	- Once a week (1)	-No(20)
The similarity of Cambridge YLE Exams' and teachers' test items	- Similar (6)	- No similarity (18)		
Professional development regarding Cambridge YLE Exams	Learning about the Cambridge YLE Exams (9)		- No (15)	

According to their responses, 14 of them had no idea about these tests although 10 of them stated they had previous knowledge about the content of Cambridge YLE exams. The second question was more detailed and related to test components of these tests and parts of Cambridge YLE exams. Although most of them stated they did not know the content of the exam, 20 participants stated it focuses on all skills, one participant said

that it focuses on listening and speaking. Other one participant claimed that grammar and vocabulary are included in addition to four English language skills. In addition, 2 of the participants stated no response to the questions. The third question was asked to learn if the participants know the test items of Cambridge YLE exams or not. It was found that none of the participants had any idea about the items types of Cambridge YLE exams. The following question was about the number of questions in each part of the exam and almost all of them (18 participants) had no idea. Only 5 of the participants knew and said 25 questions the listening parts questions because they had seen that part of the exam before and one participant claimed that there were 5-10 questions for each section. The next question was to gather information on whether participants had any working experiences as a Cambridge YLE Exams examiner. According to responses, only one participant has worked as an examiner in the Cambridge YLE exams, and 23 participants stated that they had no experience in these tests. Another question was about the implementation of the study plan for the Cambridge YLE Exams, only 4 participants implemented a study plan for the Cambridge YLE exams in different time periods (once in an academic year, twice a month, once a week, etc.). The similarity between Cambridge YLE Exams' and teachers' test items was asked to the participants whether there is a consensus or overlapping between the test items in these tests and standardized English tests, and only 6 participants claimed that their test items were similar to the Cambridge YLE Exams' test items. The final question under this theme was whether there are any aspects that the participants need to develop professionally for their future teaching experience regarding the Cambridge YLE exams. 15 of the participants stated that they do not need any training on standardized English language proficiency tests, however, 9 participants stated that they need to learn more about standardized English language proficiency tests and Cambridge YLE exams and they certainly need training for these standardized English proficiency tests.

"I need to search about Cambridge YLE exams first, after that I may use them in my classes." (P6)

I do not think I need to improve myself in standardized English tests because, in the test system in Turkey, four skills are not tested (P3)

4. Discussion and Conclusions

It has become both a necessity for teachers to catch up with the latest developments both in teaching and assessment practices throughout their careers. While the changes in teacher roles in teaching and assessment require teachers to acquire and adapt to global standardization in testing and assessment, teachers' ongoing and professional learning is considered as an important factor for both teaching and assessment. In this study, EFL teachers' knowledge and perspectives related to Cambridge YLE exams were examined. In terms of teachers' perspectives, our study confirms many of the previous

findings while also adding some new points to the debate. When the interviews were analyzed, the findings unveil that Turkish EFL teachers have very limited knowledge on Cambridge YLE Exams. When these findings are compared with the previous study (Breeze & Roothoof, 2014), it can be stated that Spanish teachers had more information about Cambridge YLE exams because they prepared their young learners for these examinations. Secondly, it was also found that the participants of the current study had mostly no idea about the implementation process and evaluation of Cambridge YLE exams. This may have some reasons, first, the testing system in Turkey mostly tests reading, vocabulary, and structure in English, and other skills, listening, speaking, and writing are mostly ignored, so this negative washback effect may dominate the TEA (testing, evaluation, assessment) process in Turkey. In addition, except for currently working in a private school and being experienced as private school teachers, other participants had a lack of institutional experience since their schools, namely state schools do not incorporate Cambridge YLE exams. One of the reasons is that Cambridge YLE exams are popular in private schools for different purposes and may have been ignored in state schools. In both cases, teachers had mixed attitudes toward Cambridge YLE exams as they stated some concerns such as financial issues on these tests and stress. The majority of the participants thought that Cambridge YLE exams are quite expensive for their teaching setting and parents cannot afford exam fees and books. Moreover, it was stated that their students' proficiency level is low, so they cannot use those exams to evaluate pupils' level of English. Another drawback mentioned in the interviews was related to stress. Young test takers may feel an overdose of stress and they cannot be successful in these exams if their parents put pressure on them to be successful, they might have a high level of anxiety and under this pressure, they can lose their self-confidence. Similarly, in Breeze and Roothoof's study (2014), it was found that these tests might put more pressure on teachers and make weaker students feel bad about their English. As another theme in the present study, one of the disadvantages of preparing students for Cambridge YLE exams for teachers included workload during the preparation process. The teachers who prepare their students for Cambridge YLE exams need to have extra workloads, maybe even after school and at the weekends, which was regarded by the participants as a burden because this preparation process can be demanding for them. School management and parents can exert pressure on teachers if their students could not successful enough in Cambridge YLE exams which can be also demotivating for them. As Breeze and Roothoof stated, teachers may have some extra work, however the pressure of success was much more apparent for teachers.

On the other hand, participants had positive attitudes towards Cambridge YLE exams and had no doubt about the effectiveness of Cambridge YLE exams in terms of assessing all skills of English. It was agreed that Cambridge YLE exams are international and valid instruments to test young learners' language proficiency. These exams provide good language input and real-life usage of English since they are authentic tools. Improving

learners' skills was also noted point by respondents, students work hard to be successful in those exams and they develop their skills. When the pupils can achieve something, they improve their self-confidence and motivate themselves to work on it. Furthermore, parents can see their kids' level of English and they will be proud of them and witness their kids' process of learning English with a certificate that is valid all around the world, hence, parents can be content with their schools and English education, which is also encouraging and motivating in learning the target language process.

Finally, the participants had limited but general knowledge of the content of Cambridge YLE exams, they had an idea about the skills and language aspects that are focused on Cambridge YLE exams and test items of them and the participants stated that they had similar test items in their local exams with Cambridge YLE test items such as multiple-choice, matching and fill in the blank. They may guess them because of their previous testing knowledge but some of them saw the Cambridge YLE exams. Surprisingly, none of them have worked or attempted to work as an examiner in the Cambridge YLE exams. Only one of the participants had experience in implementing a study plan for Cambridge YLE exams, the participant taught listening and speaking once a week. The findings are consistent with several studies conducted in Turkey. In some studies, it was also found that language teachers have limited knowledge on standardized testing and this is one of the most important teacher qualifications to be improved (Tsagari & Vogt, 2017; Öz & Atay, 2017; Şişman & Büyükkarcı, 2019). Apart from one participant, EFL teachers did not state any aspect of enthusiasm or motivation to develop professionally for their future teaching experience regarding the Cambridge YLE exams. This may lead to an implication for policymakers and teacher training institutions and the Ministry of Education in Turkey as the official decision-maker body. These findings are also similar to other studies revealing that teacher development and competencies have been slightly ignored (Fulcher, 2012; Tsagari & Csépes, 2011). In Turkish context, it was found in several studies that in-service training did not work for teacher development and highlighted the necessity for long-term and contextualized induction programs (Zorba, 2022; Arslan, Mirici & Öz, 2019). As another finding, the participants did not feel any need to improve themselves in terms of Cambridge YLE exams because these tests are not commonly used in testing in state schools, and they did not pay attention to those examinations. However, Cambridge YLE exams can be tried to assess young learners of English in state schools as well, Ministry of National Education can pilot these exams by starting from city centers to village schools. As a suggestion, EFL teachers can utilize Cambridge YLE exams in their classes as these tests have communicative purposes which overlap with the aims and outputs stated in CEFR (Common European Framework). As stated by Bachman (1990), the information obtained through tests and upon which decisions are made should be reliable and valid, and this can only be achieved through teacher development and adaptation to the standardization in assessment and evaluation practices both in local and global context. Similarly, as an

implication for the study, teachers' role should be considered again as teacher development and leadership has a pivotal role in education (Sari & Nayir, 2020), in-service and pre-service teachers need to have support from their institutions and governmental bodies to bring the latest developments and standardized tests which are globally accepted to their learning environments, and they need to have that opportunity to do so. It is also important for EFL teachers be aware of the content, frequency, and level consistency of these exams with CEFR, and the assessment policies and practices of Cambridge YLE exams, namely Pre-A1 Starters (YLE Starters), A1 Movers (YLE Movers), A2 Flyers (YLE Flyers), A2 Key For Schools (KET) so that they can suit their teaching in parallel with these tests or can benefit from these tests. In addition, these standardized tests can be a useful alternative for testing young learners' language proficiency, and teachers benefit from the materials for these tests to improve their learners' communicative competence and achieve this by using authentic content.

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