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## LEVEL LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS OF KAZAKHSTAN: ASSESSMENT PRACTICE OF STUDENTS' LEARNING RESULTS

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This article is devoted to the analysis of the assessment system in the framework of level teaching of the English language in schools of Kazakhstan. The introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in the process of foreign language education in Kazakhstan has led to a paradigm shift in assessing student achievement, when assessment and learning are viewed as inseparable and assessment is perceived as a tool to support student learning. This study was undertaken to investigate the preferences of Kazakhstani teachers in the choice of methods for assessing student learning outcomes, as well as the factors influencing this choice. Taking into account the fact that competences in speech skills of English language proficiency in Kazakhstan model curricula are assessed on the basis of the criteria and descriptors recommended by CEFR for each individual level, nevertheless, in their practice, not everyone uses the general concept of recommended assessment. The study showed that teachers' perception of the new assessment system cannot change overnight, nor can they do it independently, they need support in such as training, exchange of experience and methodological recommendations.

**Keywords:** level teaching of languages, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, formative assessment, summative assessment, criteria-based assessment.

### Introduction

The transition to level-based education in the Republic of Kazakhstan required significant changes in the entire educational process for teaching foreign languages: introducing new, more effective teaching technologies that imitate conditions of a country of the target language, creating new documentation that controls learning process, training teachers, developing new system for assessing student results. In order to create an effective assessment system that would form a stimulating environment for improving the quality of education it became necessary to provide the following conditions:

*Development of a standard and curricula* focused on specific expected results in accordance with the taxonomic approach of B. Bloom - from the level of knowledge to the level of assessment [1, 2].

*Regulatory support*, which determines the procedure for the criteria-based assessment of educational achievements of students in organizations of 12-year education. This allows us to develop uniform standards, create more clearly defined mechanisms, organize coordination and implementation of all procedures.

*Organizational support* that defines the organizational structure of management and accountability in implementing and coordinating the assessment system. It is necessary to consider the issues of regular monitoring of assessment process (carried out on the basis of summative assessment data and does not require additional measures), research into the effectiveness of the assessment system, and study of the opinions of participants in the assessment process.

*Scientific and methodological support:* is done by developing teaching aids and recommendations for criteria-based assessment, providing teachers with collections of samples of assessment tools in order to standardize and develop the practice of teacher assessment.

*Information support:* IT solutions for the development of automated environment for digitalization of procedures and online interaction of all participants in the educational process: an electronic journal and a diary, a task bank, discussion platforms, a central archive, etc. This helps to personalize assessment by building an individual trajectory for each student.

*Staffing:* systematic advanced training of teachers on implementation of the assessment system. Psychological and pedagogical counseling: creating a favorable environment for increasing activity, involvement and responsibility of students for learning outcomes, as well as cooperation between schools and parent community [3].

According to the developers, the new system of criteria-based assessment has integrated the best Kazakhstani and international experience and allows achieving real advantages in improving the quality

of education [4]. In particular, a clear and correctly prioritized methodology of criteria-based assessment system allows:

- achieving objective and reliable assessment of students' academic progress;
- forming consistent mechanisms for successful implementation of the assessment system aimed at integrating and improving teaching, learning and assessment;
- developing assessment tools, including those for testing the levels of formation of high-order skills;
- positively influencing personal development of students (increasing motivation for learning, self-regulation, responsibility, involvement) by tracking the individual learning path;
- providing informational basis for making effective management decisions (policy effectiveness, improvement of educational curricula, professional development of teachers, etc.)

According to expected results of the State compulsory educational standards within the framework of assessment criteria presented for language subjects on language skills it is determined what a student should be able to do, in what context and for what purpose communicative language competencies should be tested.

### **Literature Review**

In the field of English language teaching, there is no universally accepted definition of an approach to assessment, all terms used emphasize different aspects of assessment process, suggesting a “more teacher-mediated, context-oriented classroom assessment practice, explicitly or implicitly defined as opposed to traditional, externally established large-scale formal examinations used mainly for selection and / or reporting purposes” [5, 395]. The heavy reliance on explicit teaching of grammar rules and grammar-based testing, which characterized the teaching of English in Kazakhstan for decades, seemed very resistant to change. However, with the introduction of the principles of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) into foreign language teaching, this practice began to outlive itself. In particular, the use of CEFR has been adapted in a variety of areas, from setting standards for teacher professionalism, establishing students' learning outcomes, updating language curriculum, adapting teaching materials to changing the practice of language assessment.

Kazakhstani education allows developing new standards and assessment mechanisms that are comparable not only with current trends in the field of pedagogical measurements, but also with the peculiarities of the socio-cultural development of our country. The structure of criteria-based assessment is based on two types of assessment: formative and summative. Formative assessment is a type of assessment that in the course of daily work in classroom is aimed at evaluating the performance of an educational task, which is obligatory at this point in the process of cognition and learning. It is current measure of student's progress and provides feedback between a student and a teacher. It helps to identify a student's difficulties, to determine his ability to achieve better results. A student should be able to cover current learning gaps by following the recommendations of a teacher, peers, completing missed or additional assignments. Summative assessment is a cumulative type of assessment that is carried out at the end of a certain academic period (a quarter, trimester, academic year), as well as after studying sections in accordance with the curriculum. The accumulative system records only achievements of students and therefore actively stimulates independent educational and cognitive activities of students and a more complete development of the curriculum. Assessment standards, methods and tools differ depending on the type of assessment and specifics of a subject.

The analysis of foreign scientific literature on the research topic shows that different researchers distinguish different principles for evaluating the process of learning a foreign language. But they all boil down to 2 main areas: teachers should help students track their own progress, and, using a scaffolding strategy, help students identify their weak points. Numerous studies and reports describe and define these two aspects in favor of promoting student learning [6, 7, 8]. Teachers who implement this approach to assessment can monitor their students by observing and assessing what happens in the classroom during classroom activities. They can then engage in various kinds of interactions with learners, such as encouraging them to reflect on how they can improve their language learning, discuss with them progress they have made in learning English, and inform learners about their weaknesses and / or strengths. With regard to scaffolding, teachers and students must follow a strategy in which they interact socially, where teachers “demonstrate, support, guide their students, but gradually the teacher's role becomes less prominent and the student becomes more and more independent” [9, 507]. Kazakhstani instructive-

methodological documents also contain recommendations on the use of the scaffolding strategy and defining the role of the teacher as a guiding mentor who, in cooperation with students, contributes to the development of their communication skills [3, 134].

However, there is a very limited research on the perception and practice of teacher assessment of FL achievements in the framework of CEFR, and there is a need to study this topic. In the context of Kazakhstan, there has been a transition to level English teaching, which determines the content of the curriculum and the practice of teaching English as a foreign language, as a result of which the emphasis in the new curriculum has shifted to formative assessment. The question remains unanswered as to whether English teachers practise appropriate assessment procedures. Analysis of domestic literature on the research topic showed that this issue is practically not covered in the works of Kazakhstani linguists. Thus, this article is an attempt to contribute to this aspect of level teaching of the English language by examining the practice of assessing the results of student achievement used by Kazakhstani teachers. The following questions were formulated to cover the research topic:

1. What assessment methods do Kazakhstani teachers of English use in their classrooms?
2. To what extent are they monitoring student progress and are they using the scaffolding strategy?
3. Is there a relationship between assessment methods and
  - (a) duration of the teaching experience,
  - (b) type of school,
  - (c) education background,
  - (d) advanced training?

It is assumed that the results obtained will be useful for methodologists, trainers and teachers for assessing the practice of their students, as well as for making adjustments to the content of training programs on criteria-based assessment within the framework of English language level teaching in schools.

### **Methodology**

The method of targeted criterion sampling was used to select the respondents participating in the study. Patton describes this technique as a process of selecting specific "information-rich cases" from which a researcher can obtain informative data needed for research [10]. Thus, the respondents were selected on the basis of certain characteristics, in particular, they were English teachers who currently teach in public and private educational institutions. To get the most representative sample, the questionnaire was sent out to as many teachers as possible using social media. An online survey was conducted in May 2020 among 100 teachers. A pre-notification message was sent out informing potential participants about the survey, and then a second message was sent with a link to the tool (questionnaire). GOOGLE FORM online platform was used for the survey. Then, two subsequent reminders were sent to respondents within a month. 90% of the participants graduated from specialized faculties training English teachers, 10% of the participants graduated from language departments of philological faculties, where English was studied as an additional specialty.

The instrument for this study was a two-part self-report questionnaire. The first part included questions that characterized the participants, such as teaching experience, types of educational institutions, place of study, availability of assessment courses and trainings, and general assessment methods they used, while the second part included the assessment questionnaire designed for teachers that was partially adapted from Pat-El et al. [11]. The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements, divided into two subscales: (1) questions related to monitoring student progress (10 items) and (2) using the scaffolding strategy (10 items). Participants rated statements on a 5-point Likert scale (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). In general, the Likert scale is very convenient and versatile. It allows in a rather concise form to assess the level of efficiency, satisfaction or the degree of probability with the maximum accuracy of estimated values.

### **Results and Discussions**

The answers of the respondents were studied and grouped in order to answer the 3 previously formulated questions on the research topic.

1. *What assessment methods do Kazakhstani teachers of English use in their classrooms?*

To obtain a model for presenting the results of the preferred assessment tools for teachers, their selection was divided into three groups according to frequency of use and their percentage. The scoring tools were considered “the most preferred” if their percentage was in the range from 71 to 100, “second most preferred” if they were in the range from 41 to 70 and “the least preferred” if they were in the range from 0 to 40 of the total range of responses. Descriptive analysis showed that items such as multiple choice, fill in the gap, true or false, short answers, and matching were some of the preferred assessment methods used by English teachers. Overall, 47% of them prefer to use these methods when assessing students' knowledge. The results of the percentage analysis showed that almost nine out of ten (92%) teachers use the gap filling method more often, 87% prefer to use the assessment method using multiple choice items, 81% prefer the test items of the "true-false" type, 79% prefer the matching method and 85% prefer to use the short answer-based scoring method (Figure 1).

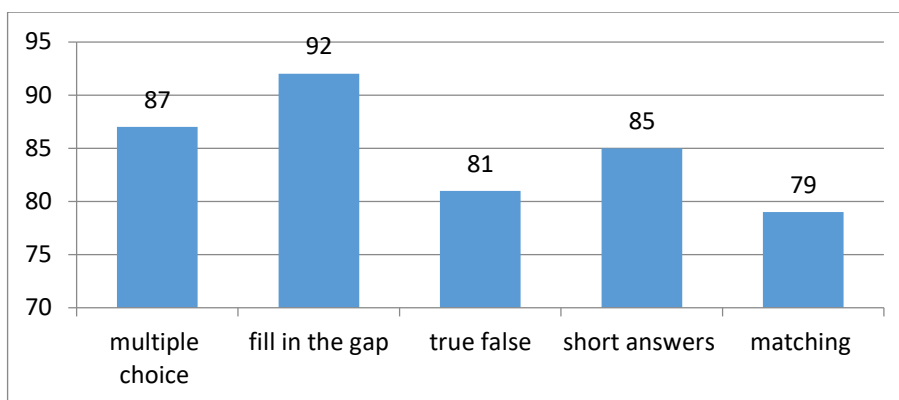


Figure 1. Types of assignments for assessing student achievement in English lessons (the most preferred)

Oral exams, group work, project, portfolio, essay and oral presentation fell into the second most popular category of assessment tools among responses. Their frequency of use and percentage ranged from 67% for group work to 44% for a project. Other assessment methods in this category gave indicators with approximately the same frequency and percentage of use, that is, about 50% (Figure 2). It should be noted that most of the assessment methods indicated in this category belong to formative assessment tools [12], but they were not included in the category of the most preferred (Figure 2).

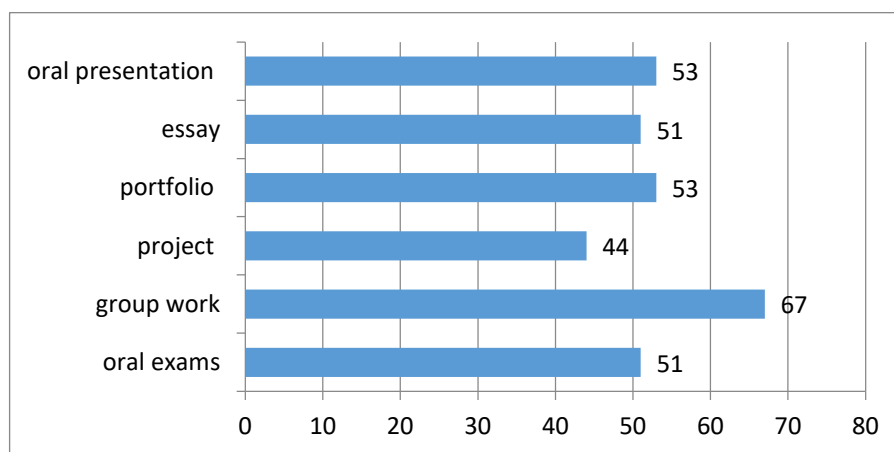


Figure 2. Types of assignments for assessing student achievement in the English classroom (second most preferred)

The least preferred assessment methods were rubrics, self and peer assessment, observation, structured grid, drama and other methods (Figure 3). These methods are mainly considered as methods of formative assessment and are mainly recommended by CEFR to be used as tools for evaluation of

language skills [13], but they are included by the teachers in the category of the least preferred tools for assessing student progress (Figure 3).

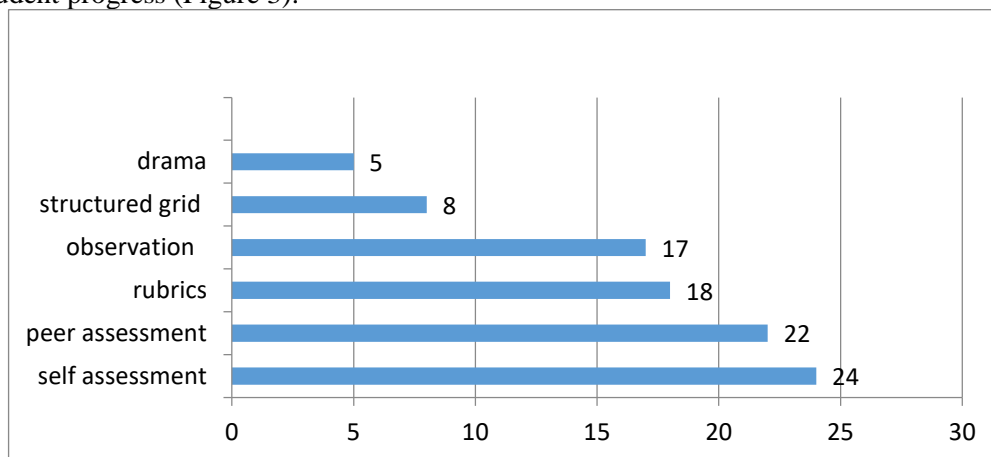


Figure 3. Types of assignments for assessing student achievement in English lessons (the least preferred)

2. To what extent do teachers monitor students' progress and to what extent do they apply the scaffolding strategy?

The results of the analysis of monitoring students' progress showed that the majority of teachers use this assessment tool during their lessons (Table 1). In most of the answers, the indicators did not fall below 4 points (except for question 3). The highest average score (4.57) was obtained for question 10 (I provide guidance and assistance to students in learning the language), suggesting that the majority of teachers (91.4%) prefer to supervise students during their practical training using the monitoring strategy. In contrast, the lowest average score was assigned to question 3 (I give my students a chance to define their language learning goals), indicating less student participation in the language learning process as well as in the assessment process. Analysis of the results shows that the lowest scores, that is, the scores for items 3, 4 and 5, relate to active student participation in the language learning process, as well as in the assessment process. This means that English teachers are less likely to involve their students in decision-making and setting language learning goals.

Table 1 - Using monitoring practices to measure student achievement

№	Question	1	2	3	4	5	Average score	% ratio
1	I encourage my students to think about how they can improve their language learning.	0	5	9	25	61	4,42	88,4
2	After tests, I analyze mistakes with the students.	0	0	15	33	52	4,37	87,4
3	I give my students the opportunity to determine their goals of learning English	5	4	19	32	40	3,98	79,6
4	I engage my students in thinking about how they would like to learn English at school	1	4	10	35	50	4,32	86,4
5	In the process of completing assignments, I ask my students how they are doing	4	5	11	40	40	4,07	81,4
6	I inform my students about their weak points in language learning	0	0	18	36	46	4,28	85,6
7	I feedback my students on their	1	1	18	26	54	4,30	86

	strengths in language teaching							
8	After the assessment, I inform my students how to improve their weaknesses	0	3	13	34	50	4,31	86,2
9	Together with our students, we look at ways to improve their weak points	0	2	12	29	57	4,41	88,2
10	I give students advice and help them in learning the language.	0	0	0	43	57	4,57	91,4

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

With regard to the responses on the use of the scaffolding strategy in assessment, the results were also consistent within the scale (Table 2). The highest GPA (4.35) was obtained on question 16 (I allow my students to ask questions). This suggests that the majority of the teachers (87%) consider it important to be able to ask questions during the learning process. On the other hand, the lowest GPA (3.68) was obtained for item 19 (I guarantee my students know what areas they need to work on to improve their results). This means that not all teachers pay attention to problem areas in teaching, while 26.4% ignore the weaknesses of students.

Table 2 - Using the scaffolding strategy in assessment practice

№	Question	1	2	3	4	5	Average score	%-ratio
11	I adjust my language teaching methods whenever I notice that my students do not understand a topic	0	3	17	28	52	4,29	85,8
12	I give my students guidance to help them understand the content of the material taught	4	7	15	23	51	4,07	81,4
13	By asking questions during class, I help my students understand what is being taught.	0	4	23	35	48	4,57	91,4
14	During my classes, students are given the opportunity to show what they have learned	2	3	15	42	38	4,11	82,2
15	I make sure my students know what areas they need to work in to improve their results	0	0	5	46	49	4,44	88,8
16	I allow my students to ask questions	0	0	11	43	46	4,35	87
17	My students know what the criteria for evaluating their work are	1	1	14	39	45	4,26	85,2
18	I ensure that my students know what they can learn by completing assignments	4	7	15	30	44	4,03	80,6
19	I guarantee my students know what areas they need to work on to improve their results	9	11	19	25	36	3,68	73,6
20	I allow students to actively participate in the lessons	5	9	12	25	49	4,04	80,0

Note: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

### 3. Is there a relationship between assessment methods and

(a) duration of the teaching experience,

(b) type of school,

(c) education background,

(d) advanced training?

The analysis of responses regarding the link between assessment methods and factors such as continuity of teaching experience, type of school, advanced training, and education taken in non / specialized faculties showed that there was no significant major influence between these factors. However, the duration of pedagogical experience and availability of advanced training courses showed some difference in indications. Teachers who work in schools from 1-5 years less often use tools of



formative assessment for student achievement than teachers with longer work experience. Taking advanced teaching courses has a positive effect on the use of recommended assessment methods.

The most important finding of this study is that most Kazakhstani English teachers rely on traditional assessment methods, rather than formative assessment tools such as self-assessment and peer assessment, which are considered the indispensable part of the monitoring aspect of language teaching and learning. This may be due to the fact that teachers classify formal examinations as the only reliable form of assessment. In other words, teachers mainly practice traditional assessment methods such as oral and written exams, testing, and final exam results are of primary importance to most teachers, rather than achievements assessed through portfolio, project and independent work, or peer assessment. However, this contradicts the principles of assessment recommended by CEFR, in which students play an active role both in learning a language and in monitoring their own progress [14, 15]. They should collaborate with their teacher to keep track of the current level of achievement in relation to the learning objectives. In other words, students should be given the opportunity to actively discuss their academic achievements with teachers, peers and parents, they need to monitor their progress, developing independence and self-confidence. This approach in assessing student achievement is recommended by the Ministry of education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is reflected in the State compulsory education standards, curricula and other documents regulating the process of level education. In line with CEFR, the emphasis has shifted from traditional assessment methods to alternative assessment methods such as self-assessment, project and portfolio, (student-teacher collaboration), paper tests, peer assessment (including listening and speaking skills), and teacher observation and assessment. The regulatory documentation on the organization of the educational process in foreign language learning in Kazakhstani schools recommends comprehensive use of communication technologies (projects, interviews, role-playing games, discussions, debates, conferences, competitions, dramatization, etc.), as well as active use of information and communication technologies and extracurricular activities that contribute to the creation of conditions for increasing motivation for learning English, enhancing the cognitive activity of students, their speech interaction and development of creative potential. It is important to regularly use teaching technologies that allow simulating situations of foreign language speech communication and providing the maximum possible degree of independence of students in interpreting the phenomena of intercultural communication [3, 214].

Another result of this study showed that local teachers differ in their perception and practice of using assessment methods. Indeed, teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience, as shown by the results of the study, are less willing to use the recommended methods of assessing student achievement than their more experienced colleagues. According to foreign linguists, this may indicate a decrease in the “optimism of young teachers when they face the realities and complexities of educational tasks” [16, 6]. This aspect needs to be investigated more carefully before assigning any generalized labels.

As for the category of teachers who have completed advanced training courses on assessment tools in English language teaching, the study only confirms the fact that courses, trainings, seminars have a positive effect on the effectiveness of applying the recommended assessment practices.

### **Conclusions**

Criteria assessment allows providing objective information about student learning outcomes. It aims to motivate students and regularly assist in the course of learning process in order to achieve progress. Compiling differentiated assessment criteria and standards, mechanisms for ensuring reliability, validity, objectivity and transparency improves the quality of assessment procedures, ensures compliance with international standards and learning needs of each student. Currently, in the field of assessing language competencies, there is a transition from a traditional culture to a formative culture of assessment, in accordance with which the practice of assessment is aimed at informing not only teachers about teaching students, but also students about their own achievements.

This study has shown that Kazakhstani English teachers differ in their perceptions of the practice of assessing students' language skills, especially with regard to the process of monitoring their students' progress. Only a small number of teachers actively use monitoring and scaffolding as a reliable assessment strategy to increase motivation to learn, while the majority of teachers simply ignore the recommended assessment tools. It is important for teachers to remember that the criteria-based assessment of language skills in the updated curriculum differs from traditional forms of examinations

and testing in that traditional forms view context as a neutral and unimportant factor and require examiners to remain objective throughout the assessment process. Nevertheless, assessment should be carried out continuously throughout the entire learning process with active participation of not only a teacher, but also students themselves, since the final achievements in language learning can and should be formed and improved through the active cooperation of all participants of the educational process. Consequently, students who regulate their own behavior based on objective assessment gain significant advantages in achieving successful results in the future.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that teachers are unlikely to be able to use new assessment practices working individually or independently. Applying criteria-based assessment to proficiency level of English teaching is an essential skill for teachers in the 21st century, and education trainers and coaches must ensure that teachers understand and apply it appropriately. In addition, to help teachers, it is necessary to provide information basis for making effective management decisions (policy effectiveness, improving educational curricula, updating the qualifications of teachers, etc.).

The main limitation of this study is that the results are based on self-reported data from English teachers in only two regions of the country. It would be very interesting to collect data from representatives of all regions, as well as students, in order to study this issue in details, taking into account the experience of all participants of the educational process.

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**Қазақстан мектептерінде ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқыту:  
оқушылардың оқыту нәтижелерін бағалау практикасы**

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Бұл мақала Қазақстан мектептеріндегі ағылшын тілін деңгейлік оқыту шеңберіндегі бағалау жүйесін талдауға арналған. Қазақстанда шет тілдерін оқыту үдерісіне тілдерге арналған CEFR жүйенің енгізілуі оқушылардың жетістігін бағалаудағы парадигманың өзгеруіне әкелді, бұл кезде бағалау мен оқуды ажырамас нәрсе ретінде қарастыру және бағалауды оқушылардың білімін қолдау құралы ретінде қабылдау керек. Бұл зерттеу оқушылардың оқу нәтижелерін бағалау әдістерін таңдаудағы қазақстандық мұғалімдердің басымдықтарын, сондай-ақ осы таңдауға әсер ететін факторларды зерттеу үшін қабылданды. Қазақстандық типтік оқу жоспарларындағы ағылшын тілін меңгерудегі сөйлеу дағдыларының құзыреттілігі CEFR әр жеке деңгейге ұсынған критерийлер мен дескрипторлар негізінде бағаланатындығын ескере отырып, өз тәжірибелерінде ұсынылған бағалаудың жалпы тұжырымдамасын бәрі бірдей қолдана бермейді. Зерттеу көрсеткендей, мұғалімдердің жаңа бағалау жүйесі туралы түсініктері бір сәтте өзгере алмайтындығында және оларды жалғыз өзі жасай алмайтындығында болды, олар тренингтердің сапасында, тәжірибе алмасуда және әдістемелік ұсыныстарда қолдауды қажет етеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** тілдерді деңгейлік оқыту, тілдерге арналған жалпы еуропалық анықтамалық негіз, формативті бағалау, жиынтық бағалау, критериалды бағалау.

**Уровневое обучение английскому языку в школах Казахстана:  
практика оценивания результатов обучения учащихся**

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Настоящая статья посвящается анализу системы оценивания в рамках уровневого обучения английскому языку в школах Казахстана. Внедрение Общеευропейских компетенций владения иностранными языками в процесс иноязычного образования в Казахстане привели к смене парадигмы в

оценивании достижений учащихся, когда оценка и обучение рассматриваются как неразделимые и оценка воспринимается как инструмент поддержки обучения учащихся. Это исследование было предпринято с целью изучения предпочтений казахстанских учителей в выборе методов оценивания результатов обучения учащихся, а также факторов влияющих на этот выбор. Принимая во внимание тот факт, что компетенции по речевым навыкам владения английским языком в казахстанских типовых учебных программах оцениваются на основе критериев и дескрипторов, рекомендованных CEFR для каждого отдельного уровня, тем не менее в своей практике не все используют общую концепцию рекомендованного оценивания. Исследование показало, что восприятие учителями новой оценочной системы не может измениться в мгновение ока, равно как и они не могут сделать это в одиночку, им нужна поддержка в качестве тренингов, обмен опытом и методических рекомендаций.

**Ключевые слова:** уровневое обучение языкам, Общевропейские компетенции владения иностранным языком, формативное оценивание, суммативное оценивание, критериальное оценивание.

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