The contribution of KET to achievements of learners studying with the ELP in reading skills

Ali GÖKSU
Res. Assist., Bitlis Eren University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
English Language and Literature Department, BİTLİS, TURKEY
agoksu@beu.edu.tr

Melih KARAKUZU
Assist. Prof. Dr., Atatürk University, Faculty of Education,
English Language Teaching Department, ERZURUM, TURKEY
karakuzu@atauni.edu.tr

Gencer ELKILIÇ
Assist. Prof. Dr., Kafkas University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
English Language and Literature Department, KARS, TURKEY
gencerelkilic1322@hotmail.com

Ali DİNÇER
Res. Assist., Erzincan University, Faculty of Education,
English Language Teaching Department, ERZİNCAN, TURKEY
adincer@erzincan.edu.tr

Abstract: European Language Portfolio (ELP) recently created by the Council of Europe not only has an important role in language education policy within Europe and the expanding world, but also helps partners to describe the levels of proficiency required by existing standards, tests and examinations in order to facilitate comparisons between different systems of qualifications. Cambridge ESOL exams are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) published by the Council of Europe. This study aims to investigate the contribution of Key English Test (KET) from Cambridge ESOL exams to achievements of learners studying with the ELP in reading skills. Firstly, twenty students were selected as the study group according to the results of questionnaire which contains items of levels A2, B1 and B2 in the CEFR. And then, self-assessment checklist in CEFR was conducted as pre-test and post-test to cross-check the study group both at the beginning and at the end of the fall term. Readings with materials prepared for the levels in CEFR were implemented to the study group, and extra activities supporting KET were also applied during the study. Besides, KET as a standardized test was also conducted as pre-test and post-test both at the beginning and at the end of the study. Then obtained scores were analyzed by using SPSS 15. T-test analysis of KET scores was computed, and no significant difference was found out according to the gender. The results indicated that ELP and KET were effective to improve reading skills of foreign language learners in Turkey.

Key Words: language teaching, reading, KET, ELP, CEFR

1. Introduction

Throughout history, people have learned and spoken foreign languages. When there was no advanced technology, reading and reading comprehension played a major part in the learning process (Lee, 2004). Today, foreign language learners use reading as a way of learning new vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and cultural diversities. In addition, reading has been still cared as an important method of learning a foreign language in non-English speaking countries throughout the foreign language learning process.

European Language Portfolio (ELP) has been created recently by the Council of Europe for a better learning and teaching process. The European Language Portfolio is an instrument that facilitates recording, planning, and validation of lifelong language learning both within and beyond English language teaching (Vosicki, n.d.).

The ELP is a tool for recording our language and intercultural experiences at school and across a lifetime of learning in our daily life. It is also a document to illustrate our language competences as well as our knowledge and experiences of other cultures through sample of work (Ministry of Education & Council of Europe, 2003).

The ELP consists of three parts. These are language passport, language biography, and dossier. (1) **Language passport** provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point in time. (2) **Language biography** facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress. (3) **Dossier** offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport (Council of Europe, 2000; p.3).

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is also connected with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as a pedagogical language learning and reporting instrument. The CEFR is a comprehensive descriptive scheme offering a tool for reflecting on what is involved not only in language use, but also in language learning and teaching. It provides a common basis and a common language for the elaboration of syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, textbooks, teacher training programmes, and for relating language examinations to one another. It also defines foreign language proficiency at three main levels (basic user, independent user, proficient user) in relation to five skills (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing) (Martyniuk, 2005).

For Cambridge ESOL Examinations which is a department of Cambridge University, CEFR offers a valuable frame of reference for our work and for our stakeholder community. The quality of the relationship between the CEFR and Cambridge ESOL exams is perhaps best judged by the extent to which together they enable language learning to flourish, encourage achievements to be recognized and so enrich the lives of individuals and communities (Taylor & Jones, 2006; p.4).

KET (Key English Test), one of the Cambridge ESOL Examinations, is a certificate that shows a person can use everyday written and spoken English at a pre-intermediate level. These examinations are recognized by thousands of employers throughout the world. KET is also at Level A2 of the CEFR an internationally recognized framework (ESOL Examinations, n.d., retrieved from http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/).

2. Methodology

This study is quantitative in nature, which aims to investigate the contribution of KET to achievements of Turkish speakers of English studying with the ELP in reading skills.

2.1. Participants of the Study

This study was conducted on 45 students who were in the 9th grade in a private high school in Erzurum, Turkey. Ages of students ranged about 14. Since there were both male and female students in the study group, gender factor was taken into consideration. The study was implemented nearly a term from the beginning of October to the end of December in the 2009-2010 academic year.

A questionnaire consisting of language proficiency levels A2, B1 and B2 from the self-assessment grids in CEFR was conducted on 45 students, and according to given responses, level classes were arranged as A2, B1 or B2. The study group was the level A2 so that we would study with only a level class at school.

2.2. Instruments

Data were collected from the students at the beginning and at the end of the fall term (between October and 2009-December 2009). In order to find out the contribution of KET to achievements of learners studying with the ELP in reading skills; questionnaires, self assessment checklists and KET were main data instruments of the study.

2.2.1. Questionnaire

Council of Europe (2001; p.25) expressed that self-assessment grid in the CEFR has shown major categories of language use at each of the six levels. It is also intended to help learners to profile their main language skills, and decide at which level they might look at a checklist of more detailed descriptors in four basic skills in order to self-assess their level of proficiency.

In this study, questionnaire consisted of language proficiency levels such as A2, B1 and B2 from the self-assessment grids in the CEFR. The questionnaire provided us determine the study group which we studied together during the implementation. At the beginning of the term, the questionnaire was conducted on 45 students, and then classes were arranged as the levels A2, B1 or B2 according to the given answers.

2.2.2 Self Assessment Checklist

Checklist is a common instrument used in ELP. Little (2006) states that checklists are important advance for self-assessment in language learning, as they make it possible for learners assess themselves using the same objective scales that in principle may underpin the test and examination they are required to take. In addition, the presence of such checklists as a key element in the ELP adds a significant new dimension to portfolio based language learning and assessment.

At the beginning and at the end of the study, self-assessment checklist consisting of sample "Can-Do" statements of only reading part of the level A2 in the CEFR was conducted on study group as pre and post tests to cross-check the level A2 again. Self-assessment checklist having the sort of five-likert scale had choices such as (5) Always, (4) Frequently, (3) Occasionally, (2) Rarely, (1) Never. In this way, the study group was crossed-check more detailed in their own reading skills again. Besides, it was observed whether there was a significant difference between them.

2.2.3. Key English Test (KET) from Cambridge ESOL Exams

CEFR plays a key role in language and education policy within Europe and the wider world – perhaps in ways not originally envisaged by its authors. Within Europe it is believed to serve policy goals of fostering linguistic diversity, transparency of qualifications, mobility of labour, and lifelong language learning. Beyond Europe it is being adopted to help define language proficiency levels with resulting implications for local pedagogy and assessment (Taylor & Jones, 2006; p.4).

Today, Cambridge ESOL Examinations are also aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: published by the Council of Europe. This internationally recognized framework describes language ability in a scale of levels which ranges from A1 for beginners to C2 for those who have mastered a language. (ESOL Examinations, n.d., retrieved from http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/).

KET (Key English Test) from the Cambridge ESOL Examinations has been applied around the world by British Council. The equivalences between British Council courses and the Council of Europe levels are shown in Table 1 (Manasseh, 2004; p.3).

Table 1. British Council courses for learners and Council of Europe levels

British Council Level	Council of Europe Level	Cambridge exams	Age ranges
Beginner	A1	Starters	6 – 8
Elementary	A1	Movers, Flyers	6- 10
Pre Intermediate	A2	KET (Key English Test)	10 – 16
Intermediate 1	B1		10- 16
Intermediate 2	B1	PET (Preliminary English Test)	11- 16
Pre advanced	B2	FCE (First Certificate in English)	14 – 18
Advanced 1	C1		14 – 18
Advanced CAE	C1	CAE (Certificate in Advanced English)	14 – 18
Very Advanced	C2		14 – 18
Very Advanced 2	C2	CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English)	14 – 18

In this study, KET was used as a standardized test from Cambridge ESOL exams. As seen in Table 1. Key English Test (KET) from Cambridge ESOL exams and A2 from the Council of Europe levels are at the same language level. The questions in the KET were prepared beforehand using in the "Key English Test" of the Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2006). The reading proficiency part of KET, which consisted of fifty questions each of which had two points, was applied to the study group as pre and post tests both at the beginning and at the end of the study. During the implementation of the study, readings with materials prepared for the levels in CEFR were implemented to the study group, and extra activities supporting KET were also done. After the results of both pre and post tests were compared and t-test analysis of KET scores was computed, it was observed whether there was a significant difference between them.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In this study, instruments of data collecting were questionnaire from the self-assessment grids in the CEFR, self-assessment checklists in the CEFR as pre and post tests, and KET from Cambridge ESOL exams as pre and post tests. The study started at the beginning of October 2009 and ended in last week of December. KET was analyzed by using SPSS 15, while questionnaires and self-assessment checklist were analyzed quantitatively.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Results of the Questionnaire

At the beginning of the study, the questionnaire consisting of statements of four basic skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) of A2, B1 and B2 levels from the self-assessment grids in the CEFR was conducted on 45 students in order to determine the study group. According to obtained results of questionnaire, classes were arranged as levels A2, B1 or B2. According to the ELP, the level B2 class consists of successful students, while level A2 consists of less successful students.
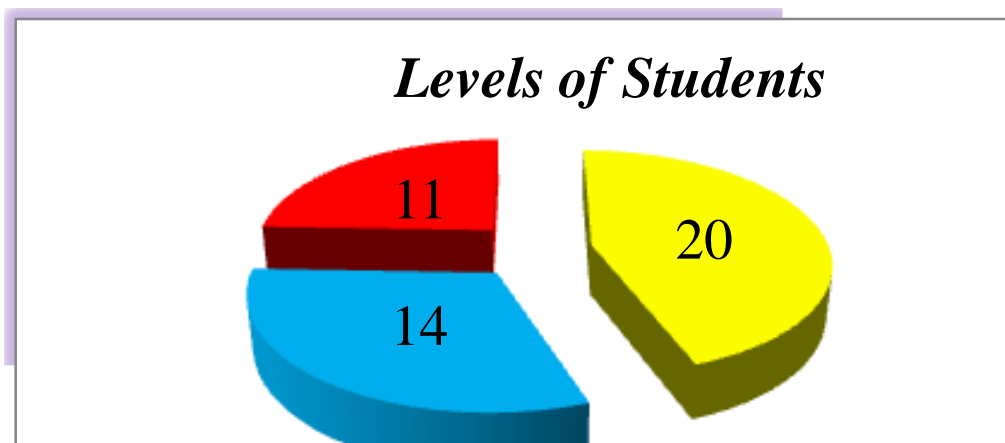

Figure 1. Levels of the Students

According to the results of the questionnaire shown in Figure 1, there were 20 students for the level A2, 14 students for level B1 and 11 students for level B2. We decided to study with the level A2 as a level class at school. Because number of the students in a class at school has consisted of 20-25 students, and there were not enough students at levels B1 or B2 to study with only a level class. As a result, questionnaire indicated that the level of the study group was A2.

3.3. Results of Self-Assessment Checklists

After the level of the study group determined as A2, at the beginning and at the end of the study, pre and post self-assessment checklists consisting of sample "Can-Do" statements of reading part of the level A2 in the CEFR was conducted on the study group. These "Can Do" statements used pre and post self-assessment checklists have included more detailed than reading part of A2 used in questionnaire. Both self-assessment checklists having the sort of five- point likert scale had choices such as (5) Always, (4) Frequently, (3) Occasionally, (2) Rarely, (1)Never. With the help of both self-assessment checklists, it was aimed not only to

cross-check level A2 again, but also to find out whether students had any changes in their reading skills at level A2.
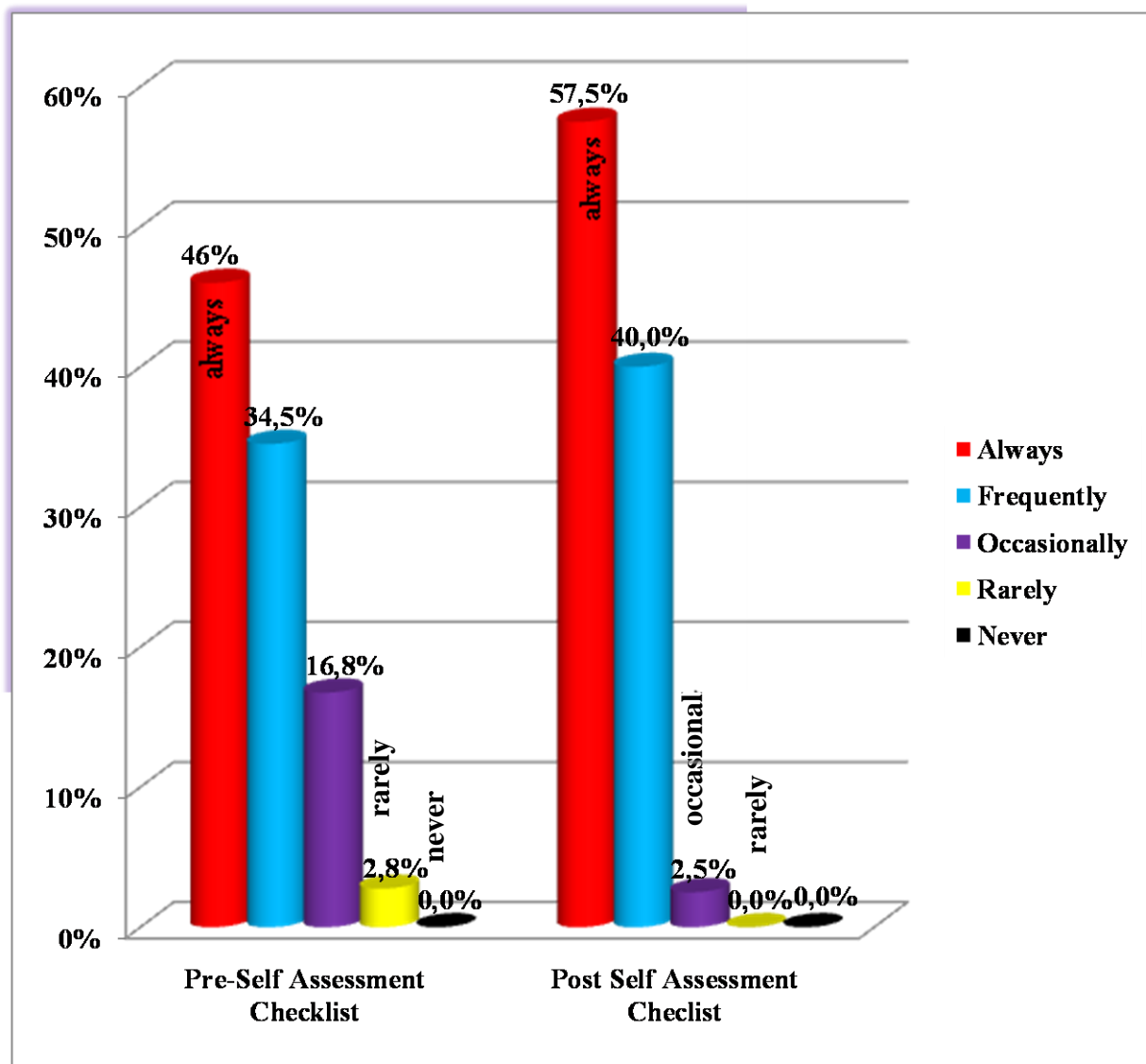

Figure 2. The Results of Pre-Post Self-assessment Checklists

As shown in Figure 2. there was an important increase from pre-test to post test. According to the results pre and post self-assessment checklists, pre and post tests confirmed again that the level of the students was A2. In addition, when both of the self-assessment checklists were compared, it could be observed that there was a significant difference between them. For example, 57.5% of the students said Always in the post self-assessment checklist, whereas 46% of students said Always in pre self-assessment checklist. Besides, the students said 40% for Frequently and 2.5% for Occasionally in the post test, while the students said 34.5% for Frequently, 16.8% for Occasionally and 2.8% for Rarely in the pre test. Therefore, we can conclude that the percentage of the post self-assessment checklist has increased more according to the percentage of the pre-self-assessment checklist. Furthermore, students have seen themselves stronger for their reading skills at the end of the study (term). In addition, one can observe easily that almost all students (57.5% for Always and 40% for Frequently) in the study group studying with ELP felt better and were more successful in their own reading skills.

3.3. **Results of Key English Tests (KET)**

In this study, questions in KET consisted of only reading proficiency part of KET, and they were prepared beforehand using in the "Key English Test" of the Cambridge ESOL Examinations (2006). It included fifty questions each of which had two points. KET as a standardized test was applied to the study group as pre

and post tests both at the beginning and at the end of the study. Furthermore, students also studied with materials supporting KET during the study.

After the data analyzed according to the descriptive statistics, the frequencies for the KET were found. When the results of pre and post tests were compared, it was observed that there was a significant difference between pre and post tests.

Table 2. Paired-Samples T-Test Results for the Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

	M	**N**	**SD**	**T**	**df**	**p**
Pre-test	64.80	20	12.50	11.50	19	.00
Post-test	86.30	20	8.36			

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the intervention on students` scores. There was a statistically significant increase from pre-test (*M* = 64.80, *SD* = 12.50) to post-test (*M* = 86.30, *SD*= 8.36), t (19) = 11.50, p<.05.

Table 3. Difference between Pre-test and Post-test Scores according to Gender

Gender	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**Sum of Ranks**	**Mann-Whitney U**	**p**
female	11	9.09	100.00	34.000	.23
male	9	12.22	110.00		

A Mann-Whitney U Test was run to explore if there was a significant gender difference between pre-test and post-test scores. As seen from the Table 3, there is no statistically significant difference between females and males (*U* = 34,000, p>.05).

It was observed that there was a significant difference between the results of pre and post tests applied to the study group. Furthermore, according to the results of pre and post tests, KET had not only an important role in improving learners` reading skills, but also positive effects on achievements of students studying with the ELP in reading skills.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the contribution of KET to achievements of learners studying with the ELP in reading skills in a private high school in Erzurum, Turkey.

The questionnaire determined language levels of students. The results of the questionnaire showed the level of the study group as A2 at the beginning of the study. With the help of the questionnaire, students could learn English better as a foreign language in their own levels. Because, according to the ELP, everybody in the class had the same level, and their teacher also taught them according to their levels. Therefore, the ELP can be a significant tool to improve the reading skills of learners.

Pre and post self-assessment checklists having sort of five-point likert scale were conducted on the study group at the beginning and at the end of the study in order to cross check in detail the study group in reading skills. The results of both of the tests indicated again that the level of the study group was A2. Besides, when the percentages of the pre and post self-assessment checklists were compared, it was observed that the percentage of the post self-assessment checklist increased more according to the percentage of the pre-self-assessment checklist. Students studying with the ELP also saw stronger themselves in their reading skills at the end of the study.

The Key English Test (KET) conducted as pre and post tests at the beginning and at the end of the study showed us whether the KET contributed to achievements of learners studying with the ELP in reading skills. The findings analyzed with statistical program for the pre and post KET indicated that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. According to analysis of t-test, there was a statistically significant increase from pre-test to post test. Furhermore, no significant difference was found out according to gender. In addition, it was observed that students studying with the ELP were more successful in KET when the frequencies of pre and post tests were compared.

According to all findings obtained from the instruments, KET had an important role and contribution in improving learners` reading skills. Besides, the ELP also provided that all learners in study group studied KET in their own levels. Thus, ELP was both a useful and helpful tool for learners in foreign language learning process. Moreover, all these findings also indicated that KET had a positive effect not only to improve reading skills of students studying with the ELP, but also to increase achievement levels of the students in reading skills. Consequently, KET contributes positively foreign language learners to improve their reading skills.

REFERENCES

Cambridge Key English Test 4. (2006). Examinations Papers from University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. (2000). *European Language Portfolio (ELP): Principles and Guidelines, Document DGIV/EDU/LANG.* Strasbourg, Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

Lee, C.H. (2004, January). *Reading-Developing Reading Skills.* Retrieved October 08, 2011 (Available from http://elc.woosong.ac.kr/english/html/databank/data2_list.html?board=board_lecturepds_english&state= download&uid=19).

Little, D. (2006). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact, *Language Teaching, 39,* 167–190.

Manasseh, A. (2004). *Using the Common European Framework to develop English courses for teenagers at the British Council Milan.* Paper presented at the De-Mystifying the European Language Portfolio, British Council Brussels, Belgium.

Martyniuk, W. (2005, May). *Relating Language Examinations to the Council of Europe`s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).* Paper presented at the ALTE Berlin Conference, Berlin, Germany.

Ministry of Education & Council of Europe, (2003). *Avrupa Dil Portfolyosu 15-18 Yaş.* Retrieved March 23, 2011, from http://adp.meb.gov.tr/15-18.php

Taylor, L. & Jones, N. (2006). Cambridge ESOL exams and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). *University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations: Research Notes, 24*(1), 2-5.

University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (n.d.). Retrieved January 28, 2011, from http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/general-english/ket.html

Vosicki, B. F. (n.d). *Piloting the European Language Portfolio in the Higher Education Sector: An ELC/CEL transnational Project.* University of Lausanne: CH. Retrieved December 29, 2010, from http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/elc/bulletin/6/en/forster.html