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Research Notes

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Editorial notes

Welcome to issue 50 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters relating to research, test development and validation within University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL). The theme of this issue is the impact of Cambridge English exams in a variety of contexts. The issue benefits from the guest editorship of Dr Jayanti Banerjee, Research Director at Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments.

Following Dr Banerjee’s guest editorial, Nick Saville outlines Cambridge ESOL’s approach to investigating the impact of its exams, and the following six studies represent different aspects of this approach.

The first two articles describe studies that are investigating the impact of Cambridge English exams as part of larger educational reform initiatives. Hanan Khalifa, Thuyanh Nguyen and Christine Walker describe the first phase of a study investigating the effect of introducing *Cambridge English: Young Learners* into an intensive English programme in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam while Lucy Chambers, Mark Elliott and Hou Jianguo’s study investigates the impact of using Cambridge English exams in a pilot programme in Hebei province in China.

The next pair of articles are baseline studies. The first by Angeliki Salamoura, Miranda Hamilton and Viviane Octor explores the anticipated effects of introducing Cambridge English exams in the Mission laïque française schools, an international association of schools teaching the French curriculum. The next article by Karen Ashton, Angeliki Salamoura and Emilio Diaz describes a preliminary investigation into the impact on stakeholders of a bilingual programme developed by a federation of Spanish religious schools in Madrid.

The last two articles focus on stakeholder perceptions of Cambridge English exams in China. Xiangdong Gu, Hanan Khalifa, Qiaozhen Yan and Jie Tian describe a pilot study investigating *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams in China. The last article by Xiangdong Gu and Nick Saville focuses on parents’ attitudes and perceptions of Cambridge English for Schools exams.

Guest editorial

JAYANTI BANERJEE CAMBRIDGE MICHIGAN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS, USA

In the almost two decades since Alderson and Wall (1993) asked the question 'does washback exist?', there has been a growing body of research confirming not only that it does exist but also that it is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Language tests and examinations have a complex effect upon the attitudes, beliefs, motivation, and actions of language learners and teachers as well as upon the broader educational context and upon society as a whole. Consequently, the field has moved away from the very early assumptions that tests would inevitably have negative effects (see, for example, Kirkland 1971, Madaus 1988) towards a more modulated view. It is now agreed that tests can be instruments of beneficial change (see, for example, Pearson 1988, Swain 1984) but that this cannot be guaranteed simply by designing a good test. For the nature and strength of the effect that a test has upon teaching, learning, and the wider social context, is in turn dependent upon that cultural and educational context.

Numerous studies have catalogued the areas of resistance that slow or block the effect of a test within the teaching and learning micro context. For instance, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) and Watanabe (1996) report that teachers may change the way that they teach when preparing students for an examination but that the methodology adopted varies from teacher to teacher, suggesting that it is not the test itself but their beliefs about the test that influence the teaching activities that are used in class. Cheng (2005) shows how the structure of the educational system may constrain the degree to which teachers are able to adapt their teaching methodology to a new test. Stoneman (2006) finds that the commitment of students to language learning and test preparation is influenced by their perception of the status of that exam. An exam with little perceived status or usefulness is less likely to effect changes upon the students' approach to language learning or their test preparation. As Wall (2005) explains, the effect of a test upon teaching and learning needs to be understood within a much broader framework.

This calls for investigations of the macro context such as Saville's (2009) meta-analysis of three case studies of test impact: the *International English Language Testing System (IELTS)* impact study, the Italian *Progetto Lingue 2000*, and the Florence Language Learning Gains Project (FLLGP). While up to that point few authors had explicitly distinguished between the terms washback and impact, often using them interchangeably (see Cheng, Watanabe and Curtis 2004), Saville (2009) firmly establishes the usefulness of the distinction presented by Wall (1997:291): that 'washback' refers specifically (and narrowly) to the effects of tests upon teaching and learning while 'impact' refers to the effects that a test can have upon both the micro context of the classroom and the macro context of the school, educational system, and wider society.

This issue of *Research Notes* focuses upon several investigations into the impact of Cambridge English

examinations. Individually and together they provide insights into the effect of the examinations within different educational contexts, whether they are government-initiated reforms, language learning initiatives taken by chains of independent schools, or the result of national education policy.

The issue begins with an overview of Cambridge ESOL's approach towards the investigation of impact in language assessment. Saville shows how the organisation's early model of test impact has evolved into a meta-framework entitled 'impact by design' (Saville 2009) whereby tests are designed to promote and encourage positive impact. Key within this framework is an appreciation of context and the interaction between the different layers (sub-contexts) within a society, for the nature and the degree of influence of an exam can vary depending on the local or national context. Additionally, echoing Wall (2005), the framework calls for impact to be regularly monitored. Test developers should seek to achieve the intended impact of the exam and to predict unintended, negative consequences (what Saville collectively terms 'anticipated impact'). The latter should be ameliorated through the test review and design process.

The papers that follow embody this approach, identifying the 'anticipated impacts' of different Cambridge English examinations. All the studies employ mixed methods designs (see Creswell and Plano Clark 2011), combining thematic analyses of focus groups and interviews with the statistical analyses of questionnaires and test performances. Most of the studies draw on a set of core data collection instruments, allowing (in the future) for useful cross-context analyses. Many of the studies also exemplify the benefits of collaborations between Cambridge ESOL-based researchers and researchers with local knowledge who provide an understanding of and insights into the specific local context being studied.

The papers by Khalifa, Nguyen and Walker (this issue) and Chambers, Elliott and Jianguo (this issue) are studies of carefully targeted government-initiated reform. Khalifa et al investigate the impact of the *Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE)* examinations within Ho Chi Minh City (HCM) in Vietnam as part of an intensive English programme (IEP). This context is particularly interesting because the IEP is not mandatory for all HCM schools and access to the programme is by selection. Chambers et al explore the effect of a pilot programme to introduce *Cambridge English: Key (KET) for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET) for Schools* to primary and junior high schools in Hebei province in China. For both these government reforms the teachers are carefully selected and trained and, as a result, are highly educated. Additionally, in the case of the IEP programme in Vietnam, the uptake among the students is much higher among children with educated parents who hope that their children will become internationally mobile in the future. This results

in somewhat rarefied groups of informants, an interesting finding in itself.

The papers by Salamoura, Hamilton and Octor (this issue), and by Ashton, Salamoura and Diaz (this issue) are pilot or baseline studies that investigate the impact of introducing Cambridge English examinations within chains of independent schools. One context, the Mission laïque française (MLF), is a global association of schools based in 46 countries while the other, a federation of religious schools based within the autonomous community of Madrid (FERE), is much more geographically circumscribed.

The final papers in this issue present small-scale studies led by Professor Xiangdong Gu and explore the impact of Cambridge English examinations in China as a result of changes in the national education policy. The paper by Gu, Khalifa, Yan and Tian (this issue) reports on the pilot phase of a project investigating the impact of the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* examinations in China. Focusing on a large private language teaching institute in Chongqing, Gu et al report that the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams are having a positive effect upon teaching and learning. The paper by Gu and Saville (this issue) focuses on parents as key stakeholders in the introduction of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*. Like Khalifa et al (this issue), Gu and Saville find that the majority of the parents are well educated and actively involved in their children's language learning.

Each of these preliminary studies into the impact of the Cambridge English examinations indicates the positive role that the examinations are playing in these different contexts. They also demonstrate the benefits of an iterative approach to gathering impact data as they have collectively revealed areas where further support and information is needed for teachers and parents. The follow-up studies that are planned will no doubt explore in much greater depth the opportunities and challenges of introducing examinations into such different cultural and educational contexts, the different points of resistance as well as the different ways in which the same information is interpreted and operationalised.

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Applying a model for investigating the impact of language assessment within educational contexts: The Cambridge ESOL approach

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Introduction

In *Research Notes* 42 (2010), I explained why Cambridge ESOL as an international test provider needs a model to guide its work in investigating the impact of its examinations. In this article I set out some features of the model now being developed and explain how it can be applied in the case of the Cambridge English examinations. The operational practices needed to implement this approach are being introduced incrementally and are being adapted and revised in light of experiences in conducting projects which are now underway in many parts of the world.

Impact research within Cambridge ESOL

Impact research investigates and seeks to understand the effects and consequences which result from the use of tests and examinations in educational contexts and throughout society. As a field of enquiry it appeared in the language testing literature as an extension of washback in the 1990s. (See Cheng, Watanabe and Curtis 2004 for an overview of washback.) The PhD theses of Wall (2005), Cheng (1997, 2005) and Green (2007) published in the *Studies in Language Testing* series, looked at different aspects of washback and extended the earlier work of Hughes (1989) and Bailey (1996). While these studies inevitably touched on considerations related to impact, none proposed a comprehensive model which would allow complex relationships to be examined across wider educational and societal contexts. This has been the aim of the team working in Cambridge ESOL.

The origin of the Cambridge ESOL approach dates back to the early 1990s and to the time when the current test development and validation strategies were first introduced. In those early stages, Bachman's work was influential as he was the first to present impact as a 'quality' of a test which should be integrated within the overarching concept of test usefulness (Bachman and Palmer 1996). Following his lead, Cambridge ESOL also introduced impact as one of the four essential qualities, which together with validity, reliability, and practicality comprise the *VRIP features* of a test (Saville 2003:65).

By conceptualising impact within VRIP-based validation processes from the start, there was an explicit attempt to integrate impact research into routine procedures for accumulating validity evidence. Subsequent work on impact has been framed by these considerations and since the initial stage it has been recognised that a proactive approach is needed to achieve intended effects and consequences.

In 1996, Milanovic and Saville proposed an early model

of test impact which was explicitly designed to meet the needs of Cambridge ESOL. They proposed four maxims as follows:

- Maxim 1 PLAN
Use a rational and explicit approach to test development
- Maxim 2 SUPPORT
Support stakeholders in the testing process
- Maxim 3 COMMUNICATE
Provide comprehensive, useful and transparent information
- Maxim 4 MONITOR and EVALUATE
Collect all relevant data and analyse as required

These maxims were designed to capture key principles and to provide a basis for practical decision-making and action planning – and they still remain central to the Cambridge ESOL approach today (see Section 4.4 in Cambridge ESOL's *Principles of Good Practice: Quality Management and Validation in Language Assessment* (2011)).

Under Maxim 1, Cambridge ESOL endeavours to develop systems and processes to plan effectively using a rational and explicit model for managing the test development processes in a cyclical and iterative way. It requires regular reviews and revisions to take place and for improvements to be made when necessary (Cambridge ESOL 2011:18–22, Saville 2003:57–120).

Maxim 2 focuses on the requirement to support all the stakeholders involved in the processes associated with international examinations. This is an important aspect of the approach because examination systems only function effectively if all stakeholders collaborate to achieve the intended outcomes.

Maxim 3 focuses on the importance of developing appropriate communication systems and of providing essential information to the stakeholders (Cambridge ESOL 2011:12–14).

Maxim 4 focuses on the essential research requirement to collect as much relevant data as possible and to carry out routine analyses as part of the iterative model (noted under Maxim 1). The nature of the data needed to investigate impact effectively and how it can be collected, analysed and interpreted under operational conditions has become an increasingly important part of the model in recent years.

Three major impact studies were also carried out between 1995 and 2004. Project 1 was the survey of the impact of *IELTS* (*International English Language Testing System*). This project helped conceptualise impact research including the design and validation of suitable instruments. Project 2 was the Italian *Progetto Lingue 2000* impact study and was an

application of the approach within a single macro educational context. These two projects are described in detail by Hawkey (2006). Project 3 was the Florence Language Learning Gains Project (FLLGP). Still within Italy, this project was an extension and re-application of the model within a single school context (i.e. at the micro level). It focused on individual stakeholders in one language teaching institution, namely teachers and learners preparing for a range of English language examinations at a prestigious language school in Florence. The complex relationships between assessment and learning/teaching in a number of language classrooms, including the influence of the Cambridge English examinations, were examined against the wider educational and societal milieu in Italy. The micro level of detail, as well as the longitudinal nature of the project conducted over an academic year, were particularly relevant in this case (Saville 2009).

Based on an analysis of these projects, I have proposed a meta-framework designed to provide a more effective model for conducting impact research under operational conditions (Saville 2009). I suggest that by implementing this framework more systematically, 'anticipated impacts' can be achieved more effectively and well-motivated improvements to the examination systems can be identified and put into place. Aspects of this approach are represented in the impact studies reported in this issue and are focused on in the second part of this paper under the concept of *impact by design*.

The concept of impact by design

Impact by design is a key feature of the expanded impact model. It starts from the premise that assessment systems should be designed from the outset with the potential to achieve positive impacts and takes an *ex ante* approach to anticipating the possible consequences of using the test in particular contexts.

In the final part of this paper, the following four points which are central to the model are discussed:

- test features (constructs and delivery systems)
- contexts
- outcomes over time – the timeline
- research methods and roles of researchers.

Test features (constructs and delivery systems)

Impact by design builds on Messick's (1996) idea of achieving 'validity by design as a basis for washback'. The importance of the rational model of test development and validation with its iterative cycles is a necessary condition for creating construct valid tests and for the development of successful systems to support them (cf. Maxim 1). Adequate specification and communication of the focal constructs is crucial for ensuring that the test is appropriate for its purpose and contexts of use and to counter threats to validity: construct underrepresentation and construct irrelevant variance (Messick 1996:252).

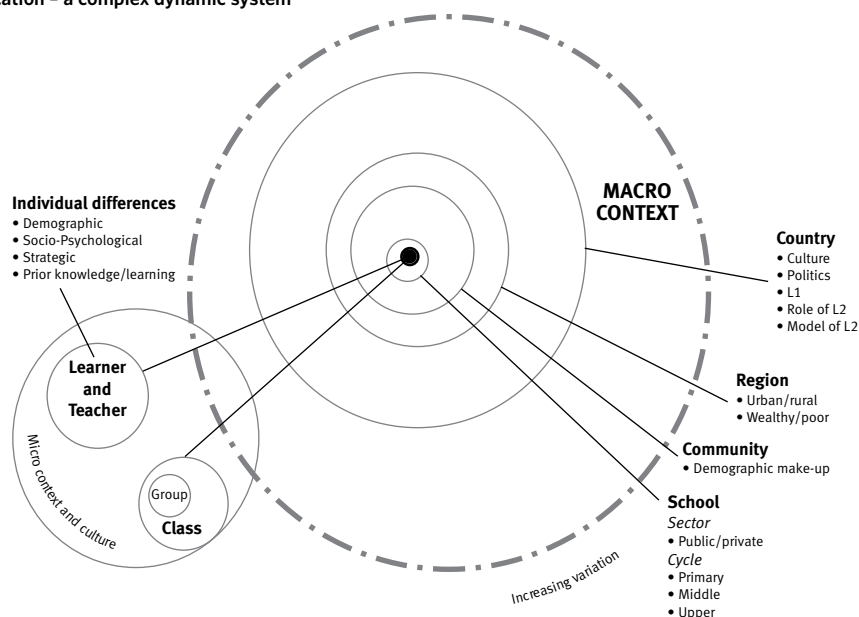
Insights from socio-cognitive theory underpin contemporary theories of communicative language ability, language acquisition and assessment (cf. the *socio-cognitive model* (Cambridge ESOL 2011:25–27, Weir 2005)) and are also helpful in understanding how language learning and preparation for examinations takes place in formalised learning contexts, such as classrooms.

While appropriate construct representation is a necessary condition for achieving the anticipated outcomes, it is not sufficient and impact by design highlights the importance of designing and implementing assessment systems which explicitly incorporate considerations related to the social and educational contexts of learning/teaching and test use. This relates to the need for effective communication and collaboration with stakeholders, as noted in the original Maxims 2 and 3 and incorporated into the Principles of Good Practice, Section 2 (Cambridge ESOL 2011).

Contexts

Understanding the nature of context within educational systems and the roles of stakeholders in those contexts

Figure 1: Context in education – a complex dynamic system



are clearly important considerations for Cambridge ESOL – see Saville (2003:60) for a discussion of stakeholders. It is now widely recognised that educational processes (see Figure 1) take place within complex systems with dynamical interplay between many sub-systems and ‘cultures’ and so an understanding of the roles of stakeholders as participants is a critical factor in bringing about intended changes (e.g. Fullan 1993, 1999, Thelen and Smith 1994, Van Geert 2007).

In conducting impact research the aim is to understand better the interplay between the macro and micro contexts within the society where the tests are being used and to determine which elements facilitate or hinder the desired outcomes. In general, diversity and variation increases as one moves from the general milieu within a country or region (the macro context) to specific schools and ultimately to the individual participants within classrooms (the multiple micro contexts at the local level involving schools, classes/groups and individual teachers and learners).

Figure 2 diagrammatically shows a school context embedded in a wider milieu with a teacher interacting with groups of learners in a particular classroom. The external influences include the general features of the milieu, as well as specific educational factors such as the curriculum and syllabus and the need to produce examination results which are used outside of the school context.

It is therefore important to develop methods to understand both the general context as well as specific local cases, including dynamics which affect learning in classrooms. This points to the need to use both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (see below).

In understanding the macro contexts into which international examinations are introduced (e.g. as part of educational reforms or innovations), it is important to focus on key factors related to the following:

- the political regime and its approach to educational reforms
- the role of educational reforms within wider socio-economic policies
- cultural norms and expectations in relation to education generally, and attitudes towards language education (and towards English specifically in the case of Cambridge ESOL)

- the educational system and how it is organised (e.g. compulsory education and the nature of the educational cycles; private vs. public schools; role of standardised assessment, etc.)
- broad differences between geographical regions and socio-economic groups.

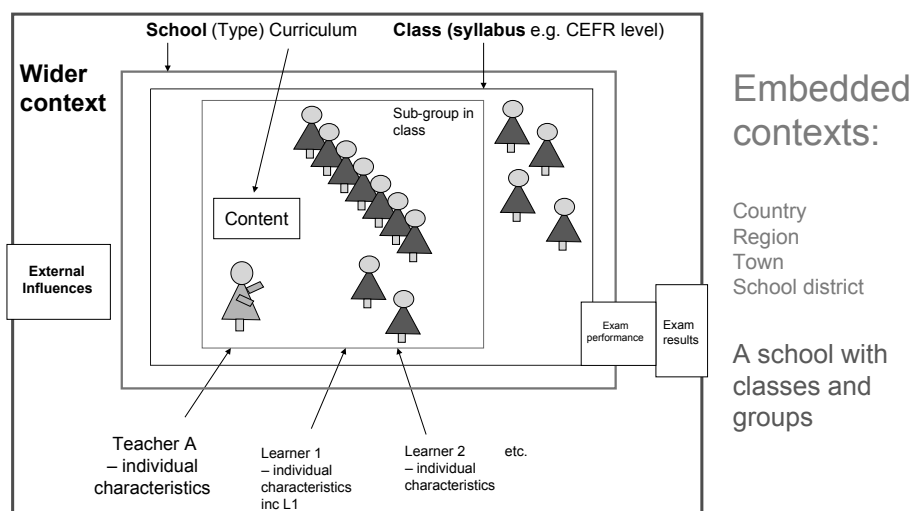
Collaboration between an international examination provider and local users is essential in order to capture relevant data and to shed light on such contextual parameters. Many dilemmas which arise in assessment contexts can only be dealt with if a wide range of local stakeholders agree to manage them in ways which they jointly find acceptable; the challenge is to get the relevant stakeholders working together effectively to agree what needs to be done to achieve the intended outcomes.

Outcomes over time - the timeline

It is essential to know what happens when a test is introduced into its intended contexts of use and this should constitute a long-term validation plan (cf. Maxims 1 and 4). Anticipating and managing change over time within specific contexts is therefore central to this concept and it means that appropriate consideration of timescales and the timeline for implementation (often involving several phases) are central to the design of impact studies. In impact research designs there is nearly always a fundamental need to collect comparative data, and therefore to develop research designs which can be carried out in several phases over an extended period of time or replicated in several different contexts.

Similarly, effects and consequences – intended and unintended – usually emerge over time given that contexts of use are not uniform and are subject to change, e.g. as a result of localised socio-political and other factors. Impact by design is therefore not strictly about prediction; a more appropriate term might be ‘anticipation’. In working with stakeholders, possible impacts on both micro and macro levels can be anticipated as part of the design and development process, and where potentially negative consequences are anticipated, remedial actions or mitigations can be planned well in advance.

Figure 2: Multiple classroom contexts where teaching and learning take place



Research methods and roles of researchers

Contemporary theories of knowledge and learning have played a prominent role in developing Cambridge ESOL's model of impact and the search for a 'paradigm worldview' (epistemology and ontology) which provides an effective conceptualisation and has drawn on relevant theories in the social sciences. A 'realist' stance now underpins Cambridge ESOL's approach, drawing on 'critical realism' (e.g. Sayer 1984, 2000) and contemporary views on pragmatism.

Constructivism is also important for the re-conceptualisation of impact for two reasons: first because contemporary approaches to teaching and learning in formal contexts now appeal to constructivist theories; secondly, because it is most appropriate to finding out 'what goes on' in contexts of test use. From the learner's perspective, affective factors are vital for motivation and feedback that highlights strengths positively tends to lead to better learning (i.e. learning oriented assessment). These considerations are relevant in designing language assessment systems which have learning oriented objectives and a concern in impact research is whether these objectives have been met effectively.

The current model of impact looks to 'real world' research paradigms to provide tools which can shed light on what happens in testing contexts, including mixed methods and quasi-experimental designs. Case studies are especially useful for investigating impact at the micro level and for understanding the complexities of interaction between macro level policies and implementation in local settings. Without such methods it is difficult to find out about and understand how the interaction of differing beliefs and attitudes can lead to consensus or to divergence and diversity.

Mixed method research designs are becoming increasingly relevant to addressing impact research questions. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:69) discuss six prototypical versions of mixed method research designs which seek to integrate qualitative and quantitative data in parallel and sequential ways and these are becoming central to the Cambridge ESOL approach, as illustrated by the studies reported in this issue.

The Cambridge ESOL 'impact toolkit' of methods and approaches is now being used to carry out analyses of both large-scale aggregated data, as well as micro analyses of views, attitudes and behaviours in local settings (as in the earlier case of the *Progetto Lingue 2000* impact study reported by Hawkey (2006)). Quantitative analysis of macro level group data allows us to capture overall patterns and trends, while the qualitative analysis of multiple single cases enables the research team to monitor variability in local settings and to work with the 'ecological' features of context. It is the integration of both analyses to provide the insights and interpretations which is particularly important.

Finally it is important to highlight the make-up of the impact research teams; where possible, the team should comprise both Cambridge-based ESOL staff with appropriate skills in research design and analysis, as well as local researchers who may be 'participants' in the teaching/learning context itself and who bring a deeper understanding of the educational and cultural context which is under investigation. Again this is illustrated in the studies reported in this issue, including Gu and Saville working jointly with other participants in the Chinese context.

Conclusion

The ability to change in order to improve educational outcomes or mitigate negative consequences associated with the examinations is ultimately the most important dimension of the impact by design model. Anticipating impacts and finding out what happens in practice are not enough if improvements do not occur as a result. Being prepared to manage change is therefore critical to a theory of action. In working closely with the stakeholders in their own contexts, this approach is now providing us with the necessary tools to determine what needs to be done and when/how to do it.

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An investigation into the effect of intensive language provision and external assessment in primary education in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Context

Education has always had a central role in Vietnamese culture and society. It is seen as the avenue of advancement and families routinely sacrifice much to ensure their children have the required education. The Vietnamese government has for some time given priority to education in terms of its budget. Currently, education occupies approximately 20% of all state budget expenditures and accounts for 5.5% of GDP (Department of Finance and Planning, Ministry of Education and Training 2008 as cited in Runckel 2008).

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Vietnam has a long-standing strategic objective to raise English language learning standards by 2020 so that students are better prepared for the workplace, for studying abroad and for becoming global citizens. The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) is used to indicate target levels set for the primary stage (CEFR A1 level), junior high school (A2), senior high school (B1), university students with non-English majors (B2) and university students with English majors (C1).

This paper focuses on the implementation of the Ministry's strategic objective by the Department of Education and Training (DOET) in Ho Chi Minh City (HCM) and the intended/unintended effects of the implemented interventions. HCM was selected for the study given that it is the largest city in Vietnam in terms of size and population and the fact that HCM DOET interventions in the learning and teaching of English to young learners are considered

to be a pioneering initiative within the Vietnamese context. The Intensive English Programme (IEP), one of HCM DOET's initiatives, started in 1998–99 with one school but by 2011–12, a total of 194 schools out of 495 state-funded primary schools had joined IEP. The other initiative was the introduction of a standardised external assessment in 2010–11.

HCM DOET intervention

The Intensive English Programme

In 1998–99, the DOET in HCM initiated the provision of an Intensive English Programme for primary students in state-funded schools whereby students are given additional English lessons. State schools typically operate on a half-day basis for students due to high demand, insufficient classroom capacity and high class density. English lessons, like other lessons, are taught in two lessons per week (35 minutes/lesson). However, IEP schools offer a whole-day programme to students which allows for an additional eight English lessons per week.

HCM DOET's drive for additional classes did not only stem from the desire to meet MOET's strategic objective but also out of a sense of social responsibility. Until the introduction of IEP, only students from financially able families had the opportunity of increasing their English proficiency through attending private language institutes. With the IEP initiative, it is hoped that all students have the chance to increase their English proficiency at affordable fees without the need to go to private institutes or tutors where fees are exorbitant for families with average incomes. (The GDP per capita per annum is estimated at \$3,400 (CIA – The World Factbook 2011)). Students can opt in or out of IEP. If students opt out, they are offered another less intensive programme, referred to as a selective programme (four additional lessons of English per week) or they can choose the standard programme, which consists of two English lessons per week.

IEP is not mandatory for HCM schools. However, schools

who wish to offer or continue offering IEP must adhere to guidelines set by HCM DOET in terms of physical requirements such as classroom size (maximum 35 students per class), layout and suitable chairs as well as resources such as teaching materials, aids and realia. Where needed, HCM DOET provides support in terms of processes and procedures, teacher training courses, support materials such as book lists for reading, establishing reading circles, provision of lesson plans, and as of 2010 aligning the curriculum to *Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE)* exams and designing textbooks to complement these exams. According to Mr Le Ngoc Diep, the Primary Education Division Manager in HCM DOET and one of the initiators of IEP:

[the] IEP curriculum developed organically; support materials were given to schools, criteria for joining IEP were formulated and standardised. The initial apprehension of introducing a foreign language at an early age and its potential negative effect started to diffuse within the first year of IEP after close inspection of results, weekly meetings among decision makers, regular school visits and classroom observations (personal communication, March 2012).

IEP schools are committed to further develop their teaching staff and to seek support from the local community. For example, some schools arrange a flexible schedule for their teachers so that they are able to enhance their language proficiency via preparing for a B2-level test, i.e. *Cambridge English: First (FCE)*. Since 2010, teachers wishing to teach in IEP must pass a three-step recruitment process: 1. candidates are short-listed based on professional qualifications (e.g. have obtained at least a BA in English Language and Literature or in English language teaching and methodology), 2. candidates take a written test and make a voice recording (to check pronunciation) and 3. candidates are interviewed by a native speaker.

Cambridge English: Young Learners

As of 2010–11, HCM DOET introduced an external assessment as mandatory to IEP. There are two main reasons for this. One reason is the high demand on IEP which led HCM DOET to need a fair and reliable measure for student selection and continuation purposes in IEP. The other reason is for accountability and quality assurance purposes. External assessment is used as a measure to evaluate the effectiveness of IEP in terms of students' learning progression, to benchmark the level of IEP students to an international standard and to monitor their progress over the years. Hence, they chose *Cambridge English: Young Learners* examinations (see Cambridge ESOL 2011). The tests have three proficiency levels beginning with *Cambridge English: Starters* set at a Pre-A1 level, followed by *Cambridge English: Movers* set at CEFR A1 level and ending with *Cambridge English: Flyers* set at CEFR A2 level. Each test level comprises three papers covering the four language skills. The *Cambridge English: Starters* Listening paper has four parts containing 20 questions and candidates are given 20 minutes, the Speaking paper has five parts taking between 3 and 5 minutes to complete, the Reading and Writing paper has five parts with a total of 25 questions and lasting 20 minutes. They are designed to make learning fun and children are encouraged by working towards certificates and earning shields that record their progress. A maximum of five shields is awarded per test paper. *Cambridge*

English: Young Learners was selected not only because of its international recognition and use in similar contexts but more importantly because it introduces children to everyday written and spoken English in a fun and motivating way. According to a key decision maker in HCM DOET, Mr Nguyen Hoai Chuong, DOET Vice Director, *Cambridge English: Young Learners* 'is child friendly, takes into account child psychology, is very motivational and covers all skills ... if the exam is child friendly and encourages learning in a fun way, then the teaching will change accordingly, so it is a win-win situation' (personal communication, March 2012).

HCM DOET decided that students finishing Grade 2 (age 7–8) would need to take *Cambridge English: Starters*, Grade 4 (age 9–10) to take *Cambridge English: Movers* and Grade 5 (age 10–11) to take *Cambridge English: Flyers*. This decision was based on local expert judgement rather than local empirical evidence. It was also based on a belief that the earlier a second language (L2) is introduced in school learning years the better the grasp of it. In 2010–11, DOET decided that the minimum number of shields required by students to continue in IEP would be 10. However, in 2011–12, post discussion with Cambridge ESOL during the conduct of this study and given the motivational nature of *Cambridge English: Young Learners*, DOET decided to use the number of shields received not for gate keeping purposes but to place students into levels within Grade 3 for homogeneity purposes (DOET document 1355/GDDT-TH dated 28 May 2012).

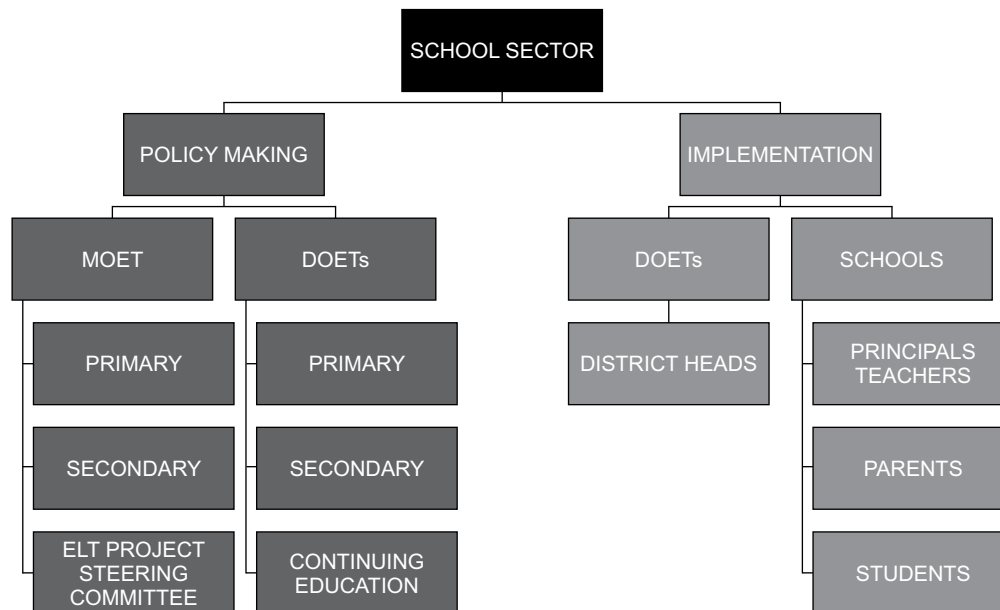
Schools which offer *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams have organised awareness-raising events for parents to explain the rationale behind introducing external assessment and to familiarise parents with the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* curriculum, learning objectives and outcomes. Some schools also have offered free test preparation courses for the children. Other schools have invited qualified native speakers of English to teach once a week.

Study purpose

Interventions are usually based on the expectation that 'if' a set of activities is undertaken, 'then' some set of changes or improvements in the situation those activities address will occur.

Thus, two years into the introduction of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams, Cambridge ESOL initiated a research study as part of its impact studies programme to look at the effect of this decision. This is in line with Cambridge ESOL's concept of impact by design (Saville 2010) which is built on the organisation's four maxims for achieving and monitoring impact, namely, PLAN, SUPPORT, COMMUNICATE and MONITOR AND EVALUATE (Milanovic and Saville 1996).

The findings of this study are intended to inform HCM DOET of notable changes in learner motivation and progression as well as notable changes in teaching practices as a result of the intervention. The study also would provide DOET with an insight into stakeholders' (see Figure 1) perceptions of IEP and of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams. Such information would allow DOET to record success stories, lessons learned and take subsequent actions whether it is sustaining conditions for success or working on areas which warrant improvements.

Figure 1: IEP and Cambridge English: Young Learners participant and stakeholder community¹

The study was conducted over a period of three months (March–June 2012) in collaboration with HCM DOET. It focused on Grade 2 given the interest of HCM DOET in tracking the performance of these young learners through their primary school years. As such, this study is seen as Phase I of the investigation of the effectiveness of IEP and the use of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams with the intention to start Phase II in 2013–14 when Grade 2 students are in Grade 4 and expected to take *Cambridge English: Movers*.

The selected sample comprised 24 schools (13 in a central district area, six in a semi-outskirts area, and five in an outskirts area) for qualitative data collection. Focus groups were conducted with 5–10 Grade 2 students in each school. Students' age ranged between 7 and 8 years old. For quantitative data collection, the selected sample consisted of 59 schools where survey data was gathered from 113 teachers and 2,683 parents of Grade 2 students. The profiles of the teacher and parent respondents are as follows:

Study design and methods²

Key question

The study addressed one broad question:

- What is the intended/unintended effect of HCM DOET's strategic decision to increase English language provision through IEP and to ensure the quality of the provision through the use of external assessment, i.e. *Cambridge English: Young Learners*?

Research sample

HCM has 24 geographical districts subdivided as follows: 11 central districts, five on the outskirts of the city, and eight districts referred to as semi-outskirts (see Appendix 1 for typical characteristics of district areas). Within the 24 districts, there are 194 schools with 446 classes currently enrolled in IEP and *Cambridge English: Young Learners*. All primary schools in HCM are mixed with a gender balance. Sample selection went through two stages. The first stage was a stratified random sample to select schools according to geographical location and a minimum of two years' involvement in IEP and *Cambridge English: Young Learners*. The second stage was random sample of classes within a single school.

Teacher profile:

- **ELT experience:** The highest percentage of respondents (52%) had between four and 10 years of experience followed by 42% who are considered novice teachers (1–3 years of experience) while the remaining 6% had 11 or more years' experience.
- **Academic qualifications:** 81% are university graduates (4-year degree) and 19% have a college diploma/degree (3-year degree). Both degrees offer pedagogic training if students are trained to become English teachers.
- **Teaching qualifications:** 52% of the respondents had a local qualification while the remaining 48% had an internationally recognised teaching qualification, namely, *TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test)*, *CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)* or *Delta (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)*. The latter is an interesting fact. It reflects the importance teachers and their employment institutions put on international certification.
- **Geographical location of teacher schools:** 52% of the teachers work in schools located in a central district area, 35% in a semi-outskirts area and 13% in an outskirts area. Although this distribution is a result of the first stage of sampling, it is not surprising to find more schools in central areas than in rural areas.

¹ Figure supplied by Ms Uyen Pham, Cambridge ESOL Business Development Manager in Vietnam.

² In conducting this study, ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2004) were followed.

Parent profile:

- Academic qualifications:** The majority of parent respondents (88%) are educated with 43% of them holding a university degree and 4% holding a postgraduate degree. This is quite interesting as Ermisch and Pronzato (2010) among other researchers have shown that parental education generates a positive correlation with children’s educational attainments.
- Socio-economic status:** This was a self-assessed category. Most parents (67%) stated that they are in the middle socio-economic stratum with 21% in the low/low-medium strata and 12% in the high/medium-high strata. This is an important piece of information given that IEP is intended for families who are less financially able. So it is interesting to note that according to the self-assessment, it is the more financially able families who are taking advantage of IEP.
- Relationship to child:** 71% of those who completed the survey were mothers, 27% were fathers and 2% were the grandparents. Although the majority of respondents are mothers, it is interesting to note that fathers and grandparents have also responded, which shows their involvement in the child’s education.
- Geographical location of parent schools:** 63% of the parents have children in a central district area, 23% in a semi-outskirts area and 14% in an outskirts area.

We will return to teacher and parent profiles when discussing the results of this study.

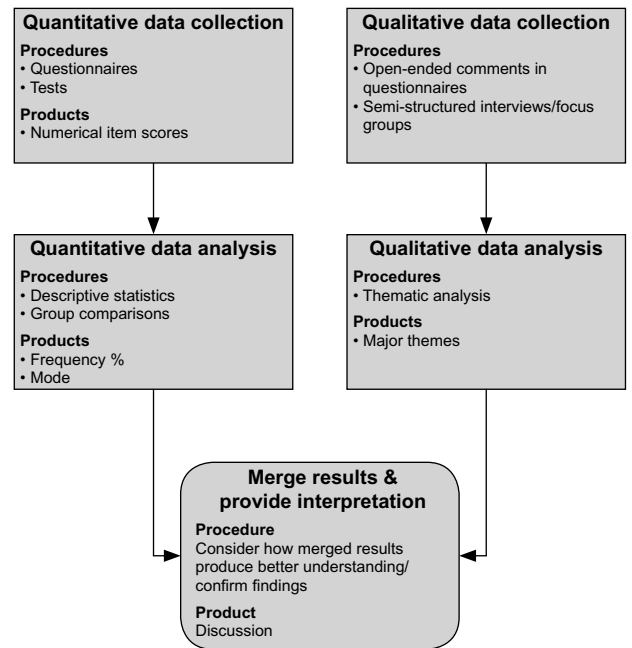
Research design

Quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously collected in a mixed method research design (MMRD). The analysis of each data strand was carried out independent of the other, but when interpreting the results information was drawn from both strands. This approach enabled us to build a rich picture and the triangulation of information derived from multiple data sources enhanced our confidence in the findings (see Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989 for a discussion on reasons for mixing methods). This type of MMRD is referred to by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) as a ‘convergent parallel design’ (see Figure 2 for an MMRD procedural diagram).

Instruments used in this study were selected from Cambridge ESOL’s ‘impact toolkit’ (see Saville’s article in this issue) and adapted for the Vietnamese context where necessary using expert judgement reviews prior to

Figure 2: Convergent parallel design procedural diagram

Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:118)



implementation in field work. In addition, minor amendments were made on the first day of field implementation to ensure reliable data collection and entry. Table 1 presents an overview of the key investigative points and demonstrates how triangulation of data sources was achieved through a variety of data types.

Qualitative data collection instruments

Qualitative data collection instruments comprised interviews with policy makers, district heads, principals (or other school leaders) and focus groups with students. The interviews and focus groups were conducted in both English and Vietnamese and were audio recorded (with participants’ consent) as an aide memoire in addition to live note taking. The interviewer/moderator was supported by a local assistant throughout the face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions.

One-to-one interviews with focal persons

Focal persons are defined here as policy makers at the national level (i.e. MOET), and at the regional level (i.e. HCM DOET); as decision makers at the district level (i.e.

Table 1: Overview of key investigative points and data type/sources

| Key investigative points | Data type | Data source |
|--|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Attitude towards assessment, English learning, and teaching | Quantitative Qualitative | 1. Questionnaire to parents and teachers 2. Focus groups with young learners 3. Semi-structured interviews with focal persons |
| 2. Learner motivation | Quantitative Qualitative | 1. Questionnaire to parents and teachers 2. Focus groups with young learners 3. Semi-structured interviews with focal persons |
| 3. Learner progression | Quantitative Qualitative | 1. Questionnaire to parents and teachers 2. Focus groups with young learners 3. Test score data 4. Semi-structured interviews with focal persons |
| 4. Changes in teaching practice | Quantitative Qualitative | 1. Questionnaire to parents and teachers 2. Focus groups with young learners 3. Semi-structured interviews with focal persons |
| 5. Change in decision making | Qualitative | 1. Semi-structured interviews with focal persons |

district vice heads in HCM) and implementers at the school level (school principal, vice principal or head of English). The interviews served as a basis for gathering contextual information, carrying out situational analysis, and investigating perceived potential effects. Some of the data gathered fed into the 'Context' section of this article while the remaining information is reported on in the 'Results and discussion' section.

Student focus group

The focus group was designed to take into account the young age and cognitive development of the participating students (see Banks 2001, Capello 2005, Morrow and Richards 1996). The focus group was conducted in a way that provided a detailed picture of learner motivation and language progression. Throughout the focus group, the facilitator maintained patience, enthusiasm, understanding and organisation. She was able to build rapport with the children. Children were encouraged to speak freely and spontaneously on five identified topics: (a) why they have joined IEP, (b) reasons behind their desire to learn English, (c) incidences of using English in the classroom, (d) their views on *Cambridge English: Starters*, and (e) whether they feel their English has improved and why.

Quantitative data collection instruments

Surveys and test score data were used in the quantitative analyses. The surveys were administered to teachers and parents. They were positively worded, provided a 4-point Likert scale for each statement and finished with an open-ended commentary section. The parents' survey was translated into Vietnamese to ensure reliable data collection.

Teacher survey and parent survey

The teacher survey sought their views on tests in general and on *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams in particular; their perceptions of the DOET intervention; and their expectations of learner progression as a result of the intervention. The survey also aimed at gaining an insight into IEP classroom practices. The survey contained specific statements about commonly used teaching practices described in ELT literature (Assessment Reform Group 2000, Brown 1993, Nunan 1999). Similar views were also sought from parents who have enrolled their children in IEP. Parents were asked to express their opinion on the influence of IEP and *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams on their child's motivation to learn English and their language learning progression.

Test score data

Cambridge English: Starters test results in consecutive academic years 2010 and 2011 were investigated to see whether standards of English have improved over time. To obtain comparative information, *Cambridge English: Starters* test data from other contexts within Vietnam and from the rest of the world was also examined.

Results and discussion

The results have been summarised below according to the investigation points identified in Table 1. Overall the survey

results are positive with nearly all statements having a mode of 3. Where the percentage of disagreement was 20% or more, in-depth analysis was performed to check the influence of variables in teacher and parent profiles as well as school district area.

Investigation point 1a: Attitudes towards assessment

This section addressed attitudes towards assessing young learners in general and the use of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams in particular.

Parents' perspective

Eighty-seven per cent of parents view the tests to be the most effective means of assessment, while 90% of them see continuous assessment as the most effective form of assessment. In addition, 88% responded that it is important for progress to be assessed using a variety of methods.

Despite the fact that 92.5% of the parents are happy that the school has introduced Cambridge English tests, 41% of the parents expressed concern that the tests will bring additional work and pressure to their children. A typical comment was: 'The English programme at school includes so many things: the intensive programme, Starters, Cambridge, ... that it sometimes leads parents to confusion as they lack information of the efficiency of study'. This concern can be partially explained by the fact that parents reported a lack of information from the schools about the introduction of the Cambridge English tests. Typical comments include: 'the school should provide more information about the Starters exam so that students can prepare for this exam as well as to achieve the best result. I am looking forward to hearing feedback from the teachers' and 'we have not received any information on English in schools'.

Teachers' perspective

In general, the teachers were positive about assessment. At least 96% of the teachers see tests as important and as a tool for them to understand students' level and ability. Only 18% of the teachers worry about their students taking exams at a young age.

When asked specifically about *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams, 95% of the teachers were pleased with their introduction into the school and found the topics interesting. At least 80% of the respondents indicated that their students like the exams and receiving a Cambridge ESOL certificate. One of the teachers from Tan Binh district (central) commented: 'I find Cambridge English test interesting. It makes me excited in my English teaching. The students like doing test so much, they are very confident when they speak English through colourful pictures'.

However, 27% of the respondents perceived the selected level of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* to be incompatible with the level of their students and 37% of the teachers stated that their students will not perform well on the tests. It is interesting to note that the higher levels of disagreement were by teachers from schools in central areas. Teachers' experience or qualifications did not influence their comments or viewpoints.

One teacher from a centrally located school commented that the 'Cambridge English test is rather difficult for Grade 2 students'.

Students' perspective

One of the questions in the focus group explored students' feelings about taking *Cambridge English: Starters*. The student responses are grouped under five core themes.

- **Affective:** 'I am not afraid of taking the test' (outskirts district), 'the test doesn't scare me because the teacher prepared me well' (semi-outskirts district), 'the test centre is so big. It is a lot bigger than my school. That scares me a lot' (central district).
- **Fun element:** 'The test is interesting, I can match, colour and write the words' (outskirts district), 'it is fun taking the test, we all like colouring, matching and moving the picture' (semi-outskirts district), 'Speaking is fun because it has lots of pictures' (central district).
- **Test practice:** 'I can learn by heart 34 over 36 questions for *Starters Speaking*' (outskirts district).
- **Test difficulty:** 'The test is as easy as a piece of cake', 'listening to spelling and write the name down is difficult but I can do it very well' (semi-outskirts district), 'the test has a lot of difficult words', 'I like the writing part just because I can think of the word by myself' (central district).
- **Oral Examiner effect:** 'The oral examiners are kind, sweet and always smile', 'I like the speaking part ... when I say something right, she said very good' (semi-outskirts district).

Focal persons' perspective

Overall, the focal persons view the introduction of an internationally recognised external assessment as a quality assurance badge for the efforts made by the school and the teaching team. They realise that although it puts pressure on them, it increases motivation in teaching and learning English. They see *Cambridge English: Young Learners* as a fair assessment – as one principal said: 'nothing is fairer because it is international, independent and professional institution which gives the assessment and results reflect on what we have done on teaching and learning English'. Another principal said: 'it is a motivation for parents and students in IEP to have more focus on learning English. Also it sets the standard for the school to have plans to develop outstanding students and to support students who do not get average number of shields'.

Focal persons also commented on the different test parts in relation to students' ability level:

Writing: 'The writing part of the test seems reasonable – looking at the given words and rearranging them or copying the given word.'

Speaking: 'One of my students has a problem with pronunciation. When taking the exam, he got a lot of encouragement from the oral examiners and that made him more confident in using English. His shields on Speaking is quite high – 4 out of 5.'

Listening: 'Listening is the most difficult part of the test, especially listening to names and numbers.'

Discussion

The above results show that the attitudes of key stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, policy makers, policy implementers) towards assessment in general and towards *Cambridge English: Young Learners* in particular are very

positive. Two key issues were raised, though. The first one is about parents' view that they have not received adequate information about *Cambridge English: Starters* and the second one is about the suitability of *Cambridge English: Starters* for Grade 2 students, which was brought up by teachers.

Although parents complained about having insufficient information about the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams, a number of focal persons specifically mentioned meeting with parents to explain the exams to them. This suggests that information dissemination about the exams may not have been consistent across all IEP districts. It is therefore recommended that a better information dissemination plan is put in place. The plan should include comprehensive information about the content of *Cambridge English: Young Learners*, its motivational value, how it fits with the overall teaching and learning strategy at a classroom level, at a school level and at a DOET level. Also it is important to clarify and quantify how much extra work, if any, is required on behalf of the teacher, student, and parent. It is hoped that with a better information dissemination plan and a better communication strategy, teachers' and parents' anxiety about the test would be addressed. It is also essential to ensure that all schools in IEP have consistently provided information to parents about new initiatives and interventions. This recommendation is in line with Cambridge ESOL's third maxim of impact, which is COMMUNICATE (see Saville's article in this issue).

With regard to the suitability of *Cambridge English: Starters* for students in Grade 2, the comparative test score data (see 'Investigation point 3: Learner language progression') should shed light on the teachers' concerns. Additionally, it would be worth considering a classroom observation exercise in order to have an external voice assessing level suitability.

Investigation point 1b: Attitude towards learning English

Parents' perspective

Research suggests that parental attitude towards education and learning has an effect on their child's level of attainment (see Bartram 2006, Gu and Saville's article in this issue). Therefore, we asked parents about the value of their children learning English and whether they are happy about the introduction of English in IEP schools from a young age. Even though one parent (a father with a postgraduate degree) stated that 'as children are only in Grade 2, they are not good at Vietnamese, so English should be considered as a foreign language and should not be paid too much attention with unnecessary pressure', the survey results showed that at least 92% of parents saw English as a means to better life opportunities whether it is for social, study or work purposes. In addition, 88% of the parents stated that 'it's important to me that my child learns English even if he/she finds it difficult'. Interestingly, however, despite the introduction of IEP, 77% of parents continue to enrol their children in English lessons outside school. The frequency of opting to do so increases as the parents' socio-economic status increases and as their level of education increases.

Teachers' perspective

All teachers reported that learning English is essential for students today. Although the majority of the teachers (94%) agreed that grammar, vocabulary, and the four skills have equal importance in terms of learning English, 30% of the

teachers disagreed on spending much of classroom time on grammar activities. Once again there was no conclusive evidence from the teachers' profile to say that it is the teachers' experience or qualification which is affecting their views. When asked to prioritise what they would like to see classroom time spent on, the result was as follows in order of priority: speaking, listening, reading and vocabulary, followed by writing and grammar.

Students' perspective

When asked why they have joined IEP and the reasons behind their desire towards learning English, the following are some of the typical responses students gave. Responses are grouped under four key themes.

- **Family support:** 'If my English is good, I can save my parent's money by winning scholarship to study abroad' (central district), 'my parents want me to', 'I study English well so I can teach my younger brother' (semi-outskirts).
- **Functional purpose:** 'If I don't know English, I could not communicate with people outside Vietnam' (central district), 'If I know English, I can show the foreigners how to get to the place they want' (semi-outskirts district). Students also mentioned for study purposes: 'When I grow up, I want to go to America to study', for travel: 'English is a popular language, when you travel or when you go on business you have to use English' and for work purposes: 'I can get a good job' (central, outskirts district), 'I want to be a singer and sing English songs' (semi-outskirts district).
- **Knowledge gaining:** 'Learning English helps me enrich my knowledge' (central district), 'in the English class, I can learn many new things such as Egypt, Spain' (semi-outskirts district), 'I want to get more knowledge' (outskirts district).
- **Fun element of learning:** 'Funny classroom ... games, songs, story', 'learning English at school isn't as fun as learning English at the Centre' (central district), 'in the English class, I have much fun ... draw picture, play games' (semi-outskirts district).

Discussion

In general, the responses given by the three key stakeholders demonstrate a very positive attitude towards learning English in a Vietnamese context. There are a couple of things to focus on from the results reported above. First of all, despite the introduction of IEP, 77% of the parents reported that they continue sending their child to English lessons outside school. Since one of the reasons of introducing IEP is social responsibility and a desire to alleviate the financial burden from parents, it is worth reflecting on why this is the case and attempting to address it. Is it because of the importance parents place on learning English irrespective of their socio-economic status or educational level? Is it because IEP is not as effective as it is perhaps thought of? Is it lack of awareness of what IEP goals and practices are? Is it peer or social pressure? These questions need to be investigated by HCM DOET.

Another point to focus on is the order of priority which teachers give to skill teaching and learning. Teachers prioritised speaking and listening over other skills. According to focal persons in the one-to-one interviews this shift of priority signifies the positive washback *Cambridge English:*

Starters has on the classroom. A further point that is worth noting is the comments provided by the students in the focus groups. Despite their young age (7–8), the comments given are insightful and in some cases moving, which could be an indicator of students' realisation of the value of English. Some of the reasons given by the students could be used when raising parents' awareness to the value of IEP.

Teachers' decision on which skill they should focus on during classroom time and how this decision would affect students' performance on external assessment is something we return to when examining students' score data later in this paper.

Investigation point 2: Learner motivation

Parents' perspective

Parents were asked to voice their opinion with regard to changes they have perceived in their child's motivation to learn English as a result of being part of IEP and taking a Cambridge English examination. The results are discussed below.

The majority of parents (87%) believe that their children like the English classroom and getting an international certificate which shows their level of attainment. Most parents (87%) view the introduction of IEP as having a positive effect on their child's motivation in terms of learning the language. However, on three occasions, 20% or more of the respondents indicated that their children dislike the test and get anxious about it and as a result are not motivated to learn English. On further analysis of these three statements, no affecting variable in the parents' profile was detected. Typical comments once again reflect the fact that some of the parents in this sample are unaware of the content of *Cambridge English: Starters*. A typical comment was: 'at the moment, parents are not clear about the structure of the exam paper'. Respondents also expected frequent test practice. A typical comment reflecting this is: 'students have not taken the trial test'.

Teachers' perspective

Teachers' comments focused mainly on the fact that good students like taking the test so their motivational factor is quite high, but 'average students feel nervous and worried about it', hence a lower motivation.

Students' perspective

The focus groups with students showed that their motivation to join the programme and to subsequently take the test stems from a desire to gain knowledge, to be able to study abroad and to gain a good job in the future. Motivation is also due to parental involvement in their learning and encouragement. One student from a central district area said: 'I want to take the test so I can go to Grade 3 IEP class, mom told me that'. Another student from a semi-outskirts area said: 'My mom said if I do well on the test, she will take me to ice cream shop'. Teachers' encouragement is also a factor. A student from the same district said: 'When we speak English right, the teacher rewards us by giving us candy, pencils'. Similar statements are echoed in semi-district areas: 'When I speak English well, the teacher gives me happy faces, candy and she says "very good".'

Focal persons' perspective

When focal persons were asked about how the introduction of IEP and *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams have affected students, most of the statements revolved around children enjoying the English classroom and being motivated to learn English. One principal of a semi-outskirts district area school said: 'The students seem not afraid of taking the test. They get more chances to speak English', while another from the same area said: 'The students have no motivation in learning English. They show no responsibility for English learning'. A principal of a central district area school voiced a typical opinion of other principals from the same area when saying: 'They speak more English in the class'.

Discussion

Survey and focus group data shows that student motivation to learn English is quite high. A recurring theme here is test anxiety which may affect motivation, which was voiced by parents and teachers and interestingly enough not by students. This could be due to the fact that parents lack adequate information about *Cambridge English: Starters* (a recurring comment) and are not very clear on DOET's intended use of the test results. Because of lack of information, parents may have speculated that results would be used for gate-keeping purposes. Another recurring theme is parental involvement and teacher encouragement playing a key role in learner motivation. When a school principal states that students are not motivated to learn English, we need to stop and ask why this is the case. Is it because of teaching practice? Is the level of English higher than they can cognitively deal with? Is it too much pressure from parents on passing the test? Seeking answers to these questions would inform HCM DOET's subsequent actions.

Investigation point 3: Learner language progression

Parents' perspective

Parents were asked for their views on their child's proficiency of English as a result of being part of IEP and taking a Cambridge English examination. Ninety per cent of the parents agreed that their child's English has improved due to these two interventions. However, 24% of the parents (mainly parents with a university degree) disagreed that their children know more about their level according to international standards. One possible reason could be that at the time of administering the survey, some children may not have received their certificate as indicated by the following comment: 'We want our children to get high results in examinations'. Another reason could be lack of awareness of the value of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams as illustrated by this comment: 'I hope that the quality is proportionate to the cost to satisfy parents'.

Teachers' perspective

Teachers were asked about improvements they have seen in students' English language ability as a result of being part of IEP and taking a Cambridge English examination. With respect to IEP, teachers' responses showed that improvements are clearly seen in terms of speaking and reading abilities followed by listening and vocabulary acquisition, and then by writing and grammatical knowledge. A similar picture emerged

in teachers' responses as far as *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams are concerned. They reported improvements as follows: speaking and listening abilities followed by reading and vocabulary knowledge, then by writing and lastly by grammatical knowledge.

Students' perspective

During the focus groups, students were asked if they feel that their English is better now when compared to the beginning of the year. Here are some of the typical responses:

- From central district schools: 'Now I can read the story to my mom and dad', 'I can write the words in English correctly', 'I can watch cartoons in English and understand it', 'before I speak English a little, now I can speak English to my teachers and foreigners'
- From semi-outskirts schools: 'Now I can speak English to my parents and can read English on the street', 'my mom said now my English becomes better'
- From outskirts district schools: 'In Grade 1, I didn't know many new words now I know a lot of new words', 'now I can read more fluently'

Students' score data

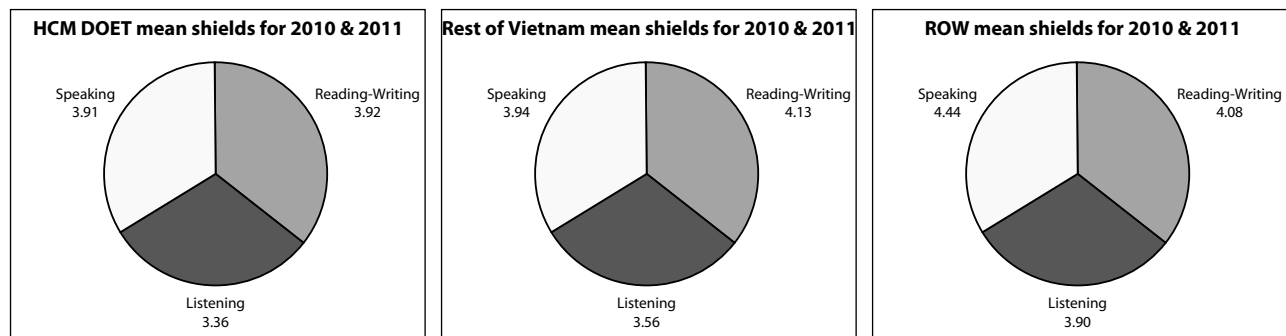
Table 2 shows the average shields obtained by the number of HCM DOET student cohorts taking *Cambridge English: Starters* over a period of two years. Over the two-year period, students' performance has been consistently high with 11 as an average total number of shields. The reader will note that when schools started using *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams the highest shield average was that for Reading/Writing in 2010. In 2011, a slight shift occurred towards Speaking, which showed the highest average shield, indicating that perhaps in 2011, classroom practices may have put more emphasis on speaking. What is interesting to note is that Listening has consistently received the lowest shield average. All in all, the results are very encouraging given that in most cases the amount of exposure students have to English inside the school is only in the English classroom.

Table 2: Average number of shields received by HCM DOET students for Cambridge English: Starters

| | Speaking | Listening | Reading/Writing | Total |
|------|----------|-----------|-----------------|-------|
| 2010 | 3.94 | 3.23 | 4.03 | 11.06 |
| 2011 | 3.89 | 3.43 | 3.85 | 11.17 |

When looking at comparative test score data, we looked at candidates who took *Cambridge English: Starters* in other Vietnamese contexts and those who took it in the rest of the world. Before we examine the data, it is important to note the following two facts: (a) data from the other Vietnamese context comes from private language institutes where students receive English language training at a more intensive rate; and (b) the 'Rest of the World' (ROW) context is a mixture of mainly fee-paying schools and private language institutes and some state schools who use *Cambridge English: Starters*. In other words, the comparison is not a straightforward one.

Figure 3 provides average shields obtained per test paper in the three contexts. The figure shows that overall there

Figure 3: Comparative test score data – Cambridge English: Starters

are slight differences in the number of shields obtained per test paper. It shows that irrespective of the context, Listening receives the lowest number of shields and in terms of rank ordering the skills per context, HCM DOET has the same profile as the rest of the world with Speaking receiving the highest number of shields followed by Reading/Writing followed by Listening. Both HCM DOET and the rest of Vietnam have a total average of 11 shields. This is an encouraging picture for HCM DOET given that those who take *Cambridge English: Starters* in the rest of Vietnam come from private language schools and not state schools, where stereotypically the former would have many more resources available to them. The rest of the world has a total average of 12 shields.

Focal persons' perspective

School principals or their deputies agreed that there has been a notable progression in students' English, especially in speaking, when asked whether they have perceived any change as a result of the intervention.

Discussion

With regard to language progression, survey data and focus group data indicated that in most cases there is a notable progression as a result of the intervention. The skill which showed the most observed improvement was speaking, as reported in teacher and student responses. This was also substantiated when looking at the score data (see Table 2). The overall average number of shields obtained is 11 out of a possible 15, which indicates that *Cambridge English: Starters* is within the ability level of students who have taken it.

Earlier in the paper there was a discussion concerning the suitability of *Cambridge English: Starters* for Grade 2 students; these results show that the level is suitable for HCM Grade 2 students given the high number of shields acquired per skill and overall. The teachers earlier indicated that they would like to prioritise the teaching of listening in classroom time. Their views are supported by the data in Table 2 where the Listening

paper has the lowest average number of shields – a picture which is replicated across all three contexts.

Investigation point 4: Changes in teaching practice

This section reports mainly on findings from the teachers' survey and where relevant views were sought from other participants in the study.

When teachers were asked whether their teaching practices have changed as a result of the intervention, 96% of them said they had changed as a result of teaching in IEP and 92% said that their practices had changed as a result of the introduction of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams. The changes which have occurred from the teachers' perspective are grouped under the following categories:

- increased adoption of some Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles
- introduction of collaborative teaching
- improved teacher motivation
- increased use of target language versus L1
- best practices utilised.

Increased adoption of some AfL principles

As a result of the intervention, the majority of teachers (as seen in percentage agreement in Table 3) adopted some of the principles of Assessment for Learning (Assessment Reform Group 2002, Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and William 1990, William 2009). For example, goal sharing with learners and ensuring that they know the standard or level they are aiming at. Similarly, teachers adopted the principle of working together with the learner to review and reflect on assessment information and giving feedback to learners in ways that enable them to improve and plan their next steps.

Introduction of collaborative teaching

Ninety-three per cent of the respondents stated that joining IEP has allowed teachers in school to work more as a team

Table 3: Adoption of some AfL principles (percentage agreement and mode)

| | | Strongly agree (4) | Agree (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly disagree (1) | Mode |
|---|---|--------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | I share success criteria with my students | 26 | 68 | 5 | | 3 |
| 2 | I give oral and written feedback to help identify next steps in learning | 28 | 65 | 6 | | 3 |
| 3 | I use assessment data to inform the learning and teaching process | 28 | 63 | 8 | | 3 |
| 4 | I give opportunities for learners to demonstrate that they have taken feedback into account in their learning | 27 | 67 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| 5 | I discuss learning objectives and outcomes with my students | 24 | 71 | 5 | | 3 |

Table 4: Use of target language vs L1 (percentage agreement and mode)

| | | Strongly agree (4) | Agree (3) | Disagree (2) | Strongly Disagree (1) | Mode |
|---|--|--------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1 | I teach in English more than in Vietnamese | 51 | 49 | | | 3 |
| 2 | Students talk to other students in English more than in Vietnamese when they do classroom activities | 22 | 59 | 19 | | 3 |
| 3 | Students talk to me in English more than in Vietnamese | 25 | 43 | 32 | | 3 |
| 4 | I encourage students to speak to each other in English | 43 | 54 | 3 | | 3 |

and share resources and discuss things more. Similarly, 94% said that they discuss planning and outcomes with team members/colleagues as a result of the programme.

Improved teacher motivation

Eighty-nine per cent of the teachers reported that the use of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams has increased their motivation to teach English.

Increased use of target language versus L1

The statements found in Table 4 were designed to find out whether there has been an increased use of the target language (English) versus L1 (Vietnamese) in the EFL classroom as a result of the intervention.

Table 4 shows that the majority of teachers prefer and practise the use of the target language inside the classroom. When looking at statement 3, a further analysis of the data to see whether the result is due to teachers' experience or school district area revealed that no conclusive finding can be stated. Similarly, there were no comments by the teachers to shed light on the level of disagreement on this statement.

Students' perspective

One of the elements the focus group with students tried to elicit is how frequently the target language and L1 is used in the classroom. Typical responses are as follows, irrespective of the geographical location of the school: 'We speak English to each other and to our teachers', 'the teacher speaks English a lot', 'we speak more Vietnamese in the class', 'we don't often speak English to one another', 'the teacher speaks more Vietnamese in the classroom', 'the teacher speaks more English while we speak more Vietnamese'.

Parents' perspective

When considering parents' comments, we find that they tend to be divided between 'let students use English more frequently in place of Vietnamese' and 'as children are only in Grade 2, they are not good at Vietnamese, so English should be considered as a foreign language and should not be paid too much attention with unnecessary pressure'.

Best practices utilised

Teachers who have been engaged in the intervention have advocated the following best practices to colleagues within their schools (with at least a 94% acceptance rate):

- **Adaptation of teaching methods** so that they are appropriate to students' learning goals and styles. In the same vein, ensuring that resources are appropriate, accessible, and relevant to students' learning needs.
- **Frequent use of interactive tasks** so that students can speak among themselves and with their teachers in English.

- **Increased use of pair and group work** so that students have an opportunity to use the target language.
- **Better lesson plan formulation**, for example, a plan including aims, methods, stages, timing, aids, anticipated problems, assumptions, and interaction patterns.
- **Increased reflection** on how the lesson went and on own teaching.

Parents' perspective

When asked about perceived improvement in teaching practice as a result of the intervention, 88% of the parents agreed that English lessons have become more fun (e.g. through games and communication activities), are intellectually challenging and have provided their children with clearer learning objectives and outcomes. Parents also perceived change in the way feedback is provided to their children; in the way that their children are encouraged to reflect and assess their own progress. The following comment reflects the parental perspective on perceived changes:

- 'although my child's English level is intermediate, I like the intensive English programme as it has outdoor lessons which make him feel more comfortable and interesting in English'.

Focal persons' perspective

When asked about changes perceived in teachers' attitude towards teaching and their teaching practices, the responses could be summarised under three main categories. The first is a sense of responsibility: 'The teachers are more responsible for the teaching: they prepare more activities in class ... they pay more attention to the students and are ready to stay after school to help out'. The second is status: 'The test is a chance for us to be named "international teachers" because it is international standardised assessment', 'I will be famous among the parents if my students do well on Starters', 'if my students did not get high number of shields, parents will think I am not qualified for teaching English'. The third is application of best practices, as outlined above.

Discussion

Data collected from surveys and focus group discussions indicated that in general there has been a positive change in teaching practice as evidenced in improved teacher motivation, increased use of the target language, increased adoption of AfL principles and the introduction of collaborative teaching. One thing to note as an unintended effect of the intervention is teachers' view of themselves as 'international teachers' since they are teaching towards international standards.

Investigation point 5: Change in decision making

The semi-structured one-to-one interviews with focal persons sought to find out if, during the course of implementing the initiative, changes occurred in decisions which have been made prior to implementation. Responses given were affirmative and changes have occurred as follows:

- Some of the schools who were involved in IEP and used *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams decided they wanted to opt out of the programme because they could no longer meet criteria set by HCM DOET. For example, they lacked qualified teachers due to teacher movement or they had to exceed the maximum class size of 35 students because of the demand to provide additional student spaces.
- Prior to this study, HCM DOET had suggested that the guiding principle for continuation in IEP is achieving an average of 10 shields in *Cambridge English: Starters* exams with no fewer than three shields per skill area – a decision that has been borne out by cohort-consistent results over a period of two years (as seen in Table 2). During the course of this study and as a result of extensive discussion between Cambridge ESOL (test developers) and HCM DOET about the nature of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* and its intended purposes (not to be used in what can be perceived as a high-stakes decision making context), a decision was made to waive this condition and leave it to individual schools to decide on their minimum requirement. As of May 2012, each school stipulates the number of shields their students are required to achieve, based on the *Cambridge English: Starters* test results, in order to continue into the Grade 3 IEP. Students from the selective English programme (non-intensive) can move to the intensive programme if their *Cambridge English: Starters* results meet the school's requirements and there are spaces available in the school. This change in decision is also in response to recurrent comments made by focal persons on the criteria set and how it may be impossible to meet given certain school conditions.
- At the time of writing this paper, HCM DOET announced the launch of a project to further enhance English language skills in 2012-13 with an estimated investment of approximately \$204,000. 'The project aims at a comprehensive renewal of teaching and learning methods in every grade and at every training level, so as to achieve dramatic progress in students' speaking, listening and reading skills. The project will then stretch over a 10-year period in which English language will be a compulsory subject from third grade onwards in schools' (Linh 2012).

Key findings and recommendations

The key question under investigation was: 'What is the intended/unintended effect of HCM DOET's strategic decision to increase English language provision through IEP and to ensure the quality of the provision through the use of external assessment, i.e., *Cambridge English: Young Learners*?'

Lessons learned

The study revealed areas where improvements can be made such as:

- better plan to disseminate information on the intervention
- ensuring information is provided consistently and adequately to stakeholders
- level assessment via empirical evidence in addition to classroom observation
- further in-depth investigation as to why 77% of the sampled parents continue to send their children to private language institutes despite the introduction of IEP
- probe further as to why some principals felt that learners are not motivated to learn English.

Positive effects

The study also revealed areas where positive effects have been achieved as highlighted below:

- The above findings showed some clear effects such as the focus on speaking, which is a direct positive effect of the introduction of *Cambridge English: Starters*, which is designed based on a communicative approach to language learning. What is more important is that this focus did not detract from attention being paid to the other skills as evidenced by test score data. Although there is a notable language progression in terms of speaking, students also performed well on the other skills.
- Another notable effect is the positive change in terms of teaching practice with the adoption of certain AfL principles, the introduction of collaborative teaching, and the utilisation of best practices such as teacher reflection or adaptation of teaching methods to support students' learning goals and styles.
- It might also be deduced that the intervention led to increased parental involvement in their child's learning in terms of encouraging them to learn English, taking them to extra English classes as provided by IEP and providing incentives for better performance as seen from the comments made in the focus group discussions. Parental involvement and teacher encouragement were a recurring theme in the findings of this study as playing a key role in learner motivation.

Unintended effects

- The study illustrates that when decentralisation of decision making is well executed, innovative approaches that suit the local context can lead to positive effects. Although the strategic objective for improving language standards came from MOET, it was up to HCM DOET to decide on how to achieve this and it is also up to schools to decide whether to be involved in the initiative or not, which provided a sense of ownership and faith in the intervention.
- One of the unintended effects is the change in decision making based on discussions that took place with focal persons during the course of this study. We are referring here to the decision about the use of *Cambridge English: Starters* and the number of shields obtained (see 'Investigation point 5: Change in decision making').
- Another unintended effect is better utilisation of children's free time. After a half-day of schooling, children are engaged in IEP and *Cambridge English: Young Learners* study. This alleviated parents' anxiety as to how to engage their children's free time once the half day of schooling is over.

- A further unintended effect of the introduction of an internationally recognised external assessment is a heightened sense of status. Teachers view themselves as 'international teachers' because they are teaching towards international standards.
- It was mentioned earlier that with the introduction of the IEP initiative, students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds would have the opportunity to increase their English proficiency. However, 67% of the parents participating in this study have self-assessed themselves as belonging to the middle socio-economic stratum. It may be a sampling issue, but HCM DOET may want to think of how to engage more parents from the low/low-mid strata so that their children can benefit from IEP.

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Appendix 1: Typical characteristics of school district areas

| Geographical area | Typical school profile |
|--|---|
| Central consisting of 11 districts | Schools in this geographical area are considered affluent in comparison to other areas. Some districts are heavily populated by Chinese Vietnamese so schools offer Chinese in addition to English. The majority of parents are educated with both parents working. Jobs vary from government officials, to businesspeople, to manual workers, to street vendors. Parents care very much about their children's education and apply pressure on schools to accept their children in selective programmes. There is a high uptake of external assessment – nearly 80% of students in IEP schools take <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners</i> assessments. There are more schools in this area which are considered to be model schools than in other geographical areas. The majority of schools teach English through Maths and Sciences. |
| Semi-outskirts consisting of 8 districts | This area of HCM is where industrial zones are located and the area is moving slowly towards urbanisation. Some schools in this area have large class sizes and sometimes library space is sacrificed to make way for classroom space. IEP dictates that schools joining IEP should have a maximum of 35 students per classroom. As a result, some schools in this district area drop out of the programme. The majority of parents are office workers, owners of small businesses, street vendors and factory workers. Some of the schools in this area are considered model schools and some schools teach English through Maths and Sciences. |
| Outskirts comprising 5 districts | Outskirts district areas are considered to be one of the most difficult areas in terms of living conditions in HCM. The majority of parents are small retailers, manual workers, farmers, housekeepers or unemployed. The uptake of external assessment at Grade 2 ranges from 20% to 85%. Where there is a high uptake, parents tend to be aware of the importance of learning English. Where there is a low uptake, parents tend to believe that learning a new language should be at an older age from Grade 6 upwards. Despite this, English teaching centres are a thriving business in this area. |

Source: Focal persons (personal communication) and second author in this article.

The Hebei Impact Project: A study into the impact of Cambridge English exams in the state sector in Hebei province, China

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Introduction and context

Hebei province, in the north-east of the People's Republic of China, surrounds the municipalities of Beijing and Tianjin. Hebei has a population of over 67 million people, which is larger than any other country in the European Union apart from Germany. The provincial capital is Shijiazhuang, with a metropolitan population of 3.8 million.

The Hebei Education Department (HED) is responsible for the state school system across Hebei province. In 2009, Cambridge ESOL and the Hebei Education Department began collaborating with the goal to improve the teaching of English to schoolchildren in the province. The agreement between Cambridge ESOL and HED, the *Cambridge English Programme* (CEP), specifies a number of areas for collaboration:

- Introducing the *Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)* to support teacher training. HED's goal is for all junior high school English teachers to pass *Cambridge English: First (FCE)*.
- Integrating a *Cambridge English: Key (KET) for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET) for Schools*-based syllabus into the curriculum. This involves incorporating listening and speaking as core elements of the curriculum as the current emphasis is on reading and writing.
- Implementing the *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* examinations.

CEP is currently being delivered in six pilot schools in Hebei: five middle schools (grades 7–9, covering ages 12–14) and one primary school (grades 1–6, covering ages 6–11). It is hoped that the CEP will grow to include more schools across Hebei province in the future. All the schools involved in CEP are state schools with a specialism in English and partnership schools in the UK. CEP is offered for free to parents and students and either involves 1 to 2 hours of additional English classes per week or the CEP-based syllabus is incorporated into normal teaching depending on the school. Students do not have to sit the examinations, which are paid for by the parents, and not all choose to do so.

Prior to teaching the *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*-based syllabus, all teachers receive TKT-based training organised by HED involving 70 contact hours of training, provision of reference materials and educational opportunities such as visiting partnership schools in the UK and attending summer camps.

This report documents the results of a study into the impact of CEP assessments at both the micro level (i.e. learning and teaching) and at the macro level (i.e. schools and stakeholders). First we will describe the data collection

procedures; then we will examine the findings of the study and draw some conclusions before looking ahead to the next phase of CEP.

Methodology

The Hebei Impact Study, similar to the other studies in this issue, is a multiphase project designed to investigate the impact of the HED initiatives over time (see Saville's article in this issue). As a result, a mixed methods research design was used in which both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and the findings of each phase will inform the following phases in order to build up a fuller picture of the effects of the HED initiatives (see Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). Three data strands were used in the analysis:

- responses to structured interviews conducted by Cambridge ESOL with HED
- responses to structured interviews conducted by Cambridge ESOL with the head teachers and academic directors of CEP
- responses to questionnaires completed by students, parents and teachers.

Students' test data from *Cambridge English: Key* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary* was also analysed, although discussion of the results lies outside the scope of this article.

The six schools currently involved in CEP all took part in this study: Shijiazhuang No. 9 Middle School; Shijiazhuang No. 19 Middle School; Xingtai No. 3 Middle School; Baoding No. 17 Middle School; Affiliated Primary School of Baoding Normal College, and Tangshan 54 Middle School.

The purpose of the questionnaires was to explore a number of constructs: motivation and learning; attitude to assessment; English in the classroom; changes in teaching practice and perceptions about learning; the Cambridge English examinations and CEP. Questionnaire data was gathered from a total of 1,805 students, 279 teachers and 2,016 parents. All CEP teachers were invited to respond to a questionnaire as were all students who had taken Cambridge English examinations, together with their parents. A 4-point Likert scale was used and participants selected either 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. The questionnaires were bilingual (Mandarin and English) and administered via an internet-based survey tool.

The interviews were designed to ascertain the intentions behind setting up/joining the programme, the stakeholders

Table 1: Number of questionnaires analysed per school

| School | Students | % | Teachers | % | Parents | % | Total |
|---|--------------|-------|------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|
| Shijiazhuang No. 9 Middle School | 74 | 4.2% | 14 | 7.4% | 66 | 3.5% | 154 |
| Shijiazhuang No. 19 Middle School | 174 | 9.9% | 11 | 5.8% | 188 | 9.9% | 373 |
| Xingtai No. 3 Middle School | 2 | 0.1% | 19 | 10.1% | 2 | 0.1% | 23 |
| Baoding No. 17 Middle School | 987 | 56.1% | 41 | 21.7% | 1,027 | 54.2% | 2,055 |
| Affiliated Primary School of Baoding Normal College | 5 | 0.3% | 29 | 15.3% | 5 | 0.3% | 39 |
| Tangshan 54 Middle School | 474 | 26.9% | 48 | 25.4% | 571 | 30.1% | 1,093 |
| Blank | 43 | 2.4% | 27 | 14.3% | 37 | 2.0% | 107 |
| Total | 1,759 | | 189 | | 1,896 | | 3,844 |

impacted by the programme, the expected impacts on students and teachers in terms of proficiency and motivation and the expected impacts on the curriculum and teaching practice. Potential unexpected impacts as well as any impacts already experienced were also explored.

Table 1 shows the number of questionnaires analysed per participating school; as can be seen, there was considerable variation in the rate of returns from different schools.

Research questions

Research area 1 (interviews with HED):

What were/are the intended impacts/purposes of the Hebei Education Department in using Cambridge English examinations at the micro level (i.e. learning and teaching) and at the macro level (i.e. schools and stakeholders)? What could the unintended impacts be?

Research area 2 (interviews with head teachers and academic directors):

What were/are the intended impacts/purposes of the pilot schools in their adoption of the *Cambridge English Programme* and more specifically in using Cambridge English examinations at the micro level (i.e. learning and teaching) and at the macro level (i.e. schools and stakeholders)? What could the unintended impacts be?

Research area 3 (questionnaires completed by students, parents and teachers):

What were/are the intended and unintended impacts/purposes of Cambridge English examinations and the *Cambridge English Programme* at the micro level (i.e. learning and teaching) and at the macro level (i.e. schools and stakeholders)? What is the current situation with respect to teaching and learning?

Findings

Research area 1 (interviews with HED):

Officials from HED outlined a number of intentions behind setting up the programme:

- a platform for educational reform; a way of changing teaching and learning in the province
- to improve the students' English to internationally recognised levels

- to improve the teachers' English teaching ability and English proficiency
- to incorporate listening and speaking into the curriculum (these skills are rarely taught partly due to the provincial exam which focuses on reading)
- to increase Cambridge ESOL recognition in Hebei and China.

Research area 2 (interviews with head teachers and academic directors):

The schools had a number of reasons for joining the programme. The main reasons were:

- development of the school e.g. the school being recognised as an English specialist school or receiving international status
- to improve teaching skills/methodology and motivation
- to improve students' English skills and interest in learning English
- to meet the demands of parents (that a higher level of English could be achieved without going abroad, or paying for extra classes).

Research area 3 (questionnaires completed by students, parents and teachers):

For ease of presenting the underlying trend, the percentage agreement is given, which is a conflation of 'strongly agree' and 'agree'.

Students

The students on the programme realise the importance of learning English (99%) and appear highly motivated (94%) and enjoy their classes (95%). The majority of students like learning English (95%), enjoying all skills, although writing is the least popular skill (86% compared to 93% for speaking, 94% for listening and 93% for reading). All four skills were considered important in language learning (97%–98%). However, when asked whether it is important to spend time in class on related activities, the percentage agreement varied by skill, with speaking considered the most important (95%) and writing activities receiving the lowest proportion of agreement (86%).

From the questionnaire responses, it is encouraging to note that classroom interactions appear to be taking place in English more than in Mandarin. According to students, their

teachers encourage them to speak in English (98%), their teachers speak to them in English more than in Mandarin (89%) and they speak to their teachers in English more than in Mandarin (84%). However, the student–student interaction in English shows the lowest proportion of agreement (73%); this is something that students may take a while to become comfortable with if they have been used to a less communicative teaching approach.

Students appear positive about the Cambridge English tests (88% like them compared to 75% who like tests in general). Students particularly like the fact that all four skills are tested (93%). The students have found preparing for the tests to be a good source of motivation for their studies (96%); stating that they work harder in class as a result of them (94%), that success in them is important (91%) and the tests help them understand their progress (96%). When asked about tests in general students think tests are important (92%), but worry about taking them. Students also feel they have a lot of tests (83%).

Teachers

According to teachers, English is the main language of instruction (97%) and they encourage students to use it in class (97%). However, teachers admitted that for non-instruction interactions they do use Mandarin or a local language (81%) and feel that they probably should use English more in class (96%).

Teachers are very positive about the introduction of CEP and were pleased that their school had joined the programme (97%). The teachers have appreciated the support and training that the programme has brought and feel that the programme has made them more motivated (96%). Teachers also believe that their students' English has improved since their school joined CEP (94%). The majority of teachers agree that all aspects of English will improve with most agreement for the receptive skills of reading (92%) and listening (91%) and least for writing (84%).

Teachers are generally positive about the Cambridge English tests (91%) and think they are at the right level for their students (91%). Teachers use the tests to inform students what they can do to improve their English (92%). When asked about tests in general, teachers realise the importance of tests (91%) and their extrinsic motivation (97%); however, they also appreciate their formative aspects (97%). Teachers assess their students using a variety of methods (97%) and also encourage peer assessment (98%) and self assessment (98%). Teachers do admit that students worry about tests (79%) and they have a lot of tests (77%).

Almost all teachers like teaching English (99%), prepare in detail for each class (99%) and encourage pair work (97%). Teachers discuss learning objectives and outcomes with their class (99%) and regularly discuss progress with students (99%). Teachers try to make the lessons relevant and appropriate for their students and find students are more responsive as a result (94%). All teachers reflect on their own teaching and monitor their progress. A large proportion of teachers find the demands of the curriculum make it

difficult to develop lessons that enable them to respond more explicitly to the needs of their students (57%).

Teachers consider all skills and systems to be important and agree that class time should be spent on related activities. However, there was lowest agreement for grammar activities (81%). As with the students, the proportion of teachers who considered it important to spend time on writing activities (90%) was lower than that of the other three skills (95% for reading, 93% for listening and 94% for speaking).

Parents

Parents believe that learning English is very important (97%) and want their children to succeed in tests (94%); however, it is also important that their children enjoy learning English (98%). They are pleased that their children are part of CEP (92%) and feel that the programme adds value to their children's education (93%). They also believe the programme to be motivational (94%) and that it has increased their children's level of English (96%). With regard to the Cambridge English tests, parents are pleased that their children receive a Cambridge English certificate (96%) and like *Cambridge English: Key* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary* exams (85%). Parents believe assessment to be important and that it should be done through a variety of methods (98%). It is encouraging that parents are open to more alternative assessment methods in addition to tests (98% for both continuous assessment and self assessment). However, just over half of parents (56%) believe their child has too many tests in English. There is strong agreement in the belief that learning English will bring many benefits and opportunities in education, work, travel and life in general (97%–98%). Despite the belief that schools had provided a lot of information about CEP (81%), a sizeable proportion of parents (45%) felt they did not know a lot about it, suggesting that improved communication is an area on which to focus in future.

Success stories

A number of changes and improvements are already evident despite the relatively short time that CEP has been implemented. The schools note that the changes are 'beyond their expectations'. In the classroom there has been a shift towards the use of English and students are now more confident in communicating in English. It is felt that students have become more active and more competent. Tests in general are not usually popular, but students are attracted to the content and topics of Cambridge English exams. They are eager to progress up the Cambridge English qualifications ladder and are willing to increase their time spent learning English. HED officials note that students' English levels have improved and they have received good results in their junior high school entrance examinations.

Teachers' confidence and enthusiasm for CEP has increased as they have learned how to make use of the new teaching theories and turn them into practice. Teachers are thinking more about their teaching methodology and skills and are using a variety of assessment methods, realising the importance of assessment. They are even asking for

additional training. Teachers are now more self-motivated and are enjoying their job more. According to responses from questionnaires and interviews, classrooms are becoming more student-centred, with different teaching methods being used for different students and more attention being paid to their progress. Teachers from the pilot schools have won prizes in provincial teaching-related competitions and have been asked to hold demonstration classes by teachers in other provinces. It was also reported that there is more teamwork and collaboration among the teachers, with teachers sharing expertise and resources.

Teachers and academic directors reported in questionnaire and interview responses that parents and grandparents think highly of CEP, especially as schools do not charge a fee, and that means students no longer need to attend private language courses. Parents reported that they have always known that English is important but didn't know how to guide their children; the programme now allows them to monitor their children's progress and guide them more easily.

Unintended impacts and challenges

CEP has proved more popular than anticipated, with more students choosing to enrol in the schools and many enquiries having been received from schools and parents that are not part of CEP. While this is encouraging, increasing the scale of the programme does present a challenge in terms of offering more training and increasing the number of *TKT*-qualified teachers.

Although teachers are very positive about the programme they are finding that they are doing more preparation for Cambridge English classes than before so have to do extra work at home.

One particularly interesting unintended impact of CEP has been the influence it has had on the teaching of other subjects. English teachers have told other colleagues about CEP, the teaching methodologies being used in the programme and how to change the teacher-student relationship.

Recommendations

Teaching support and training

It is recommended that teachers be provided with background and detailed information about Cambridge English examinations. A particular emphasis should be placed upon the need to engage explicitly with the teaching of all language skills and systems in a coherent and communicative way to help learners towards examination success. It is also recommended that teachers be provided with activities/ideas to encourage student-student interaction in the classroom,

at least in part through the continued use of *TKT* as a tool for professional development. However, the additional preparation time necessary for teachers to search for teaching materials and to plan and prepare lessons needs to be acknowledged.

Finally, it is recommended that teachers be provided with more opportunities/support to increase their English language level through a continuation of the use of *Cambridge English: First*.

School-home communication

In light of the finding that a significant proportion (45%) of parents felt that they did not know much about CEP, certain recommendations were made regarding communication between schools and homes.

The first recommendation is to review the information provided to parents about CEP and Cambridge English examinations, and consider ways in which communication with parents might be improved, through which they could be more involved. In addition, it is recommended that: parents be provided with the rationale behind the HED decision to introduce CEP and Cambridge English examinations; parents are directed to background and detailed information about Cambridge English examinations, and provided with information regarding the reasons for testing, the different sort of assessments and how they complement each other so that they don't feel their children are heavily burdened.

Next steps for the Hebei Impact Project

There has been a positive response to the first phase of the Hebei Impact Project. HED, schools, teachers, students and parents provided very helpful and informative feedback. Phase 2 will consist of a further round of questionnaires for administration during the November/December 2013 examination session, by which time it is hoped that more schools will have joined the programme. It is hoped that more teachers, students and parents will participate, especially from the schools with a lower response rate in this phase. Following the questionnaire administration, the data will be analysed and reviewed with the test data and if necessary, interviews/focus groups with teachers/students may be conducted.

References

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An initial investigation of the introduction of Cambridge English examinations in Mission laïque française schools

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Introduction

In the 2011/12 academic year, Mission laïque française (MLF), a non-profit association providing education to more than 40,000 primary and secondary school students globally, began introducing Cambridge English examinations (*Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE)*, *Cambridge English: Key (KET) for Schools*, *Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET) for Schools*, *Cambridge English: First (FCE) for Schools*, *Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE)* and the *Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)*) as part of the development of their English language curriculum. At the same time, Cambridge ESOL and MLF set up a joint research project to assess the impact of the introduction of these examinations in MLF schools (see Saville, this issue, for the importance of collaboration between exam providers and local users in order to investigate impact in context effectively).

This paper reports on Phase 1 of this joint project, which aimed: i) to investigate MLF's anticipated impacts in using Cambridge English exams (i.e. aims and expected consequences), and ii) to establish a baseline, that is to capture views and attitudes on the learning, teaching and assessment of English in MLF schools, at the beginning of this new initiative, from students, teachers, school management and parents. It is anticipated that findings from this preliminary baseline study will be compared with stakeholders' views and attitudes at later phases of this research project to assess the initiative's *actual* impact (see Saville's discussion of managing change over time, this issue). A broader aim of this first phase of the project lays in the provision of a comprehensive profile of these different stakeholder groups that can be used to inform the development of MLF's management, teaching and learning strategies to support the achievement of their long-term learning objective of raising standards in English language learning.

The educational context

MLF is a secular educational association of 114 schools teaching the French curriculum at primary and secondary levels to more than 40,000 pupils globally. At the end of 2011, MLF ran schools in 46 countries around the world, employing a combination of French nationals and local teachers. Schools in the MLF network are entirely privately funded (by student fees or corporate funding) and fall under four categories:

- *MLF/Osui schools and MLF schools under agreement* (henceforth MLF/Osui/under agreement schools): MLF/Osui take full responsibility for the running of these schools. The schools in the Moroccan network are run by the Office Scolaire et Universitaire International (Osui - International Schools and University Board), a 'sister' association, also not-for-profit, to MLF. The schools under agreement are covered by an agreement between MLF and AEFÉ (Agency for French Education Abroad) or with DGM (Directorate General for globalisation, development, and partnerships in the Foreign and European Affairs Ministry).
- *Corporate schools*: These schools meet the specific needs of French and foreign companies that wish to provide schooling for the children of their expatriate employees.
- *Members and Affiliates*: In the member schools, MLF is given full academic and administrative responsibility whereas Affiliated schools delegate only a part of the academic responsibility to MLF.
- *Educational cooperation agreement*: MLF works on behalf of the state and of companies as part of school partnerships, particularly in crisis or post-crisis situations.

As specified in the organisation's Code of Ethics:

The purpose of Mission laïque française, a certified non-profit organisation, operated for public interest since 1907, is the spread of the French language and culture in the world, through secular, multilingual and intercultural teaching (Mission laïque française 2011).

This excerpt also captures MLF's core educational values: secularity, multilingualism and multiculturalism. In practice, these values are implemented through:

- a) a teaching system that respects freedom of conscience for all;
 - b) learning the local language and culture from a very early age;
 - c) spreading French language and culture abroad, right from nursery school age; and
 - d) learning English from an early age in an international context.
- (Mission laïque française 2010/11:7)

MLF's promotion of the notion of *deux cultures trois langues*, [two cultures and three languages], where the third language refers to English (as indicated in the MLF 2010/11 Directory above), is a clear indicator of the value attributed to the teaching and learning of English.

The French education system and curriculum, which MLF follows, is well regarded internationally in terms of academic achievement; but potentially less so for the teaching of foreign languages. As Harvey, Balch and Salamoura (2010:7) remark,

'[t]here was perhaps a perception that language learning in French schools had relied a little too heavily on receptive skills, to the detriment especially of speaking, although this is quickly changing', particularly since the reforms in the French National Curriculum for English in 2007 and again in 2010 (Cambridge ESOL 2011).

Facing competition around the world from international, English-speaking schools, MLE believes the quality of English language tuition is one of the key criteria for parents when choosing a school for their child. They report that parents want to optimise their child's opportunity to get a place at an English-speaking university – for which evidence of a high level of English is required. MLE is aware of the need to respond to the needs of their learners and the expectations of parents in a highly competitive marketplace by providing high-quality English language tuition and offering internationally recognised certification. Therefore, MLE acknowledges the need to raise standards in the teaching and learning of English.

In terms of target assessment levels, MLE's aspiration is for the majority of their students to achieve one level more than that which would otherwise have been expected of them according to the French National Curriculum (see also MLE's 'View of the intended impacts' section below). The target achievement level for English in the French National Curriculum for the end of primary school is A1 and for the end of secondary school is B2 (Cambridge ESOL 2011). MLE does not, however, impose a standard rate of progress across levels on individual schools as pupils and local situations vary.

In working towards the raising of standards in English language teaching, MLE has put in place a series of measures. They have introduced internationally-recognised assessment certification in the form of Cambridge English exams, which assess all four skills and range from below A1 to C2. MLE's recommendation to their schools is that the exams become compulsory from spring 2012 and the exam costs are built into the school fees. MLE anticipates that introducing Cambridge English exams will enable their schools to compete with international schools. Pedagogically, MLE feels that the introduction of external, internationally recognised assessment certification will provide schools with a coherent English language teaching framework, which in turn they hope will raise standards in language teaching and learning outcomes, enhancing teacher and student motivation and improving attitudes to assessment.

They are also encouraging schools to start teaching English earlier than in the standard French curriculum. They are introducing the teaching of subjects through English (CLIL) where possible.¹ MLE recommends that within reason teachers in primary schools should be native speakers. They encourage a range of extracurricular activities to further support the students' English language development; activities include virtual exchanges with English-speaking schools, school trips to English-speaking countries, multilingual choirs with some schools offering multilingual drama activities.

Research questions

This baseline study was conducted in October and November 2011, i.e. at the very beginning of the MLE initiative to introduce Cambridge English exams in their schools and before any MLE students had taken any exams. The first MLE students were scheduled to sit Cambridge ESOL exams in spring or summer 2012. In conducting this baseline study the aim was to find out:

1. What are the intended impacts of MLE introducing Cambridge English examinations at the micro-level (i.e. learning and teaching) and at the macro-level (i.e. school and stakeholders)? Could any unintended impacts (i.e. other unplanned outcomes) be anticipated?
2. What is the situation with respect to teaching and learning English at the start of this MLE initiative to raise standards in English and to introduce Cambridge English examinations (i.e. what is the baseline) for students, teachers, school management and parents?

As all other studies in this issue, the current study is part of a multi-phased research project which aims to trace impacts over a period of time within a specific context (see Saville's article in this issue). Following this initial phase which investigates anticipated impacts and the baseline, subsequent phases will look at the observed impacts following the introduction of Cambridge English examinations in the MLE context.

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments (interviews and questionnaires) were combined to answer the above research questions in a mixed method design. A structured one-to-one interview was conducted in English with MLE's head of foreign language policy (henceforth referred to as MLE management) to gauge preliminary insights into the anticipated impacts of introducing Cambridge English exams into MLE schools (Research Question 1).

Online attitudinal and perception questionnaires were administered by MLE in 20 of the 38 in total MLE/OSU1/under agreement schools. The questionnaire respondents were primary and secondary school students, parents, teachers and school management teams across the participating schools (see next section for details of school selection). Questionnaires were designed to build a profile of views from each of the four stakeholder groups at the start of the MLE initiative (Research Question 2). A 4-point Likert scale was used for all questions ('strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'). Following discussion with MLE management, it was agreed that the questionnaires should be administered in French, which is identified as the *lingua franca* of the organisation. The questionnaire constructs and statements were selected and constructed after reviewing instruments in the Cambridge ESOL 'impact toolkit' (see Saville's article in this issue). Questionnaires were preferred over focus groups for the young (primary school) learners in order to cover a wider population than would have been

¹ CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), of course, also exists in French as 80% of the students are not native French speakers (MLE 2010/11). The proportion of school subjects taught in the local language, French or English varies depending on the country, school and school year; this is a factor that will be taken into consideration in the next phases of the project.

Table 1: Overview of research questions, stakeholder groups, data types, instruments and data analysis techniques used

| Research question | Stakeholder | Data type | Data collection instruments | Data analysis techniques |
|---|--|--------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. MLF anticipated impacts | MLF management | Qualitative | Structured interview | Thematic analysis (Patton 2002) |
| 2. Attitudes and perceptions (baseline) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students • Teachers • School management • Parents | Quantitative | Questionnaires | Descriptive statistics - frequencies & percentages (Bachman 2004) |

Table 2: Questionnaire construct overview

| Students | Teachers including language assistants | School management | Parents |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation/attitudes towards learning English • Perceptions about language learning and English ability • Perceptions about the use of the target language in class • Attitudes about assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation/attitudes towards teaching English • Perceptions about teaching, language learning, and the curriculum • Perceptions about the use of the target language in class • Perceptions and attitudes about assessment practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions about student and teacher motivation • Perceptions about teaching, language learning, the curriculum, • Perceptions about use of target language in class • Perceptions about assessment practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions about their child's motivation towards learning English • Perceptions about the value of their child learning English • Perceptions about assessment • Perceptions about the value of introducing Cambridge English exams |

possible if using focus groups in this study (see also Ashton, Salamoura and Diaz's article in this issue). As in Ashton et al (this issue), care was taken to ensure that the language used was clear and accessible for young learners. All questionnaire data was validated and amended by expert judgement prior to data collection.

Table 1 provides an overview of the research questions, stakeholders, data types, instruments and analysis techniques used in this study, whereas Table 2 lists the constructs covered in each of the four questionnaires. All data collection took place in October and November 2011.

Although a convergent parallel design was used (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011 – see also Khalifa, Nguyen and Walker's article in this issue) – it is not prototypical since only one construct was investigated using both qualitative and quantitative methods and in all other cases the qualitative and quantitative methods addressed different questions. For the construct investigating the initial stakeholders' views on the introduction of Cambridge English exams the two data sets were related to each other to gain a richer picture and understanding of their views. The data from this investigation will be used to inform future phases of the research project.

Sample description

Following consultation with MLF management, it was agreed that this initial study will focus on MLF/Osui/under agreement schools because MLF/Osui take full responsibility for the running of these schools (see the different school categories under MLF in 'The educational context' section). There are in total 38 MLF/Osui/under agreement schools across 15 countries (out of a grand total of 114 schools in 46 countries in the whole MLF network). The sample provided by MLF included 20 schools across six countries although the vast majority of the data comes from 18 schools

and four countries.² The sample was deemed to be fairly representative of the countries and schools in their network in that the schools come both from the top three countries in number of MLF/Osui/under agreement schools (Spain, Morocco and Lebanon) and from three other countries with a smaller cluster (i.e. one or two) of MLF/Osui/under agreement schools.

Within these schools, the study participants were students who would take Cambridge English exams at the end of that school year, together with their parents, their teachers of English and school management. The students were drawn from two groups. The first group, aged 9–10, were in the *CM1* class, the penultimate class of primary school. The second group, aged 16–17, were from the *1ère* class, the penultimate class of secondary school. There was also one class of *2nde* students (one year below *1ère*, aged 15–16) because one of the participating secondary schools did not have any *1ère* classes. As the size of the group of *2nde* students was too small to draw any independent conclusions, they were grouped together with *1ère* students.

The study targeted students towards the end of their primary or secondary education as these are milestone years for both the French National Curriculum and the MLF curriculum for English. Table 3 shows the number of respondents by country, stakeholder group and class who completed the online questionnaires. The sample size in most countries and schools was too small to allow an investigation of any differences in the learning contexts of the countries involved or other affecting variables. These aspects could be considered in larger follow-up studies.

² As Table 3 shows, the respondent sample from Saudi Arabia and Italy does not include any students and it is, otherwise, very small; however, these responses were not excluded from the quantitative analysis of the questionnaires as they were on a par with those of the respondents from the other countries and did not alter the average percentage of agreement.

Table 3: Number of respondents by country, group and class who completed the online questionnaire

| | Students | | Parents | Teachers | School mgt | Total | Total % |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|------------|-------|---------|
| | CM1 | 1ère/2nde | | | | | |
| Lebanon (2 schools) | 13 | 106 | 27 | 4 | 6 | 156 | 22% |
| Spain (8 schools) | 43 | 133 | 60 | 24 | 7 | 267 | 37.6% |
| Morocco (7 schools) | 54 | 92 | 74 | 16 | 6 | 242 | 34% |
| Egypt (1 school) | 12 | 7 | 13 | 4 | 1 | 37 | 5.2% |
| Saudi Arabia (1 school) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 0.84% |
| Italy (1 school) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0.28% |
| ALL | 122 | 338 | 176 | 52 | 22 | 710 | 100% |

Analysis and discussion

This section summarises the findings from the interview which invited the MLF management team to consider the possible anticipated impacts of introducing Cambridge English exams from the perspective of the students, parents and the teachers.

MLF management view of the intended impacts of introducing Cambridge English examinations

Students

The introduction of Cambridge English exams is seen by MLF to be part of their long-term plan towards helping the majority of their students to achieve one level beyond that which would otherwise have been expected of them if they were to follow the French National curriculum. The latter recommends A1 for the end of primary education and B2 for the end of secondary education (see also 'The educational context' section). They appreciate the additional academic pressure this represents for students as they will be studying and preparing for additional exams but they hope that student motivation will improve, that standards will be raised, leading to increased success in learning English.

Parents

MLF believes that parents identify English as an essential skill for their child, with the potential to enhance their child's educational and life opportunities. For this reason MLF anticipates that parents will value the introduction of international certification in English as a key component in the schools' plan to improve standards in English. Cambridge English exams provide an overall language profile of the learner by assessing all four language skills. Although this Cambridge English model may be somewhat unfamiliar in the French school context, with its focus primarily on grammar, literature and culture, MLF anticipates that the exams will be received positively by the parents who are highly motivated for their children to succeed academically in school.

Teachers

The standard of English amongst the teachers of the older learners in 1ère and 2nde classes is reported to be high.

However, it is hoped that the introduction of Cambridge English exams will help the teachers of the younger learners to improve their English. Beyond this, the management team anticipates that the change in pedagogical focus towards a more skills-based, communicative approach to language learning, advocated by Cambridge ESOL, will encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching and adopt a more integrated approach to teaching, materials, curriculum and lesson planning. What is of particular interest in terms of the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment, is that MLF believes that the most significant impact will be with regard to changes in teachers' attitudes to assessment. Since the introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), the teaching of English has pedagogically undergone change and it is hoped that teachers will move towards reflecting upon, planning and grading their learners based on what they *can do* rather than penalising them for what they *can't do*.

MLF management view of the unintended impacts of introducing Cambridge English examinations

Students

MLF expressed concern that learners could feel demoralised if they did not make the progress expected, and that this might be compounded further by additional pressure from their families.

Parents

Cambridge English exams will be made compulsory in MLF schools from spring 2012 with the costs embedded into the school fees. MLF expressed concern that there may be some dissatisfaction from parents about the additional costs attached to these compulsory examinations. This was identified to be a potential problem in those schools which had previously used Cambridge English exams on a non-compulsory basis for those students who wished to take them. MLF management also expressed concern that if they are not able to improve English standards, parents may not look upon MLF schools favourably when choosing a school for their children. As discussed in 'The educational context' section, good-quality educational provision in English is a key factor in meeting the demands of the parents who want their

Table 4: Summary of MLF management perceived intended and unintended impacts

| | Intended impacts | Unintended impacts |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Students | Raise standards of English (learners achieving one level higher than that specified in the French National Curriculum) Improve learner motivation Evidence of progress in English | Additional pressure from parents to succeed Additional academic pressure Demoralised if don't make anticipated progress |
| Parents | Value high standards of English language teaching and Cambridge English exams Value Cambridge English grading system Value international certification | Resistance to additional, compulsory exams Resistance to additional cost Market demands may result in parents not choosing MLF schools if English levels don't improve |
| Teachers | Raise primary school teachers' level of English and language teaching qualifications Bring coherence to teaching, planning and curriculum Encourage reflective practice Improve attitudes to assessment Encourage positive grading (what learners 'can do' rather than 'can't do') | Resistance to change Extra work Changes in approach may prove too radical |

children to reach a good standard of English to enhance their educational and professional opportunities internationally.

Teachers

It is anticipated that the transition towards a more skills-based, communicative approach will require teachers to reconceptualise their pedagogical approach. MLF management has considered the possibility that these changes brought about by introducing Cambridge English exams might prove too radical for teachers but believes that teachers would be likely to see the value and respond positively to the new approach to teaching and assessment, understanding that it is a process designed to *enable* rather than *disable* learners.

It is interesting to note that a number of these hypotheses identified by the MLF management when asked about potential unintended impacts do not refer specifically to unplanned consequences but rather to sources of friction in the implementation of the MLF initiative or areas of resistance (following Henrichsen's 1989 model, discussed in Wall 2005).³ It would therefore be of interest to investigate in subsequent phases of this research project whether any of these sources of friction do materialise and how they are addressed. As Saville (this issue) argues, the concept of impact by design may also involve putting in place remedial or mitigating actions in advance in cases where potential negative impacts or consequences are anticipated. Table 4 provides a summary of findings from the interview data collected from MLF management about their views on the intended and unintended impacts of MLF adopting Cambridge English assessments.

Student, teacher, school management and parent views

In this section, we summarise the data from the online questionnaires which aimed to generate a baseline profile of the teaching and learning of English and to capture perceptions about assessment and the introduction of

Cambridge English exams, from the viewpoint of students, teachers, school management and parents. Findings from this section were also used to make recommendations which can help MLF put strategies in place for the achievement of their long-term objectives for English (see the 'Recommendations' section).

Student profile

A total of 460 students participated in four countries and 19 schools. Language tuition is almost entirely school based with some evidence that students are receiving private language classes, particularly with the younger learners, for example 13.1% of *CM1* students have had one year of private tuition compared to 6.5% of older learners. The younger *CM1* students have been learning English for between one and four years and the older *2nde* and *1ère* students learning English for between six and eight years.

Student motivation and learning English

Questionnaire data indicates high levels of student motivation to learn English as can be seen in Table 5. Both younger and older learners identified with English as necessary for employment, creating opportunities for studying abroad, using the internet and social media and communicating with friends. They indicated that they valued, enjoyed and were highly engaged in their English language classes. Students reported that they did not find English difficult to learn (69.6% *CM1* and 79% of *2nde* and *1ère*). This is perhaps a reflection of their motivation and captures something of the schools' pedagogical approach as students look forward to and enjoy their English classes and the activities they do in class (94.3% *CM1*, 79% *1ère*) and passing school and external exams is important for all students. Nevertheless, as the data shows throughout Table 5, though motivation is high in both age groups, there is an indication from the older learners that marginally suggests an enhanced awareness of the longer term implications of the value of learning English and that activity in the classroom is perhaps not as much fun as it is for the younger learners.

³ We thank Jayanti Banerjee for this remark.

Student perceptions about their ability and use of English

Table 6 summarises student responses when they were asked about their language learning preferences and their perceived ability with English. There was broad agreement between younger and older students that they liked each of the four language skills and were confident in their language ability. Of the two groups, *CM1* students emerged overall as the most positive, showing the greatest belief in their language ability.

As Table 6 indicates, listening and speaking emerge as the language skills preferred by younger and older learners. However, proportionally both groups showed less confidence in their ability with these language skills with significantly fewer students strongly agreeing that they felt they were good at listening and speaking. There is general parity

between older and younger students, however 21.6% of the older students compared to 34.4% of younger students strongly agreed that they felt they were good at speaking, relative to other learners of the same age group. This might be attributable to increased self-consciousness in the older age group.

Reading and writing were identified as the least preferred of the language skills, with reading emerging as the skill least liked by both younger and older students.⁵ However, younger students who reported that they liked reading showed a very clear preference, and were more likely to 'strongly agree' than the older students (*CM1*: 40.2% strongly agreed while 32.5% of *1ère* and *2nde* strongly agreed they liked reading). The same pattern emerges with writing. Though younger and older students indicated that they liked writing, they showed less confidence in their ability. Nevertheless, younger learners were more likely to 'strongly agree' that they liked writing than the older students (*CM1*: 51.6% strongly agreed while 36.4% of *1ère* and *2nde* strongly agreed they liked writing).

Table 5: Questionnaire statements: Student motivation and learning English

| | What do you think about learning English? | % agreement ⁴ | |
|----|--|--------------------------|-----------|
| | | CM1 | 1ère/2nde |
| 1 | It is important to me to learn English. | 96.7% | 99.1% |
| 2 | Learning English will help me to get a job when I leave school. | 90.9% | 95.9% |
| 3 | Studying for exams in English is important for me. | 90.2% | 91.1% |
| 4 | Success in school exams in English is important for me. | 94.3% | 95% |
| 5 | Success in external exams in English is important for me. | 83.6% | 78.9% |
| 6 | Learning English is something I do in my free time. | 50% | 42.3% |
| 7 | I want to use English and make friends with people who speak English. | 85.2% | 87.3% |
| 8 | I want to study abroad in the future. | 79.5% | 83.2% |
| 9 | I want to understand English on the internet, watch English TV, English films and listen to English songs. | 90.2% | 97.6% |
| 10 | I want to talk to my friends in English. | 72.1% | 71.9% |
| 11 | I look forward to our English lessons. | 86.9% | 83.4% |
| 12 | Learning English is fun for me. | 85.3% | 79.6% |
| 13 | Learning English is difficult for me. | 30.4% | 21% |
| 14 | I like the activities we do in our English lessons. | 94.3% | 79% |

Student perceptions about use of English in the classroom

Classroom interaction is predominantly in English, which is encouraged by the teacher. Nevertheless, more French is spoken by the teacher in lessons with the younger students which might be expected with less-proficient learners. However, 50% of younger learners reported they spoke more English with their classmates, of which 19.7% strongly agreed, compared to 39% of older learners, of which just 7.1% strongly agreed. Differences might be attributable to the nature of classroom activities in primary school compared to secondary school, and increased levels of self-awareness in the older students.

Student perceptions about language learning: The most important aspects of language learning

Students reported that all aspects of language learning are identified as being important, however, older learners ranked speaking as the most important aspect (94.9%), which is of interest considering the older students' reticence to use the target language with their classmates. By contrast younger learners ranked vocabulary the most important aspect of language learning (90.2%). All students agreed that listening

Table 6: Student perceptions about their language preferences and ability

| | CM1 | | 1ère/2nde | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Agree and Strongly agree % | Strongly agree only % | Agree and Strongly agree % | Strongly agree only % |
| Like listening | 91 | 63.1 | 92.6 | 57.1 |
| Like speaking | 90.2 | 56.6 | 88.2 | 50.3 |
| Like writing | 82.7 | 51.6 | 75.8 | 36.4 |
| Like reading | 73.8 | 40.2 | 73.9 | 32.5 |
| Good at listening | 78.7 | 32.8 | 83.4 | 36.4 |
| Good at speaking | 69.6 | 34.4 | 72.8 | 21.6 |
| Good at writing | 74.6 | 20.1 | 67.7 | 20 |
| Good at reading | 73.7 | 31.1 | 85.2 | 29.9 |

⁴ The column described as '% agreement' includes the sum of responses selected by students who chose 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. Where relevant to the analysis, the difference between 'agree' and 'strongly agree' is indicated in the text.

⁵ It would have been of interest to consider any potential differences in student preferences between different cultural contexts; however, given the small size of the sample in each country, it would have been difficult to conduct a meaningful analysis. This is a topic that could be followed up in subsequent studies.

is the second most important aspect (*CM1* at 90.1%, *1ère* and *2nde* at 94.7%), which corresponds to the skill both groups reported that they liked. Both groups ranked writing as one of the least important aspects, with younger learners ranking it the least important. This finding again corresponds to students' preferred language skills. Younger and older learners ranked grammar as one of the least important aspects of language learning. Further research is needed to explain the students' low preference for grammar and writing although the teachers' practice of prioritising task and communicative achievement over grammatical accuracy and their ranking of grammar as the least important aspect of language teaching may offer a clue here (see the 'Teacher profile' section).

Student perceptions about language learning: How time is most usefully spent in class

All students thought time was best spent in class on listening (ranked in position 1) and speaking (ranked in position 2). Younger students perceived that time was least usefully spent reading in class (position 5) and writing (position 6). These findings correspond to the students' impression about their perceived ability and the most important aspects of language acquisition. Priorities change for the older learners who rank reading and writing in class after listening and speaking, suggesting that whilst they understand the value in developing these skills in class this does not necessarily mean they enjoy the process of skill development.

Student attitudes to assessment

Learners showed some anxiety about assessment, but younger learners (77.1%) liked tests more than older learners (45.8%). All students identified with the value of assessment helping them to understand how much they have learned and helping their teacher to help them. They agreed that they work harder in class and at home when they have a test, particularly the younger learners (83.6% *CM1* with 58% *1ère* and *2nde*) and that they were more likely to do well if they had prepared in class and at home. Younger learners were more likely to view assessment more positively than older learners. In this instance, this recurring distinction between the older and younger learners might be attributable to the additional pressures associated with secondary education, with 52.3% of the older learners reporting that they felt they had a lot of tests compared to just 36.9% of the younger learners.

Teacher profile

A total of 52 teachers from 16 schools participated. Many of the respondents taught more than one age group. Figures were fairly evenly distributed in terms of the number of years' experience they had teaching English (25% 1–3 years; 34.6% 4–10 years; 19.2% 11–15 years; 21.2% 15 years plus). Many of the teachers reported that they held more than one type of teaching qualification with the majority who were 'Licence' qualified (73.1%).

Teacher motivation and beliefs about teaching and learning English

Teachers strongly identify with the need for students to learn English. They like and are confident teaching English and 75% agree that students are more responsive with an exam to work towards. Although 98% see the importance of integrating

exam strategies into lessons, 90.3% report that this can be difficult due to the limitations of time, a finding that is further supported in the teachers' comments: '*Des horaires insuffisants pour un apprentissage soutenu à certains niveaux*' ['timetabling is insufficient to support learning at certain levels'].

They believe there is a need for MLF to review the focus on grammar, literature and culture in the current English curriculum (77%) and to refocus on supporting the development of communication skills (98%). Teachers look for task achievement and communicative competence above grammatical accuracy when marking work, which may explain students' low value of grammar in language learning (see the 'Student profile' section).

Teacher attitudes to their use of the target language in the classroom

Teachers report they are confident users of the target language and 95% indicate that English is identified as the language of instruction and of classroom activities. Teachers report that their students speak English with them (86.6%), but that students were more reticent to do so with their classmates (51.9%), a finding that corresponds to the student data. Almost all the teachers (92.3%) reported a belief that English should be used more widely in the classroom.

Teacher perceptions about the most important aspects of language learning and how time is usefully spent developing the language skill in class

Like the older students, teachers identify and rank speaking and listening in first and second position respectively as the most important aspects of language learning, ranking grammar as the least important, as indicated in Table 7. This last finding could be another explanation as to why students do not value grammar instruction (see the 'Student profile' section); further investigation is needed to corroborate this. However, unlike the learners, this view is reversed in Table 8, when teachers were asked how time is most usefully spent in class, speaking ranked in fifth position. Teachers prioritise listening, vocabulary and grammar in the classroom. Writing is identified as the least important aspect of language learning and the least valuable use of classroom time. As the following teachers' comments on the questionnaires suggest, findings related to speaking and writing perhaps reflect the concerns teachers have that they have insufficient time to cover the existing syllabus effectively, added to which additional communicative language development activities are more difficult to co-ordinate with the whole class:

'We lack time to implement everything with excellency (sic) ... if we, teachers, slow down too much, we cannot fulfill the yearly program's content'.

'*Travailler en groupe de 10/12 maximum et non en classe de 30/35 élèves*' ['Working in groups of up to 10/12 rather than a class of 30/35 students'].

Teacher attitudes and perceptions about assessment practice

Findings are encouraging as teachers report they use a range of formative and summative assessment methods. Formative approaches to assessment include continuous assessment (92.2%), classroom observation (77%), self-assessment (78.8%) and peer assessment (71.1%). Teachers report that

Table 7: Teacher ranking: Most important aspects of language learning

| Language skill/system | Teacher ranking | Respondent % |
|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Speaking | 1 | 86.6% |
| Listening | 2 | 86.5% |
| Vocabulary | 3 | 69.3% |
| Reading | 4 | 67.3% |
| Writing | 5 | 63.4% |
| Grammar | 6 | 28.8% |

Table 8: Teacher ranking: How time is most usefully spent in class

| Language activity | Teacher Ranking | Respondent % |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Listening in class | 1 | 100% |
| Vocabulary activities | 2 | 96.1% |
| Grammar activities | 3 | 92.3% |
| Reading in class | 4 | 90.4% |
| Speaking in class | 5 | 86.6% |
| Writing in class | 6 | 82.7% |
| All are equally important | 7 | 78.9% |

they tested their students at the end of each module or unit (86.6%) and summative assessment methods included course-book practice tests (79.9%) and teacher-developed tests (94.3%). Almost all teachers (92.3%) agreed that external international examinations contribute and add value to their students' education.

School management profile

A total of 22 members of the MLEF school management teams from 14 schools responded to the online survey. Data showed that schools had responsibility for students across the age groups. In terms of the respondents' roles in the MLEF management team, 40.9% were *Chef d'établissement*, [Principals]; 36.4% were *Adjoint au chef d'établissement*, [Deputy principals]; 9.1% were *Coordinateur de discipline*, [English co-ordinators], and 13.6% were *Professeur principal*, [Senior teachers].

School management perceptions and beliefs about student motivation

Respondents all agreed that learning English is essential for learners and that it was a core component of the curriculum. Nevertheless opinion is divided across the group about whether learners are motivated to learn English, with 59% who do not see motivation to be a problem and 41% who perceive it to be difficult to motivate learners. This latter view, however, appears in conflict with the student and teacher data, which suggests a high level of student motivation to learn English.

School management perceptions and beliefs about teacher motivation

School management agrees and acknowledges the challenges associated with introducing change for teachers because of the additional workload that this represents. Like the teachers, there is significant agreement from 72.7% of the respondents, for the need to review the focus of and introduce change into the English curriculum, particularly in the development

of communication skills in the target language with 100% agreement, of which 81.8% strongly agreed. All respondents in this group acknowledge the need to prepare students for exams, but only 40.9% agree that there is enough time in the current curriculum to achieve this, a point which is in line with the view of the vast majority of teachers (90.3%).

School management perceptions about the use of English in the classroom

English is identified as the target language in the classroom and is used by teachers and students, a finding that corresponds with data from each of the respondent groups. The school management teams are marginally less positive than the teachers about the students' willingness to use the target language in the classroom, but there is agreement between the groups that students are more reticent to use English with their classmates, than with their teacher. School management agrees that the teachers' use of English varies depending on the age and level of the students. There is a consistent level of agreement between school management (81.8%) and teachers (92.8%) that English should be used more widely in the classroom.

School management beliefs about assessment

School management teams agree that students are assessed regularly using a wide range of formative and summative assessment methods. Findings correspond to the teacher data. Marginally fewer respondents (63.6%) from school management believed peer assessment is encouraged, compared to the teachers (71%). There is agreement that students are more motivated to work when they have an exam to work towards (90.9%) and respondents believe that external certification contributes and adds value to students' education (90.9%). There are clear and promising indications to suggest that both the school management and teachers identify with the value of formative and summative approaches to assessment.

Parent profile

A total of 176 parents responded to the online survey in five countries and 14 MLEF schools. The majority of parents reported that their child was in either *CM1* (48.9%) or *1ère* (44.9%) with just 6.3% reporting that they had a child in *2nde*.

Parents' beliefs, motivation and attitudes about the value of their child learning English

Learning English is highly prized by all parents, who are motivated for their child to learn English because of the perception that English will enhance their life opportunities. In the classroom all parents want their child to be intellectually challenged but equally believe they should feel positive and motivated to learn. Although good classroom performance is identified as more important than exam results (80.3%), parents agree that it's important for their child to work towards identified goals, such as an exam (96.6%). They perceive that Cambridge English exams will add value to their child's education (93.8%) with the potential to motivate their child to work harder in school (72.9%).

Parents' attitudes to assessment and perceptions about the impact of introducing Cambridge English exams

Parents appreciate the value of assessing their child's progress using a variety of formative and summative assessment methods in school (97.7%) with 89.3% agreeing that a combination of continuous assessment and end of term tests are the most effective form of evaluating their child's progress. They are highly satisfied that MLE is introducing Cambridge English exams (96.6%), though 56.5% do not feel they have been given enough information about the introduction of the Cambridge English exams. There is a view held by 60.5% of parents that their child does not work hard at home in the evening to prepare for exams (a finding that is held somewhat in tension with the view held by 72.9% of parents that the goal-driven stimulus such as the Cambridge English exams will motivate their child to work harder in school). Nevertheless, they are extremely positive about the introduction of these exams, and are confident that their child's ability to use the target language will improve following the introduction of Cambridge English exams. Although 75% of parents are not concerned that Cambridge English exams will represent an excess of academic pressure for their child, 41% believe they will need to help them at home if they are going to do well.

Initial stakeholder views on the introduction of Cambridge English examinations

At this preliminary stage of the MLE initiative, data from this initial baseline study shows that there is a high level of satisfaction and great optimism from all stakeholders in response to the introduction of international certification with Cambridge English exams. The communicative approach adopted by Cambridge English exams complements the learners' language learning preferences and the development of the language skills that the learners value. For example, students and teachers prioritised listening and speaking as the important skills for second language learning; older students also agreed that these were the most important aspects to spend time on in class. Although teachers did not prioritise speaking as the best use of classroom time, they agreed that English should be spoken more often in class. As Cambridge English examinations place a great emphasis on the development of communication skills in listening and speaking this bodes well for teacher and learner preferences for listening and speaking (see also Saville's article in this issue, for the importance of matching test features with stakeholders' needs within the framework of impact by design).

Cambridge English exams encourage a communicative, skills-based approach to language teaching and assessment which corresponds to teachers' and school management teams' perceptions about the learning and use of English. Furthermore teachers and school management teams agree that it is time to review the existing English curriculum with its emphasis on grammar, literature and culture. It might be argued that the introduction of Cambridge English exams addresses an identified need for change in the teaching, learning and assessment of English. In addition, the teachers' and school management teams' perceptions appear to be on a par with the MLE management's expectations when they were

interviewed about the intended impacts of the new exams on teachers. MLE anticipates that teachers will be encouraged to reflect on and adopt a more integrated approach to their teaching, materials and lesson planning.

In terms of parent satisfaction, learning English, educational success, and internationally recognised exams are highly prized. The introduction of Cambridge English exams is therefore perceived as a very positive initiative by parents who anticipate that with such clearly identified goals their child will be more motivated to work hard in school. The parents' views are also in line with the expectations of the MLE management who expressed the belief that parents will value highly the introduction of external internationally recognised certification for English.

In July 2012, the MLE management provided us with informal feedback from schools which further illustrates some of the early impacts of the introduction of Cambridge English exams, for example:

Assessment and language development

1. Increased teacher awareness of the need and the value of raising the language profile of their students in English and other languages including French.
2. Teachers perceive the value of assessment to support students' language development.
3. Teachers perceive the value of assessment as a means by which students can monitor their progress.

Teacher and student motivation

1. Enhanced levels of co-operation and teamwork between all teachers in working towards identified teaching and learning goals:
 - in English lessons
 - in CLIL lessons (arts, music, drama, physical education, technology, geography).
2. Teachers feel the need to involve parents more with the exams (e.g. by inviting them to a celebration giving out exam certificates) as a way of underlining the tests' importance.
3. Teachers are encouraging students to work towards expected and higher levels of achievement.
4. Enhanced levels of student motivation in preparing for internationally recognised, external exams.
5. Enhanced levels of educational aspiration by the students.

Perceptions of Cambridge English exams and support

1. Teachers value the support provided by MLE and the Cambridge English website, through webinars and training.
2. Teachers value the notion of positively assessing students for what they *can do* rather than for what they *can't do*.
3. Teachers value language testing through the introduction of external assessments.
4. Teachers perceive the value of exam preparation and practice which in turn informs course and lesson planning.

Recommendations

In summary what recommendations can be made in response to insights gathered at the start of the MLE initiative? The following recommendations have emerged having conducted the analysis of the views expressed by MLE management about the anticipated and unanticipated impacts of introducing Cambridge English exams, and the perceptions and attitudes about the teaching, learning and assessment of English gathered from the students, teachers, parents and school management team who participated in the impact study.

A. Teaching support and training

The questionnaire feedback indicates that schools and teachers would welcome an information and support package about the MLE initiative (see the need for sufficient SUPPORT of the stakeholders as noted in Maxim 2 of the impact by design model in Saville's article in this issue). Suggested points to consider for inclusion might be:

1. Rationale behind the MLE decision to introduce Cambridge English exams.
2. Encourage teachers to engage with online teacher resources such as:
 - the Cambridge English Teacher Support website at www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org/ts/, where teachers have access to teaching resources, information about the exams, teacher discussion forums as well as the opportunity to participate in online seminars
 - the Cambridge ESOL Teacher site, which is a joint initiative between Cambridge University Press and Cambridge ESOL and supports the online professional development of English language teachers. Teachers have access to online teaching courses, a library of teaching resources, webinars and discussion forums at www.CambridgeEnglishTeacher.org
3. Guidance towards Cambridge ESOL recommended exam teaching and practice materials to encourage a coherent approach to the teaching and preparation of students for Cambridge English exams.

B. School – home communication

There is a need to reflect upon the level of feedback and information about the new MLE initiative to parents. MLE could consider ways in which communication pathways with parents might be improved (following Maxim 3 COMMUNICATE, i.e. provide useful information to the stakeholder, see Saville's article in this issue). Parents could be provided with an information pack about the new Cambridge English exams that might include the following points:

1. Rationale behind the MLE decision to introduce Cambridge English exams.

2. Background and detailed information for parents about Cambridge English exams.
3. Implications for timetabling and homework for students.
4. Raise awareness and direct stakeholders to Cambridge English links mediated by social networking sites such as:
 - a. www.facebook.com/CambridgeESOL
 - b. Twitter: @cambridgeesol
 - c. YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeenglishtv

C. Teaching and preparation time

Two points emerge that relate to timetabling and teachers' preparation time. In order to optimise the students' chances of success in learning English and doing well in the Cambridge English exams so that target achievement levels are reached, teachers felt that there is a need to review the number of available teaching hours for English and to acknowledge that they need additional preparation time to search for teaching materials, to plan and prepare a coherent programme and prepare students for success in Cambridge English exams.

D. Use of English in class

Feedback from teachers, students and the MLE school management team indicates that English is not used as widely as it might be in class. MLE could, therefore, consider ways in which the target language might be used more extensively.

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The BEDA impact project: A preliminary investigation of a bilingual programme in Spain

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Introduction

This article describes a pilot study (Phase 1) of a joint research project between Cambridge ESOL and FERE Madrid (The federation of Spanish religious schools – Madrid, FERE hereafter).¹ The aims of this research are to assess the impact of Cambridge English assessments as part of FERE's Bilingual English Development and Assessment (BEDA) programme as well as the overall impact of the BEDA programme. *Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE)* exams are the focus of this pilot study.

The context

In Spain, there is a central government with devolved political power for 17 autonomous regional communities, one of which is the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Education is the responsibility of each of the Autonomous Communities, 'with the exception of a series of education competences which, according to the Constitution, come under the exclusive jurisdiction of the State' (Spanish Eurydice Unit 2009/2010). An example of state-level jurisdiction is that Spanish legislation requires the teaching of a foreign language, which is generally English, from the age of 8 in primary education (Blanco and Nicholson 2010:10). As Blanco and Nicholson (2010:11) state, in '2008 the Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero promised that all students in Spain would speak English within 10 years'. The promotion of English is prompted by the desire to be more economically competitive, as well as the need to work towards the 2002 Barcelona European Council Conclusions which called for European Union (EU) member states to teach 'at least two foreign languages from a very early age' (European Commission 2005). Autonomous Communities have the jurisdiction to further develop national legislation, 'to regulate non-basic aspects of the education system, as well as to exercise those executive-administrative competences which allow them to manage the education system within their own territory' (Spanish Eurydice Unit 2009/2010). For example, the Autonomous Community of Madrid in working towards the directives described above, has set as a future goal for the majority (80%) of secondary school learners to leave school having achieved Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) (personal communication, June 2011).

FERE consists of approximately 340 schools in Madrid, the majority of which provide both primary and secondary education. These schools belong to a category of Spanish schools called *Escuela Católica Concertada* which means that they are state funded but privately run. FERE set up BEDA in 2008 to implement bilingual education (the promotion of English alongside Spanish) through its schools and had as its overall aim 'the implementation and improvement of efficiency in language education within their schools' (Blanco and Nicholson 2010:11). Bilingual education is introduced gradually in the programme with growing use of English promoted within the school and curriculum.

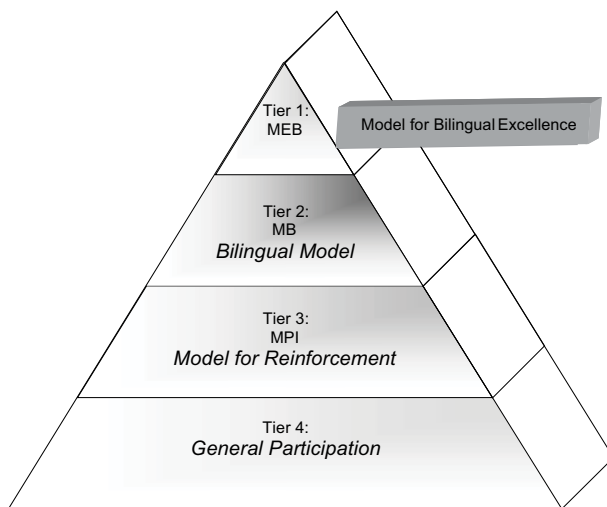
Cambridge English examinations form a key component of the BEDA programme, which also includes a teacher training programme and the promotion of a bilingual atmosphere. As part of this bilingual atmosphere, native speaker English language assistants are provided by FERE to work in each BEDA school and schools are expected to have initiatives such as school exchanges to support the learning of English, an 'English corner' in the school and an English language section in the school library. At the time this research was undertaken, there were approximately 180 FERE schools registered to take Cambridge English exams within the BEDA programme and this number is growing. *Cambridge English: Young Learners*, *Cambridge English: Key (KET)* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET)* are the most commonly taken exams by students in BEDA schools with *Cambridge English: Young Learner* exams accounting for two thirds of all exams taken by students in 2010–11. As parents pay for the exams, they have the final decision as to whether and when their child will take a particular exam, although teachers provide the recommendations and there is very close and collaborative discussion between students, teachers and parents.

In addition to the components described above, the BEDA programme has four tiers of membership (see Figure 1) which are designed to be as inclusive as possible. Tier 4, general participation, is open to any school with a desire to increase the use of English within their school, while schools in Tiers 3 and 2 require a plan for the implementation of the teaching of English, a plan for continuous teacher training, and the establishment of an assessment plan. Schools in the first tier, 'Model for Bilingual Excellence', have extensive experience with bilingual education, which includes classes such as science, physical education and music being taught through the medium of English. Although schools usually join the programme at Tier 3, and proceed up the tiers, they

¹ Blanco and Nicholson (2010) provide an overview of Cambridge ESOL's partnership with FERE Madrid as well as a review of the Spanish school system and context and the publication is recommended for further reading.

can be admitted directly into Tiers 1 or 2. Admission to Tiers 1, 2 and 3 and movement up the tiers requires schools to present a proposal including plans for implementation of the aspects outlined above, which is assessed by a panel including representatives from FERE and Cambridge ESOL. Blanco and Nicholson (2010) provide more detailed information on the four tiers and the criteria for each. At the time of this research there were only two schools in Tier 1, one of which participated in this research. On joining BEDA, schools receive a placard to place above the entrance of their school, which is jointly branded by FERE and Cambridge ESOL. Each school has a BEDA co-ordinator who is responsible for the in-school implementation of the BEDA programme.

Figure 1: Membership tiers for the BEDA programme



Research questions

There are three broad research questions for this study:

1. What were/are the intended impacts/purposes of FERE in using Cambridge English examinations on the micro level (i.e. learning and teaching) and on the macro level (i.e. FERE, schools, stakeholders)? What could the unintended impacts be?
2. What were/are the intended impacts/purposes of BEDA schools in their participation in the BEDA programme and more specifically in using Cambridge English examinations on the micro level (i.e. learning and teaching) and on the macro level (i.e. school, stakeholders)? What could the unintended impacts be?
3. What is/has been the impact (i.e. intended and unintended) of Cambridge English examinations on the micro context (i.e. learning and teaching) and the macro level (i.e. school, stakeholders) in terms of the constructs outlined in the 'Questionnaire construct overview' below.

The focus of this pilot study is on *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams. This is because, as detailed above, these exams are the most commonly taken exams by learners in the BEDA programme. As Phase 1 is a pilot study, the results of this research will be used to review the research questions and to focus on research question three in more detail in future phases.

Methods

This research is ongoing and is multi-phased in order to measure change over time in a complex dynamic education context (see Saville's article in this issue). Four case study schools participated in Phase 1 of this research which collected data through the following methods:

- interviews
- attitudinal and perception questionnaires
- 2011 *Cambridge English: Young Learners* test data.

A two-stage sequential, exploratory mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011) was used. The interview data was collected and analysed qualitatively as part of the first stage before the questionnaires were designed, administered and analysed. This sequencing was used so that the interview data could inform the development of the questionnaires. This was necessary as existing instruments in the Cambridge ESOL 'impact toolbox' (see Saville's article in this issue) had not been used before in this context with younger learners. The questionnaire data and test data was analysed quantitatively in this second stage as illustrated below.

Figure 2: Sequential exploratory mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011)

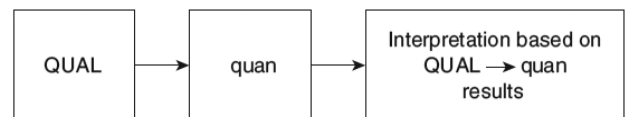


Table 1: Data analysis techniques

| | Data analysis techniques |
|-----------------------|--|
| Interviews | Thematic analysis - inductive theme analysis (Patton 2002) |
| Questionnaires | Descriptive statistics - frequencies, percentages (Bachman 2004) |
| Tests | Descriptive statistics - frequencies, percentages (Bachman 2004) |

The data from each of the three sources are presented separately in this article in the order outlined above according to respondent, e.g. FERE, BEDA co-ordinators, students, teachers, parents. As each new data source is presented, consistencies as well as inconsistencies are looked at qualitatively across the data already presented to build up a clearer picture of the results. In conducting this study, ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2004) were followed.

School sample

Four schools at different tiers of membership and with varying lengths of involvement in the BEDA programme were selected for participation. This allowed for a broader understanding of the overall context for BEDA schools as well as a richer understanding of each individual school's context. As Saville (this issue) notes it is important to 'understand both the general context as well as specific local cases'. Although only one school from each tier is looked at in Phase 1 of this research, as Denscombe (2003:36) notes, while 'each case is in some respects unique, it is also a single example of a broader class of things'. The sample will be extended for

Table 2: Schools participating in Phase 1 of the BEDA impact project

| School | BEDA tier | Key features |
|----------|----------------|--|
| School 1 | MEB (top tier) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen as a 'leader' and is one of only two schools in the top tier • Joined BEDA in 2008 • Has been using Cambridge English examinations since 2007 • A total of approximately 1,800 pupils |
| School 2 | MB (2nd tier) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined BEDA in 2008 – they were one of the first schools to join • Has been using Cambridge English examinations since 2006 (before joining BEDA) • A total of approximately 2,000 pupils |
| School 3 | MPI (3rd tier) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined BEDA in 2009 • Used Cambridge English examinations for the first time in March 2010 • A total of approximately 1,300 pupils |
| School 4 | MPI (3rd tier) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joined BEDA late 2010 • Used Cambridge English examinations for the first time in June 2011 • A total of approximately 1,500 pupils <p>Note – interviews took place before June 2011 when the school had its first Cambridge English assessment session.</p> |

Phase 2 of this research so that generalisations can be made across schools within each tier. These four schools are seen as leading schools within each of the three tiers. Table 2 provides an overview of the four schools that participated in the project.

Participants in the study

Within these four schools, students preparing to take *Cambridge English: Starters*, *Cambridge English: Movers* and *Cambridge English: Flyers* examinations in June 2011, together with their parents and teachers of English at the school, formed the participants in this research. The students were aged between 8 and 12 with an average age of 10.

The profile of the teacher respondents is as follows:

- English teaching experience: the highest percentage of respondents (36%) had over 15 years of English teaching experience followed by 28% who had 4–10 years of experience
- academic qualification: 84% have a university bachelor or postgraduate degree
- teaching qualification: 52% of the respondents have a teaching qualification.

The BEDA co-ordinators at these four schools also participated in this research as did key personnel responsible for the development and management of BEDA at FERE. The groups of participants were selected for this research as they are the key stakeholders for these four schools.

Overview of data collection methods

Table 3 shows an overview of the data collection techniques used together with the format and channel of communication and language used. The number of completed questionnaires is included in parentheses.

While Khalifa, Nguyen and Walker (this issue) opted for focus groups to collect learner data from young learners, questionnaires were preferred for this study in order to obtain responses from a larger number of learners more easily than is possible using focus group methodology. The considerations taken into account in the design of the questionnaires as a consequence are described below.

Interview design

Structured interviews, using an interview protocol, were conducted with FERE and each of the BEDA co-ordinators from the four schools. The design was structured so that each school was asked the same questions but also allowed for particular points to be discussed in more depth as necessary.

The interview with FERE looked at the intentions of FERE in setting up the scheme and the stakeholders impacted by the scheme. The interviews with the BEDA school co-ordinators looked at the school's reasons behind joining the BEDA programme. The expected impacts on students and teachers in terms of proficiency and motivation, and the expected impacts on the curriculum and teaching practice, were looked at in the interviews with both FERE and the BEDA co-ordinators as were potential unexpected impacts and any impacts already experienced.

Questionnaire design

Phase 1 of this research was designed to validate the questionnaires so that more extensive data can be gathered in Phase 2. The questionnaires were developed according to the constructs detailed below. These constructs and questions were informed by reviewing instruments in the Cambridge ESOL 'impact toolkit' (see Saville's article in this issue) as well as the findings from the interviews in Phase 1. Considerable care was taken in the drafting of the learner

Table 3: Data collection overview

| | Persons/organisation involved | Format and channel of communication | Language used |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Interviews (Research questions 1 and 2) | FERE (President of FERE Madrid and four personnel instrumental in the development and on going management of BEDA) | Group, face-to-face | English, Spanish with interpretation |
| | Teachers (BEDA co-ordinators) | One-to-one, face-to-face | English |
| Questionnaires (Research questions 2 and 3) | Students (106) | Internet | Spanish |
| | Teachers (24) | Internet | English |
| | Parents (43) | Internet | Spanish |
| Tests | Students | Paper-based | English |

Table 4: Questionnaire construct overview

| Learners (48 questions) | Teachers including language assistants (99 questions) | Parents (38 questions) |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation/attitudes towards learning English • Proficiency, including student perceptions of proficiency • Perceptions of use of English/Spanish in the classroom, <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners</i> exams and assessment in general • Changes in teacher practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation/attitudes towards teaching English • Proficiency • Changes in teacher practice – e.g. teaching style/quality of teaching, materials, curriculum and lesson planning, definition and use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), dynamics of school's English teaching community • Perceptions of own teaching practice, assessment practice, use of English/Spanish in the classroom, student ability, student perceptions of <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners</i> exams and assessment in general | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of child's reasons for learning English, how motivated child is to learn English • Level of involvement |

questionnaires to ensure that the language was simple, clear and appropriate for younger learners. The questionnaires were validated and amended using expert judgement, including an expert in the assessment of young learners. The student and parent questionnaires were translated into Spanish and quality control procedures were used which again included ensuring that the language was appropriate for young learners. No translation issues became apparent in the review or administration of the questionnaires and the BEDA co-ordinators reported that the students were able to understand and respond to the learner questionnaire without difficulty. Teacher questionnaires were administered in English as teachers had sufficient proficiency in English.

Table 4 illustrates the constructs covered by each of the three questionnaires. The total number of questions for each questionnaire is indicated in parentheses. The questionnaires were web based and were broken down into short construct sections. A Likert scale was used so that participants only had to select one of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' for each question.

Test data

Students who completed the questionnaires had also taken a *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exam in the June 2011 session. The data was not triangulated at an individual level; however, general trends of the data for all of 2011 *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams for BEDA schools were examined together with the interview and questionnaire data.

Interview findings

The findings from the interview with FERE are presented first, followed by the findings from the interviews with BEDA co-ordinators.

FERE's reasons behind BEDA and early evidence of impacts

FERE spoke about the need for school students in Spain to improve their English and said that the BEDA programme was designed to give support and structure to what already existed in schools rather than to be directive over teaching methods and practices. The programme was designed to be flexible enough to cater for all schools, with the tiered model (see Figure 1) providing an embedded motivational factor so that schools would have something to aspire to. FERE spoke

about the vital partnership with Cambridge ESOL stating that the examinations are of key importance in providing external validation. This external validation and international prestige of the exams was seen as a critical unifying factor given the flexibility schools have within the BEDA programme in terms of teaching methods and practices.

The desired impacts of FERE in establishing the BEDA programme are expressed in terms of 'quantity' and 'quality'. FERE would like to have a large number of FERE schools join the BEDA programme and taking Cambridge English examinations, but more importantly it aims to have a high-quality programme to positively impact on learners' English proficiency. It recognises that the programme needs to be dynamic and aims to keep the number of schools manageable so that FERE can 'be there in the daily life of the teacher' providing them with the support they need. In their general discussions with schools, FERE has heard the following regarding early impacts of the BEDA programme:

- Learners now use much more English in schools. There is the view that they have lost the fear of speaking English in public.
- Teacher motivation has increased.
- Teacher confidence in using English has increased. BEDA meetings are now all in English, which was not the case at the beginning of the programme.
- Teaching practice has become more creative, particularly in schools where Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is used.
- The contribution of the language assistants has been very positive.
- Parents are happy as BEDA visualises what they requested. They are very satisfied with the language assistants which they describe as a 'visual factor'. They can clearly see that schools are making an effort. They are very happy with the examinations, and the numbers of learners taking the examinations has increased despite the economic crisis.

In addition, FERE gave two examples of the positive impacts already seen from the BEDA programme:

- The Madrid Ministry of Education (in *Escuelas Católicas de Madrid* 2010, 2011) has publicly praised the BEDA programme.
- The programme has been exported to other regions in Spain. Regions also use Cambridge English examinations,

follow the structure of the tiered approach outlined above and have the same membership requirements.

As well as these positive impacts, FERE discussed issues surrounding teacher workload. For teachers and BEDA co-ordinators there is an increased workload, particularly for staff in schools new to BEDA, while they respond to the demands of the programme.

Motivating factors for schools joining the BEDA programme

The BEDA co-ordinators from each school gave a variety of reasons for their school's participation in BEDA, which are summarised as follows:

Relationship with FERE: As one of the founder schools of FERE, school 2 said that BEDA is something FERE was promoting and 'we joined BEDA because we are close to FERE and we always collaborate'.

To keep up with other schools and progress in bilingual education: This was an important consideration for each school with school 3 saying that 'bilingual education is essential today. Other schools have started it and we didn't want to get behind'. Similarly school 4 stated that joining BEDA provided them with resources, the opportunity to take the Cambridge English examinations and the provision of more hours of English tuition than was possible before joining the programme. This was a stronger motivator for schools new to the programme, and at lower tiers (schools 3 and 4) than schools who have been in the BEDA programme for a longer period and are at higher tiers (schools 1 and 2), and are already seen as 'leaders'.

To gain visibility: This was the key factor for school 1. They saw the BEDA programme as giving visibility to parents for what they were already doing. They see parents as the most important stakeholder and commented that progress in learning languages is not very visible to parents in the early stages, and that 'the perception was that we did nothing. We thought BEDA was a good way of bringing everything together and promoting what we were doing ... with Cambridge being behind the project, we thought why not'.

External reference: This is important to all schools and can also be seen as part of 'visibility'. School 1 outlined the importance of having external evidence from the Cambridge English exams 'rather than just saying your child is good'. School 4 spoke of the different motivators for teachers and families. For example, they said that for the teachers the external reference from Cambridge English exams provides evidence of improvement over years whereas for families it is the extrinsic motivation (Dornyei 1994) that the examinations provide 'because the children get something for their future'.

Early impacts for schools in the BEDA programme

The early impacts of the BEDA programme experienced by these four schools are summarised below. The analysis of the interview data was done thematically and therefore not

all themes below are relevant for each school. For example, school 4, at Tier 3, is very new to the programme and at the time of this research, had not yet had a Cambridge English exam administration. Where specific differences apply across schools, these are outlined.

Motivation/attitudes

School 2 has been using Cambridge English examinations for nearly six years (at the time of this study) and, in the view of the BEDA co-ordinator, as a result students 'are more motivated than in the past'. School 1 also commented that student motivation has improved but is hesitant to link this directly to the BEDA programme or the Cambridge English examinations saying that it could be to do with the importance of English more generally. Both school 1 and 2, at higher tiers of BEDA and users of the Cambridge English exams for a longer period, talked about how over time the exams are seen as 'less scary' for students and that now it is common for students to talk about the exams with their siblings or in the playground, meaning that they are now seen simply as part of what they do at school. School 1 also described how within families 'things have become quite competitive'. For example, 'sometimes in families the older child will say can my sister take the mock [practice exam] as well?'. For school 3, the BEDA programme and examinations were still relatively new but the 'exams have been more popular than we thought'. They highlighted the extrinsic motivation of students in taking the examinations, for example, 'the exams give students a goal to work towards. Students know the exams will be good for their future, they are very worried about the future'.

Perceptions: Increased self-awareness of students

School 2, which has been using Cambridge English examinations since 2006, the longest out of the four schools in this project, described the exams as having had an important impact on student self-awareness, for example 'they say "I got a bad mark in listening, what can I do about it?" Students see particular problems and want to resolve them ... The atmosphere at school is completely different and now students are much more self-aware as to their strengths and weaknesses than they were at the start of the programme'. This illustrates the control and autonomy students are taking over their learning as a result of the information they receive from Cambridge English examinations. School 2 saw this change after they had been using Cambridge English examinations for about three years. This aspect was not discussed in the interview with school 1 and schools 3 and 4 are too new to the programme to have experienced this impact.

Perceptions: Increased self-awareness of parents

Awareness among parents has increased for the two schools at higher tiers of BEDA and with longer experience of using the Cambridge English examinations. For example school 2 claimed that parents now know all the names of the Cambridge English exams and have a stronger awareness of their children's strengths and weaknesses in English as a result of the introduction of the Cambridge English examinations, while school 1 stated that 'most parents know which exams their children are ready for'. For schools 3 and 4, which were new to the programme, parents did not have the same

knowledge of the exams and therefore they have put extra efforts into communication with parents. This highlights the importance of Maxim 3 ('COMMUNICATE') of the 1996 model of impact proposed by Milanovic and Saville (see Saville's article in this issue).

Changes in teaching practice: Impact of assessments on teaching practice

While school 1, at the highest tier of BEDA, felt that they were doing what they had always been doing, schools 2 and 3 talked about the impact the Cambridge English examinations have had on the teaching practice in their school. For example, school 2 said that the exams highlight where they need to focus, which they now take into account in their planning. School 2 also spoke about the need to teach strategies or tips related to taking the exams such as 'don't get stuck on a question, etc.'. School 3, although new to the exams, had already 'changed what we are doing with speaking to make it match the exam. We have more communication activities as a direct result of the exam'. This reflects what Saville (this issue) refers to as 'impact by design'.

Changes in teaching practice: Impact of BEDA programme on teaching practice

Schools 3 and 4, at Tier 3 and relatively new to the programme, were positive about the training sessions with school 3 saying that 'it has motivated teachers in a positive way ... We see other people doing things and we don't want to get behind', again highlighting the notion of 'keeping up with others'. Although schools 1 and 2, at higher tiers and with longer membership in the programme, were positive about the opportunity to share with teachers in other schools they felt that 'the training has to be very worthwhile given that teachers are giving up their time and are very tired'. School 1 suggested that social media could be used for teachers to share ideas and materials and to communicate which would help to alleviate the pressures on time needed for the training.

When discussing the use of CLIL with schools, it was apparent that there were very different practices across schools and varying levels of teacher confidence in implementing CLIL. There was no relationship between confidence and the length of time a school had been a member of BEDA or their membership tier. Although the use of CLIL is promoted rather than imposed, schools felt that central training sessions on the use of CLIL and the sharing of ideas with other schools would be beneficial.

Proficiency: Student proficiency

Schools 1, 2 and 3 all claimed that the biggest change in student proficiency has been in oral skills since becoming members of the BEDA programme. They stated that this in part is due to the impact of the language assistants provided by BEDA, however, the Cambridge English examinations have also had an impact as described by school 3 above.

Visibility of school efforts

The notion of increased visibility was not a construct initially under investigation; however, it came out clearly in the data in terms of giving clear evidence to parents of the efforts the school is making to improve their child's English. For example School 2 stated that the BEDA placard (given to all schools

on joining BEDA and placed above the school entrance) is positive as 'it is something visual to show that we are changing things at the school' while school 1 is pleased that parents are beginning to see what they do through the BEDA programme. Another aspect of visibility comes from the Cambridge English examinations. For example, school 2 stated 'it is an organisation with an international reputation'. The native speaker language assistants provided by BEDA were also viewed positively.

Unexpected impacts

School 2 described the increased level of self-awareness of students discussed above as an unexpected but positive impact: 'things have changed a lot, you have to look for new ways as students want to improve'. One co-ordinator commented that the other teachers in the training courses provided by BEDA seemed to have a low level of English and that maybe too many schools were becoming bilingual before they were ready. The impact on teacher time was also mentioned as a negative impact.

Future

For school 4, new to the programme, the focus is simply on increasing the confidence of their students. For the three other schools the future poses challenges for school planning as learner proficiency improves and schools progress through the BEDA tiers. School 2 summarised the situation as follows: 'Twenty years ago nobody complained that the students didn't speak English but now that's not the problem. Their children are the perfect tourists but the target is 80% leave with *FCE*. Now we are 40-50%. Many students will apply for university and they will need B2. The expectations are so different that the preparation, the methodology and everything needs to be completely different'. Schools discussed concerns about how they would manage the changes required of their teaching practices and preparation (e.g. more hours of English and more CLIL) to meet the needs of their improving students as they progress through the tiers of BEDA.

School 3 spoke of concerns they have when their current principal, who is very motivated, retires. As they are fairly new to the programme, they also wondered if the current level of motivation is sustainable long term.

Questionnaire findings

In this article it is not possible to discuss all questionnaire constructs (see Table 4) or findings in detail, therefore the main findings for each group of respondents (student, teacher, parent) are summarised below and discussed in relation to the interview findings where relevant. For the student questionnaires, findings are presented under key construct areas whereas the teacher and parent data, due to a smaller number of respondents and space constraints, is summarised across constructs. Data from the four schools has been accumulated, as with the exception of one finding which is specifically mentioned, there were no significant differences in findings across schools. Percentage agreement represents the sum of responses for 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Student questionnaire findings: Motivation/attitudes towards learning English

Overall, students were very positive about the teaching and learning of English. They were very strongly aware (100% agreement) that English will help them to get a job in the future and that it allows them to learn new things (over 95% agreement), demonstrating the strong extrinsic motivation they have for learning English. This supports the early impacts in terms of motivation and attitudes as outlined in the interview findings above. There was 95% agreement from students that their teacher makes learning English fun and 75% agreement that English is their hobby, demonstrating more intrinsic motivations (Dornyei 1994).

Student questionnaire findings: Student proficiency

The data showed that students prefer speaking and listening to reading and writing, with reading least favoured by a greater proportion of students. A greater proportion of students felt that they were good at speaking, corroborating teacher views from the interviews. Although listening was the second most liked skill, it was rated as the skill that students thought that they were the least good at.

Student questionnaire findings: Perceptions of Cambridge English: Young Learners examinations

Over 95% of students agreed that the tests helped them to understand their progress and that they understood what they had to do in the tests, could do them ok and had enough time to complete them. There was also very strong agreement (85%) that students found the topics interesting. Overall half of the students (51%) stated that they liked the tests. As the next section shows, this reflects how they felt about taking tests generally.

The fact that such a high proportion of students felt that the tests helped them to understand their progress further illustrates the extrinsic motivation students expressed in stating the importance of English for their future. This is also supported by the interview findings.

Student questionnaire findings: Perceptions of assessments in general

In terms of students' perceptions of tests in general, 54% said they liked taking tests (compared with 51% who agreed they like the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams). A higher proportion (59%) worried about taking tests and 93% of students said that taking tests helped them to understand their progress, showing once again students' awareness of the importance of testing and progression for their future.

Additional student comments:

Twenty-five students made additional comments at the end of the questionnaire. These three comments are representative of all comments made:

- 'I like the Cambridge exams because thanks to them better English'
- 'English will help me a lot in life and is very interesting'
- 'I don't like exams'.

Teacher questionnaire findings: Overall impact of BEDA and Cambridge English examinations

In general teachers were very positive about the programme. The results showed 100% agreement that teachers were pleased their school had joined the BEDA programme and is using Cambridge English exams. The certificates were also very positively received, with 100% of teachers saying that learners and parents liked the certificates, which supports the interview and student questionnaire data and reflects the high level of extrinsic motivation.

There was over 80% agreement that students' proficiency had improved and that they were more motivated to learn English as a result of the introduction of the Cambridge English exams. This supports the interview findings in relation to motivation and attitudes.

The BEDA training days were appreciated with over 80% agreement from teachers that they were useful and helped them improve as a teacher; however, in teachers' views the Cambridge English exams have impacted more on teacher motivation and teaching practice than the overall scheme. For example, there was 75% agreement that teachers were more motivated to teach English as a result of using the Cambridge English exams compared with 55% as a result of having joined the BEDA programme. Similarly, there was 64% agreement that teaching practice had changed as a result of the Cambridge English exams compared with 50% agreement that it changed as a result of having joined the BEDA programme. In Phase 2 it would be interesting to delve more deeply into the nature of the changes to teaching practice including whether these are perceived as positive or negative changes by teachers.

Parent questionnaire findings

In terms of parent perceptions, although all parents agreed that they worry about their child's progress in English, they also all agreed that they were pleased that their child's school was part of the BEDA programme and that their child was learning English. There was also 100% agreement from parents that they liked the Cambridge English exams and the Cambridge English certificates. All parents agreed that their child liked getting a certificate from Cambridge English.

Demonstrating the strong extrinsic motivation, there was over 90% agreement from parents that their child is learning English in order to help them get a good job in the future, which perhaps accounts for the worry parents feel about their child's progress. There was strong agreement (greater than 80%) from parents that their child is motivated, likes to learn English, is good at English and likes the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams. Parents also strongly agreed (greater than 80%) that their child knows more about their level after taking a *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exam.

There was between 60% and 80% agreement that parents know a lot about the BEDA programme and Cambridge English exams. The strongest amount of disagreement (71%) from parents was in relation to their perception of their child's level of knowledge about the BEDA programme. There was stronger disagreement for schools new to the programme.

Test data: Student proficiency

Cambridge English: Young Learners test data for all BEDA schools which administered *Cambridge English: Young Learners*

exams during 2011 was analysed and it shows two strong general trends. First, over half of the students achieved four or five shields per paper when the data across assessments (i.e. *Cambridge English: Starters*, *Cambridge English: Movers* and *Cambridge English: Flyers*) and skills is accumulated. Five is the highest number of shields obtainable and indicates that 'your child did very well in that skill' (Cambridge ESOL 2012). Second, it is clear that there is a difference across skills. For example, although the picture for Speaking shows that two-thirds of students achieved five shields, for Listening, Reading and Writing the picture differs with a higher proportion of students achieving three or four shields. The strength of speaking skills relative to listening, reading and writing is a pattern seen across Spain and also globally for *Cambridge English: Young Learners*; however, the pattern for BEDA schools is more extreme with a larger and more pronounced gap between Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing. The findings support the teachers' comments in the interviews that speaking is the skill that has most improved as a result of the BEDA programme. It also corroborates the questionnaire data as a greater proportion of students feel that they are good at speaking and that listening is the skill they are least good at, although it is the second most liked skill after speaking. When FERE were presented with these results, they were not surprised as they reflected their perception that listening was weaker than the other skills. This raises challenges for FERE and schools to improve learners' skills in listening, reading and writing.

Conclusions

In this section, the conclusions of Phase 1 of the BEDA impact project are presented under 'positive impacts' and 'challenges'.

Positive impacts

It is clear that students, teachers and parents are in general very happy with the Cambridge English examinations and the BEDA programme. Particular elements that have been successful are detailed below:

Motivations/attitudes towards learning English: The interview and student questionnaire data showed that students enjoy and are very motivated to learn English. Students have strong extrinsic motivation to learn English and recognise its importance with 100% agreeing that learning English will help them get a good job in the future. Over 90% of parents agreed that learning English is important for their child's future and over 80% of teachers agreed that students were more motivated to learn English after the introduction of Cambridge English examinations. This illustrates the impacts that political decisions and directives outlined at the start of the article (macro context) have on the micro context (learner and the classroom).

Perceptions - increased self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses: One school, after three years of using Cambridge English examinations, has found that the results have increased students' self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and that they are now able to use the results formatively, providing them with more control and autonomy over their learning. The questionnaire data

complements this finding, with very strong agreement that the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* tests help students to see their progress. The interview data indicate that this was more prevalent in the schools that had been using Cambridge English examinations for some time and it is likely that schools new to the examinations will experience these impacts in several years' time.

Perceptions - external reference: The interview data showed that teachers and parents particularly appreciate the external reference that the Cambridge English examinations provide and the fact that they are internationally recognised. The questionnaire data revealed that 100% of teachers are pleased that the school is a member of the BEDA programme and is using Cambridge English examinations. One hundred per cent of parents said that they like the Cambridge English assessments and certificates.

Student proficiency: Over 80% of teachers agreed that student proficiency has improved as a result of the school joining the BEDA programme and using Cambridge English examinations, particularly in speaking, as also highlighted in the interviews.

Visibility of the programme: The BEDA programme has brought extra visibility to stakeholders, especially to parents, as they can see what schools are doing to improve their children's English. The placards, language assistants and Cambridge ESOL certificates were commented on particularly positively. The questionnaire data also showed that the Cambridge English examinations are extremely well received within the BEDA programme.

Changes in teacher practice: Training within the BEDA programme has provided essential support for schools. This is particularly true for schools new to the programme as illustrated by the interview data. The teacher questionnaire data showed that over 80% of teachers agreed that the BEDA training days help them improve as a teacher and that the Cambridge English examinations have made them more motivated to teach English. The data has highlighted how teachers are using the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* test results formatively to structure their teaching practice according to their learners' strengths and weaknesses.

Challenges for the future

As with any dynamic programme, there are areas which pose challenges for the future:

Changes in teacher practice - ongoing support: Progressing through the tiers of BEDA is a goal for each school but they expressed concerns about how the increased requirements, e.g. additional hours of English tuition and more CLIL, would impact on their teaching practices, methodology and preparation. The interview data revealed a need for teachers to be supported by FERE and schools experiencing similar challenges.

Changes in teacher practice - teacher network: Teachers mentioned they would like to be able to talk more easily with other teachers experiencing the same issues, e.g. use of CLIL, progression through the BEDA tiers. The interview data revealed a desire to have a media site/forum to meet this need.

Ongoing communication: Stakeholders at differing stages of the BEDA programme have different information needs. Despite both schools' and FERÉ's efforts, the questionnaire data reveals that parents still felt that they and their child do not know enough about the BEDA programme. This was a stronger finding for schools new to the programme. This reiterates the importance of Maxim 3 ('COMMUNICATE') of the 1996, model of impact proposed by Milanovic and Saville (see Saville, this issue).

Student proficiency: Improving listening, reading and writing skills: Students performed much better at speaking in the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* tests than in Listening, Reading and Writing. While this matches the general trend for all candidates taking *Cambridge English: Young Learners*, the picture for BEDA schools is slightly more pronounced. A challenge for the future is to reduce this gap in student performance, particularly in listening.

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A small-scale pilot study investigating the impact of Cambridge English: Young Learners in China

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Introduction

Ensuring that Cambridge ESOL examinations are fit for purpose, 'impact by design' is a fundamental principle of good practice (Cambridge ESOL 2011a). *Cambridge English: Young Learners (YLE)* exams are designed to give a consistent measure of how well 7-12-year-olds are doing in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The exams are also designed to make learning enjoyable. Children are encouraged to work towards three certificates: *Cambridge English: Starters*, *Cambridge English: Movers* and *Cambridge English: Flyers* by earning 'shields' that record their progress (Cambridge ESOL 2012a).

Cambridge English: Young Learners exams went live in 1997, and since its introduction to China in the same year, it has been attracting more and more young learners, becoming one of the most popular standardised English exams for

young learners in China. In 2001, the Chinese government established a national policy whereby children in state-funded schools must start to learn a foreign language (mainly English¹) from an earlier age, namely, from Grade 3 in primary school (age 9) instead of from Grade 7 junior middle school (age 12). The main impetus for this policy was the urgent need to comprehensively improve the English language proficiency of the Chinese population to meet the challenges of the new millennium brought about by globalisation, in which English is seen as a key to international communication. With the consequent upsurge in younger learners of English learning in China, the importance of research into the impact of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* in the Chinese context has become urgent. It is particularly important to discover young learners' perceptions of the exams and the impact of the exams on classroom teaching patterns, because young

¹ Other foreign languages include Japanese, German, Russian, French and Spanish.

learners are the direct users of the exams and classroom teaching is the main means for them to learn English in the Chinese EFL context.

This paper reports on Phase I of a wider research project investigating the impact of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* in China. In this phase, we conducted a small-scale pilot study through a questionnaire survey of young learners, supplemented by focus-group interviews of a selection of the learners and their teachers. The pilot study involves one private language institute in Chongqing. Chongqing is, however, the biggest and most populous city in China, with 36 million people. There are more than 50 colleges and universities in Chongqing and consequently it has considerable educational influence in China. The language institute selected for this pilot study is a well-known and reputable one within this megacity. This pilot study aims to address two broad research questions:

- What are young learners' perceptions of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams?
- What is the washback of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams on classroom teaching patterns in private language training institutes compared with young learners' compulsory English classes in state-funded primary schools?

In the next phase, we will refine the research questions and questionnaires, and collect data on a wider scale.

Methodology

In the present study, a questionnaire is employed as one of the two main instruments. Qi (2004) points out that questionnaires have three advantages: ability to sample large numbers, facility for in-depth investigation, and relatively high reliability. The young learners' questionnaire was written in Chinese in a way that was accessible to the target age group of the respondents (aged 10–13). When the questionnaire was designed, we took account of the cognitive processing level of their age and the fact that they were still acquiring basic literacy in their first language. We used simple and straightforward Chinese to ask short questions to elicit direct and accurate information from the primary school children who were the main participants. Several question types were used and a description and example of each follows:

- A 5-point Likert scale question: e.g. What do you think of the difficulty level of the Listening paper of *Cambridge English: Young Learners*? 1 = very easy, 2 = easy, 3 = moderate, 4 = difficult, 5 = very difficult.
- A multiple-choice question with one answer only: e.g. How much time do you usually spend on English learning per day? 1) no time spent 2) about half an hour 3) about one hour 4) more than one hour.
- A multiple-choice question with more than one answer allowed: e.g. What are the top three classroom activities often held in class? 1) listening to the teacher explain the text 2) listening to text recordings 3) doing word dictation 4) listening to English songs, etc.

The sources used to construct the questionnaire included: *Cambridge English Young Learners Handbooks for Teachers* (Cambridge ESOL 2012b); personal communication with test developers and validation researchers of *Cambridge English: Young Learners*; the Cambridge ESOL impact study pamphlet and proposal templates (Cambridge ESOL 2011b); Alderson and Wall's 'Washback Hypothesis' (1993); the researchers' local knowledge of the Chinese educational culture and current practices in state-funded schools as well as those of privately owned language training institutes; and the student questionnaires used in the impact study of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* in China (see Gu and Saville's article in this issue).

The questionnaire had three parts. Part 1 covered children's demographic information (see Table 1). Part 2 investigated children's perceptions of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* including their interest in and motivation for learning English, time spent learning English, familiarity with the exam, perceptions of the exams' accuracy and difficulty level and influence of the exam on their learning. Part 3 sought to ascertain the impact of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* on the teaching patterns found in the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classrooms compared with children's compulsory English classes in primary schools, including textbook selection and preferences, English language use, classroom activities, classroom atmosphere and teacher feedback.

The survey was conducted in May 2012 in a privately-owned language training institute which prepares students for *Cambridge English: Young Learners* in Chongqing, China. In total, 80 student questionnaires were distributed. Necessary explanations of the question items were offered to the participants during the survey. Of the 80 questionnaires, 72 were returned and fully completed and thus valid for analysis. At the time of the survey, the children had already sat *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams and obtained their certificates. Immediately after the survey, focus group interviews were conducted with a third of the surveyed children. The focus group interviews were kept as short as possible given the young learners' short attention span. One-to-one interviews were held with three teachers, who taught *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes and compulsory English classes in state-funded primary schools.

Findings and discussions

As shown in Table 1, most of the children investigated were between the ages of 10 and 13. Most of them started learning English at the age of 5. They were enrolled in Grades 2 to 6. The majority of them were at the level of *Cambridge English: Starters* and *Cambridge English: Movers* and performed well in *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams, managing to earn more than 10 shields.

Research Question 1: Young learners' perceptions of *Cambridge English: Young Learners*

As noted above, all the children involved in the study have taken *Cambridge English: Young Learners*. Fifty-seven per cent of them reported that they were very familiar or fairly familiar with the exams while 38% of them reported that they were somewhat familiar with the exams. In China, many

Table 1: Participant information

| | Options | Number (N = 72) | Percentage |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 31 | 43.1 |
| | Female | 41 | 56.9 |
| Age | Younger than 10 | 13 | 18.1 |
| | 10 to 13 | 59 | 81.9 |
| Starting age of English learning | Younger than 5 | 11 | 15.3 |
| | 5 to 10 | 58 | 80.5 |
| | Older than 10 | 3 | 4.2 |
| Grade* | Two | 2 | 2.8 |
| | Three | 11 | 15.3 |
| | Four | 18 | 25.0 |
| | Five | 29 | 40.3 |
| | Six | 12 | 16.7 |
| Level of Cambridge English: Young Learners | Starters | 30 | 41.7 |
| | Movers | 36 | 50.0 |
| | Flyers | 6 | 8.3 |
| Number of shields (Total 15) | Fewer than 5 | 1 | 1.4 |
| | 5 to 10 | 17 | 23.6 |
| | More than 10 | 54 | 75.0 |

*Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 2: Students' perceptions of the accuracy of Cambridge English: Young Learners in assessing the four skills (percentage agreement and mode)

| Skill | Not accurate at all (1) | Not accurate (2) | Moderate (3) | Accurate (4) | Very accurate (5) | Mode |
|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|------|
| Listening | 5.6 | 6.9 | 18.1 | 37.5 | 31.9 | 4 |
| Reading | 6.9 | 13.9 | 26.4 | 30.6 | 22.2 | 4 |
| Writing | 5.6 | 12.5 | 26.4 | 33.3 | 22.2 | 4 |
| Speaking | 4.2 | 5.6 | 25.0 | 40.3 | 25.0 | 4 |

children take exams according to their teachers' advice or their parents' requirements rather than because they wish to. As the learners concerned are very young, even though they have taken the exams, some of them might still feel that they are not familiar with the exams. In interviews, some children said that their purposes in taking the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes and the exams were to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses and to improve their English proficiency. Some did not pay attention to the test format and task types of the exams at all.

Seventy-five per cent of the young learners investigated reported that they are very interested in or fairly interested in learning English. These children had various motivations for learning English: 'To go abroad for further study' (69.4%), 'to communicate with others in English' (47.2%), 'interest in English' (40.3%), 'to perform better in English exams' (37.5%), and 'to watch cartoons and listen to songs in English' (36.1%). Interviews revealed that learners are concerned about their future development at quite a young age. They tend to view English as a tool for communication or a link with the outside world. Some of them, however, learn English for more intrinsic motivations such as interest and entertainment.

Since all the children involved had taken *Cambridge English: Young Learners* and received their results (see Table 1), they were asked for their opinion on the accuracy of the tests in assessing their four language skills. Concerning listening and speaking, most children praised the test highly. For reading and writing, the responses suggest slightly less satisfaction (see Table 2). However, it is important to

note that it is not clear whether this is because they think *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams were inaccurate in assessing reading and writing or because they simply were unhappy with the results they received for reading and writing. Therefore, further investigation may be necessary in future phases.

The interviews suggest that children's perceptions of the accuracy of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams play a part in strengthening their interest in English. The perception that it's an accurate assessment of their four skills helps motivate learners' participation in additional English-related activities, for example, watching cartoons in English, listening to English songs. *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams help them gain confidence because they can demonstrate their ability in the four skills, which helps to further strengthen their enthusiasm for learning English. For some children, their motivation appears to have shifted from 'for better performance in *Cambridge English: Young Learners* to learning English for the improvement of their own capacity and for the enrichment of their daily life.

On the whole, the children think *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams are at an appropriate difficulty level, though the Reading and Writing paper is perceived as relatively more difficult than the Listening and Speaking papers (see Table 3). Again, it is not clear whether the learners were making judgements concerning the difficulty of the Reading and Writing Paper or whether they were expressing their dissatisfaction with the results they received for reading and writing.

Table 3: Perceived difficulty level of Cambridge English: Young Learners exams (percentage agreement and mode)

| Paper | Very easy (1) | Easy (2) | Moderate (3) | Difficult (4) | Very difficult (5) | Mode |
|---------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|------|
| Listening | 11.1 | 18.1 | 31.9 | 27.8 | 9.7 | 3 |
| Reading and Writing | 4.2 | 6.9 | 45.8 | 30.6 | 11.1 | 3 |
| Speaking | 6.9 | 12.5 | 47.2 | 22.2 | 9.7 | 3 |

Table 4: Influence of Cambridge English: Young Learners on skill learning (percentage agreement and mode)

| Skill | Very negative (1) | Negative (2) | No impact (3) | Positive (4) | Very positive (5) | Mode |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|------|
| Listening | 4.2 | 4.2 | 27.8 | 40.3 | 23.6 | 4 |
| Reading | 2.8 | 11.1 | 31.9 | 30.6 | 23.6 | 3 |
| Writing | 4.2 | 5.6 | 38.9 | 23.6 | 27.8 | 3 |
| Speaking | 1.4 | 4.2 | 18.1 | 38.9 | 37.5 | 4 |

Table 5: Young learners' textbooks

| CYLE Pre-starters (2010) | PEPEP Book 1 (2003) | PECUP Book 1 (2001) |
|--|------------------------|---------------------|
| Unit 1 Greetings | Unit 1 Hello | Unit 1 Greetings |
| Unit 2 Beginning sounds | Unit 2 Look at me | Unit 2 My friends |
| Unit 3 Dog, elephant, fish and giraffe | Unit 3 Let's paint | Unit 3 On a farm |
| Unit 4 Find the hidden letters | Recycle 1 | Unit 4 My face |
| Unit 5 The falling letters | Unit 4 We love animals | Unit 5 Numbers |
| Unit 6 Fun with letters | Unit 5 Let's eat | Unit 6 Colours |
| Unit 7 Animal fun | Unit 6 Happy birthday | |
| Unit 8 Play and score | Recycle 2 | |
| Unit 9 Write and colour the letters | Vocabulary | |
| Unit 10 Let's learn the alphabet | | |
| Unit 11 Meeting new friends | | |
| Unit 12 What is red and what is black? | | |
| Unit 13 Which and where | | |
| Unit 14 How many | | |
| Unit 15 'Word cheer' game | | |
| Unit 16 Happy New Year! | | |

According to the survey data, the young learners allocated more time to speaking (36.1%) and listening (34.7%) than to reading (18.1%) and writing (11.1%). It could be that the more time children spent on certain skills, the less difficult they felt the related test part was.

Eighty-one per cent of the children spent 30–60 minutes per day learning English. The children interviewed reported that English is not a compulsory subject when moving from primary (Grades 1–6) to junior middle (Grades 7–9) schools. That is why they spent a relatively limited amount of time on English than on Chinese and Mathematics – the two most important compulsory subjects for them.

The survey data shows that young learners believe *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams have exerted a very positive influence on their learning of the four skills, especially speaking (see Table 4). This also suggests that the less difficult the children consider a certain paper in the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* exams, the more they believe in the positive influence of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* on learning the related skill.

Research Question 2: Impact of Cambridge English: Young Learners on the Cambridge English: Young Learners classroom teaching patterns

In China, textbooks are seen as core teaching materials, an important component of English classes and the best way

to achieve teaching objectives (Huang and Xu 2010). In the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes, the main textbook used is *Cambridge Young Learners English* (CYLE) published by Xi'an Jiao Tong University Press. In compulsory English classes in state-funded schools, two versions of the textbook *Primary English* (PE) are used, one published by The People's Education Press (PEPEP) (69.4%), and the other by Chongqing University Press (PECUP) (30.6%). Table 5 shows the unit numbers and topics of the first level of the three books.

Survey results indicate that a higher percentage of the children (59.3%) preferred CYLE to PE (40.7%). The reasons for the different responses given by the children to an open-ended question were that CYLE has more interesting topics and is richer in content. It contains more speaking exercises which may meet the needs of the children studying for *Cambridge English: Young Learners* in terms of genuine communication opportunities. In the interview, Teacher 1 mentioned that the number of oral tasks in CYLE is approximately twice those in PE at the same level. Teacher 2 suggested that the abundant cross-cultural knowledge in CYLE is not matched in PE.

According to the survey data, in the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes, the young learners answered questions more actively and were also given more one-to-one question-answer opportunities than in compulsory classes (see Table 6). Teacher 3 explained in the interview that

the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* speaking component requires one-to-one interaction with the examiner in English. That kind of skill can be taught in class by encouraging children to answer questions individually. Moreover, children at this age often like to push themselves to do more and perform better (Wang 1998). Answering questions voluntarily and individually may, to some extent, satisfy their need to make their presence felt in public. Further studies in the next phase will employ classroom observations to validate the findings of the survey and interview data on learners' participation in classroom activities and on teacher-student interactions.

Table 6: Question-answer formats (percentage agreement) by class type

| | <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners class</i> | Compulsory English class |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Answering questions required by the teacher | 24.3 | 37.8 |
| Answering questions voluntarily | 39.2 | 31.1 |
| Answering questions in group or class | 25.7 | 39.2 |
| Answering questions individually | 74.3 | 60.8 |

In both *Cambridge English: Young Learners* and compulsory classes, teachers usually combine English with Chinese in their lessons (see Table 7). This method might be the most feasible one for beginners of English because their vocabulary range and size at this stage is quite small and perhaps insufficient for an English-dominated class.

In both types of classes, about 20% of the students reported that their teachers mainly use English in class. Some children complained in response to the open-ended question that they sometimes cannot follow their teachers when they speak English.

In *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes, teachers spent more time teaching and gave less time for children to practise than in compulsory classes (see Table 7). This seems to contradict the findings that there is more interaction between teachers and students in *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes (see Table 8). Teacher 3 gave the following explanation in the interview: 'The *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes are of shorter duration. The teaching pace is set according to the agreed administration dates of *Cambridge English: Young Learners*. With time pressure, more exercises are left for children to practise after the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes'. In fact, the nature of 'children's practice' in the compulsory classes needs to be verified through classroom observation in further studies. It is not

Table 7: Language used and time allocation in class (percentage agreement)

| | | <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners class</i> | Compulsory English class |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Language used* | Mainly English | 23.0 | 20.3 |
| | Half English and half Chinese | 75.7 | 66.2 |
| | Mainly Chinese | 1.4 | 13.5 |
| Time allocation | Mainly teacher's teaching | 51.4 | 35.1 |
| | Half teaching and half practice | 48.6 | 58.1 |
| | Mainly children's practice | 0 | 6.8 |

*Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 8: Classroom atmosphere (percentage agreement)

| | <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners class</i> | Compulsory English class |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| There is often/always interaction between teachers and students | 70.2 | 55.4 |
| There is often/always laughter in class | 70.3 | 44.6 |

Table 9: Emphasis on the four skills in class (percentage agreement)

| Skill | <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners class</i> | Compulsory English class |
|-----------|--|--------------------------|
| Listening | 32.4 | 37.8 |
| Writing | 23.0 | 17.6 |
| Reading | 44.6 | 39.2 |
| Speaking | 74.3 | 60.8 |

Table 10: Top three classroom activities

| Classes | Activities | Percentage |
|--|--|------------|
| <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners class</i> | Listening to the teacher analyse texts | 82.4 |
| | Dictation of new words | 74.3 |
| | Reading sentences in the texts | 70.3 |
| Compulsory English class | Listening to the teacher analyse texts | 70.3 |
| | Listening to the recordings of the texts | 63.5 |
| | Reading words in the texts | 62.2 |

clear whether 'children's practice' covers activities like silent reading, completing grammar exercises etc., namely, the kinds of activities that a teacher who is managing a large class might use and not necessarily activities designed to practise communication in English.

As pointed out by Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996), laughter in class is one of the manifestations of classroom atmosphere. The more laughter there is, the more favourable the classroom atmosphere is for English teaching and learning. Table 8 shows more interaction between the teacher and the young learners and a higher occurrence of laughter in *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes than in compulsory classes. This indicates that the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classroom atmosphere may have been more relaxing than in the compulsory class.

As a whole, teachers in both types of classes prioritised the four language skills similarly: speaking, reading, listening and writing (see Table 9). All the interviewed teachers and students mentioned that the key feature of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* is that it assesses all of the four skills.

There are both similarities and differences in the classroom activities of the two types of classes (see Table 10). The

Table 11: Frequency of positive feedback from teachers (percentage agreement)

| Class type | Never (1) | Seldom (2) | Sometimes (3) | Often (4) | Always (5) | Mode |
|--|-----------|------------|---------------|-----------|------------|------|
| <i>Cambridge English: Young Learners</i> class | 6.8 | 13.5 | 24.3 | 29.7 | 25.7 | 4 |
| Compulsory English class | 8.1 | 6.8 | 28.4 | 32.4 | 24.3 | 4 |

similarity lies in the fact that 'listening to the teacher analyse texts' ranked first among all the classroom activities in both types of classes, i.e. the teacher explaining the grammatical rules, words and expressions, sentence patterns, text organisation features and meanings to the students, to ensure they understand the text. The difference is that accuracy is strengthened more by 'word dictation' in the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes and reading comprehension is at a higher cognitive level through 'reading sentences in the texts', i.e. understanding sentence meaning and practising reading fluency. In the compulsory classes, on the other hand, listening was emphasised through 'listening to the recordings of the texts', to help the students understand the text and to improve their listening comprehension ability by listening to tape recordings of the text; reading, however, is at the word level, i.e. through memorising words by repetition.

Teachers' positive feedback not only lets children know that their answers are correct, but also enhances their motivation to learn. It is a means of triggering children's language output (Chaudron 1988). Learner observation also indicates that positive feedback is very beneficial in the language learning process (Nunan 1991). The frequency of positive feedback given by teachers as reported by learners in both class types is very similar (see Table 11), though Teacher 2 noted in the interview that teachers are guided by the Speaking test of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* to offer students help and encouragement and try their utmost to give the young learners positive feedback.

Perhaps more positive feedback is needed for young learners, particularly in the context of Eastern etiquette and culture where generally the focus of feedback is what is being done wrong rather than what is being done right.

Conclusions

Given the limited numbers of participants contacted and the limited context within which this study took place, no generalisations can be made. However, the pilot study has provided valuable insights into how the potential impact of *Cambridge English: Young Learners* on learner motivation and teacher practice are perceived in a Chinese context.

The majority of the young learners in this study show strong interest in learning English, for which they have various intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. They spend time each day learning English, but prioritise certain skills over others. They believe that *Cambridge English: Young Learners* can accurately assess their English proficiency, and that it has exerted a very positive influence on their learning of the four language skills, particularly speaking. The tests' difficulty level is seen as moderate and appropriate for the test takers.

Cambridge English: Young Learners exams are seen as exerting a positive influence on the *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classroom teaching patterns compared with the classroom teaching patterns in compulsory English classes in

state-funded primary schools. The *Cambridge English: Young Learners* classes use textbooks which are more interesting and richer in content, with more oral practice tasks and abundant cross-cultural information. Children in the preparation classes for *Cambridge English: Young Learners* are more active. English is more frequently used in such preparation classes. The four skills are given the same emphasis in the preparation classes for *Cambridge English: Young Learners*. Accuracy in terms of speaking and writing output is emphasised and more cognitively demanding reading tasks are used. There is more teacher-student interaction. The classroom atmosphere is also more relaxed and favourable for English learning.

In addition, the study also offers some useful insights into how to use questionnaires and how to conduct interviews with young learners; for example, the questions need to match the young learners' cognitive ability through appropriate simplicity and straightforwardness. To improve the reliability and validity of the survey data, we also need to offer participants the necessary explanations of the question items. When conducting the interviews, interviewers need to show patience to guide the young learners to the key issues (though not, of course, to particular responses) because their minds can be very active, with a tendency to stray. Interviews should normally be kept as short as possible, given young learners' shorter attention spans. The pilot study has also provided a platform for a forthcoming large-scale study in the same megacity and the potential inclusion of other provinces in China for comparability purposes in the next phase.

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Impact of Cambridge English: Key for Schools and Preliminary for Schools – parents' perspectives in China

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Introduction

Cambridge English: Key (KET) for Schools and *Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET) for Schools* are designed for young learners between 11 and 14 years old and are aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) Levels A2 and B1 respectively. They are qualifications that show pupils can deal with everyday written and spoken English at a basic level and at an intermediate level respectively (Cambridge ESOL 2012a). They were introduced to China in 2009. Given the importance of identifying the kinds of impact these two widely used exams have on various stakeholders, a collaborative impact study is being conducted by two teams, one from the Language Assessment Research Institute in Chongqing University, China¹ and the other from the Research and Validation Group of Cambridge ESOL.

This paper reports on one part of the research project, specifically on parents' views, using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The key constructs under investigation included parents' knowledge of their child's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and their perceptions of and attitudes towards *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* exams. We also explored the impact of the two different Cambridge English exams and the impact of parents' educational backgrounds on children's EFL learning.

There is emerging evidence that parents play a key role in children's school attainment. For example, Douglas (1964) found that the biggest factor contributing to a child's educational success was parental involvement in the child's education. Recent findings by Feinstein, Duckworth and Sabates (2004) show that parental education and income has the most significant impact on a child's educational achievement. A new study by De Fraja, Oliveira and Zanchi (2010) has found that parents' effort towards their

child's educational achievement is crucial – playing a more significant role than that of the school or child. Among the findings of the First European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) is the importance of the informal language learning opportunities available to students, such as students' perception of their parents' knowledge of the foreign language tested and individual trips abroad (European Commission 2012). All these research findings highlight the 'inter-generational transmission of educational success' or failure (Feinstein, Duckworth and Sabates 2004:42) and the necessity to investigate parents' perspectives in the Chinese context of EFL learning.

The macro context of EFL learning in China

In the wake of the political reforms which opened China up to the outside world in 1978, and the establishment of Coastal Economic Zones in 1980, the state authorities considered it important to increase the number of competent users of English in a range of professions, businesses and enterprises. The new market economy strengthened the realisation that competence in English means easier access to well-paid jobs, which acted as a motivating factor for the Chinese population to improve their English proficiency.

In line with these political and social changes, China introduced reforms in education. For example, the national examinations for colleges and universities (commonly referred to as Gaokao) were restored in 1977 after a 10-year suspension. According to the new regulations of the Ministry of Education, foreign language teaching and learning were to be compulsory from junior middle school (Grade 7, age 12). English rapidly became the most popular of the foreign languages taught.² In 1983, English became a compulsory subject examined in Gaokao with equal status to Chinese and Mathematics. In 2001, the Chinese government established a

¹ The first phase of the project was implemented during the first author's visiting professorship with the Cambridge ESOL Research and Validation group from October 2011 to September 2012.

² Other foreign languages include Japanese, German, Russian, French and Spanish.

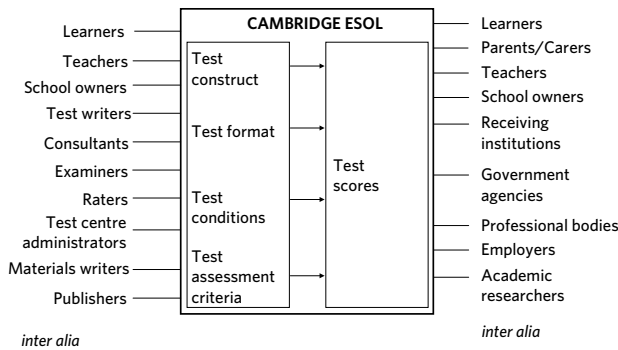
national policy whereby children in state-funded schools had to learn a foreign language (mainly English) from an earlier age, namely, from Grade 3 in primary school (age 9), instead of from Grade 7 in junior middle school. The main impetus for this policy is the need to meet the new challenges brought on by globalisation, in which English is considered key to international communication.

In China, parents tend to expect their children to ‘become somebody’, and, especially following the ‘One Couple, One Child’ family planning policy of 1982, not to miss any opportunities to gain an advantage over others at a young age. The traditional and still widely held beliefs are that being a scholar is superior to other walks of life, knowledge offers a ‘new leaf’, and education ensures one’s future.

Parents as stakeholders

According to a review of previous empirical washback and impact studies (Liu and Gu forthcoming), parents are among the least investigated stakeholders, although they are listed next to learners in the taxonomy of stakeholders in the testing community (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Stakeholders in the testing community (Taylor 1999, as cited in Saville 2003:60)



Given the increasingly important role played by English in education and development in China and the part parents are playing in young learners’ EFL experience, it is appropriate to investigate parental perspectives on test impact in general and on *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* in particular.

Research methods

Instruments: Questionnaire and interviews

The parents’ questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions were initially designed in Chinese, but for communication and discussion between the two impact study teams, were also translated into English. The main sources of information for the design were the following:

1. *Cambridge English: Key for Schools Handbook for Teachers* (Cambridge ESOL 2012b) and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools Handbook for Teachers* (Cambridge ESOL 2012c).

2. Consultation with *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* test developers and validation researchers (personal communication).
3. Cambridge ESOL impact study pamphlet and proposal templates (Cambridge ESOL 2011).
4. Previous ESOL washback and impact studies (e.g. Green 2007, Hawkey 2006).
5. China team’s washback and impact studies (e.g. Gu 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2011, Gu and Peng 2010, Gu and Wei 2012, Gu, Yang and Liu 2012).
6. China team’s local knowledge of young EFL learners and their parents in China.
7. Other theoretical and empirical work on test washback and impact (e.g. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons 1996, Alderson and Wall 1993, Bailey 1996, Cheng 2005, Cheng and Curtis 2004, Qi 2004, Saville 2010, Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ferman 1996, Wall 2005, Wall and Horák 2011, Watanabe 1996, 2004).

The questionnaire and interview design process was iterative, with more than a dozen revised versions of the data collection instruments developed over one and a half months. The validation of the questionnaire and the interview questions was ensured mainly through expert judgement and informal interviews by the China team with EFL young learners’ parents at four different training institutions in China.

The questionnaire for parents had three parts and 21 items. Part 1 sought parents’ demographic information (items 1-4). Part 2 covered children’s EFL learning (items 5-11), for example, the age their children started learning English, English homework, and time learning English per day. Part 3 investigated parents’ perceptions of and attitudes towards the Cambridge English exams, for example, the exams’ accuracy in assessing their children’s English proficiency, the influence of the exams on their children’s confidence, sense of achievement and interest in EFL learning.

The questionnaire had three item types:

1. Blank-fill e.g. At what age did your child begin to learn English? _____.
2. Multiple-choice: one answer only, e.g. Do you think the test has motivated your child in learning English? Yes No Not sure
3. Multiple-choice: more than one answer acceptable, e.g. Why do you want your child to take the test? To get a Cambridge English certificate To improve their educational opportunities in the future To improve their opportunities for a better job in the future To be able to live or travel abroad in the future.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted for two main purposes: to triangulate the questionnaire data and to explore in-depth information not revealed through the questionnaire data, such as a parent’s knowledge of their child’s test preparation activities, their attitudes towards and expectations of their child’s EFL learning, and their role in their child’s EFL learning.

Participants and data collection

Cambridge English: Key for Schools and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* were administered in Beijing on 4 December 2011. Many parents took their children to the test sites and waited there till the end of the exams. The China team took this opportunity to administer the questionnaires and conduct interviews with the parents at one test administration centre. Altogether 148 parents were surveyed. Forty-two received individual 5 to 10-minute interviews, eight audio-recordings were made, and the remaining 34 were documented by field notes.

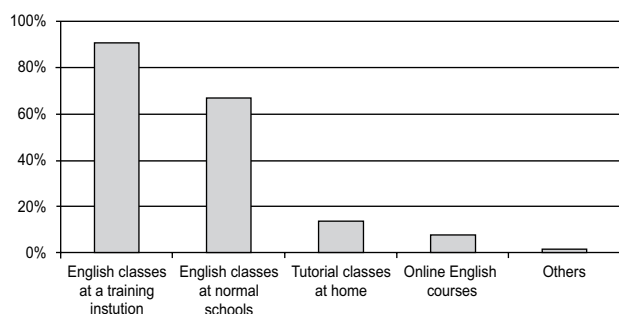
Findings and discussions

Most of the surveyed parents were mothers (74.7%). Seventy-nine per cent of all the parents have received a bachelor degree or above. They mainly worked in accounting and finance, engineering, the civil service, medicine and teaching. Most would be considered middle class, able to afford their children's extra education costs. Fifty-three per cent of the parents reported their children took *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and 47.2% took *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*.

Parents' knowledge of their children's EFL learning

Most children of the parents investigated started learning English at about 5 years old (pre-primary school). Ninety-eight per cent of them were enrolled in a primary school (ages from 6-12) at the time of the investigation, which meant that many were younger than the 11-14 target age group of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*. They were learning English mainly at training institutions (90.5%) and/or at normal schools (66.7%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Location of children's means of EFL learning



Training institutions are privately owned schools offering extra-curricular courses for children in various subjects, including English, generally attended at weekends, with relatively high fees. The major reason why many children are sent to training institutions in addition to attending normal schools is as follows: according to the 2001 national policy noted previously, the children in the study are required to start learning English in Grade 3. However, Beijing is the capital of China and a political, educational, cultural and international communication centre, where parents tend to have received a better education and understand the importance of English in their children's future education, career and life. Therefore, their children start learning English earlier than the nationally required age. In addition, many parents think the English instruction their children received in normal schools might

be inadequate and they may feel the content is not 'rich' or difficult enough.

The interview data indicates that there are three types of English training courses:

1. Integrative courses, generally lasting several terms, using textbooks such as *Cambridge in Mind for YLE* or *New Concept English* to teach the children the four macro-skills.
2. Last-minute test preparation courses, lasting usually two to three months, using coaching materials or sample test papers, focusing on test-taking strategies, task types and test formats.
3. Combined language skills and exam preparation courses, mainly integrated skills training with either half an hour of each session used for preparing for the target test, or the first two-thirds used for integrated skills training and the last third on test preparation.

The quality of training courses varies from teacher to teacher within the same institution and from institution to institution. Thus some parents have very positive views of the effects of training courses while others' views are less complimentary. The parent interview quotes below illustrate this variety of views:

Mother of a Grade 10 daughter, age 16, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: My daughter started EFL training courses at Grade 4. She has been at the same training institution for six years. She was not interested in English before, but now is very interested in and has little difficulty in learning English. She achieved almost full marks in English in her entrance exam to senior high school. She ranks the third at her normal school, feels good and works very hard. She is self-disciplined, watches English TV, listens to English radio, reads English novels, using a digital dictionary for new words.

Parent (no personal information): There are too many training institutions, but few qualified teachers. The teachers can teach and earn the money without knowledge of the exams. My child has learned English in a few institutions. What the teachers teach is not English, but test-taking strategies.

Mother of a primary school child, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: We parents were allowed to sit at the back of the classroom to attend the classes with the children. We noticed individual differences among teachers: If the teacher has limited knowledge, she is more confined to the textbooks; if the teacher is more knowledgeable, she would cover a wider range of content beyond the textbooks.

On a positive note, as many as 89.7% of the parents in our questionnaire-completing group thought that the children concerned liked their English teachers and liked learning English. More evidence of this is revealed in the interviews:

Father of a primary school son, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: My child mainly does the exercises assigned by the teacher. He listens to the teacher. The teacher plays an important role. A good teacher is very helpful in stimulating and encouraging the child. The child has made obvious progress in learning English.

Mother of a Grade 6 son, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: My child likes his teacher for *Cambridge English: Key*

for Schools and thus this increases his interest in learning English, having recited more words, and read more books.

In terms of the amount of time children spent at home on English per day, 49.7% spent between half an hour and one hour, 26.2% less than half an hour while 23.4% spent more than one hour. The interview data suggests that, on the whole, the younger the child, the shorter the time spent on learning English in a session at home, while the older the child, the less time there was for extra-curricular English, particularly in Grade 6 because they were graduating from primary school, in Grade 9 because they were graduating from junior middle school, and from Grade 10 onwards (senior high school), because they had more homework to do and had to learn more subjects. Almost all interviewed parents mentioned that their children did not have time on their own, even one day a week, to play. Many children were learning to the point of exhaustion.

Interview responses support the time pressures discussed above:

Grandmother of a Grade 4 granddaughter, age 9, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: My granddaughter started English in kindergarten at four years old. Now she is only nine, but is taking different courses at different training institutions at weekends. On Saturday afternoon, she leaves home at 1 p.m. and arrives at an institution at 15.00 p.m. to learn Chinese from 15.00 p.m. to 17.30 p.m., then English from 17.30 p.m. to 21.00 p.m. On Sunday, she goes to another institution to learn math. On weekdays she has a governess to teach her more after her normal school time. She has no day to rest or play at all.

Mother of a Grade 6 daughter, age 12, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: My child loves English, but graduating from elementary school and with too much homework, she does not have enough time to read English books, or to watch English movies. She never has a weekend free.

Mother of a Grade 10 daughter, age 16, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: My daughter participated in various kinds of English activities previously. Now she is in senior high school, busy with many subjects, thus no time for extra-curricular English activities, except for learning English for two hours every Saturday and Sunday.

The homework these children did in order of skills was: writing (82.8%), listening (66.9%), reading (62.1%) and speaking (40.0%). Few of the children (4.1%) had no English homework. As English is a foreign language in the Chinese context, children do not have English learning and practice environments at home. In fact, writing seems the most practised skill, mainly through written exercises such as copying vocabulary, sentences and texts, rather than writing for genuinely communicative purposes.

Interview quotes relating to four skills practised at home include these:

Mother of a primary school child, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: My child has been attending training courses at one language learning institution for a few years. The most frequent homework is listening, reading, and looking up new words in dictionaries.

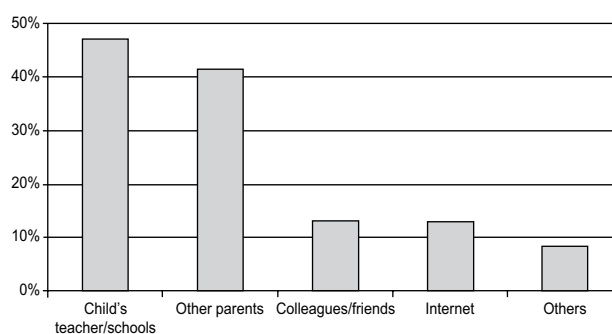
Mother of a primary school son, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: My child spends much time on listening practice, listening to English radio. He can understand most of the content. In addition, he reads English books, original works, and can understand most of the contents, too.

Father of a Grade 5 daughter, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: My daughter started to learn English at three years old, but does not have much interest in learning English. She usually does the homework required by the teacher in reading and writing.

Parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards Cambridge English: Key for Schools and Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools

The parents who completed the questionnaire mainly learned about the two Cambridge English exams from their children's teachers/schools and/or from other parents (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Sources of information about Cambridge English exams



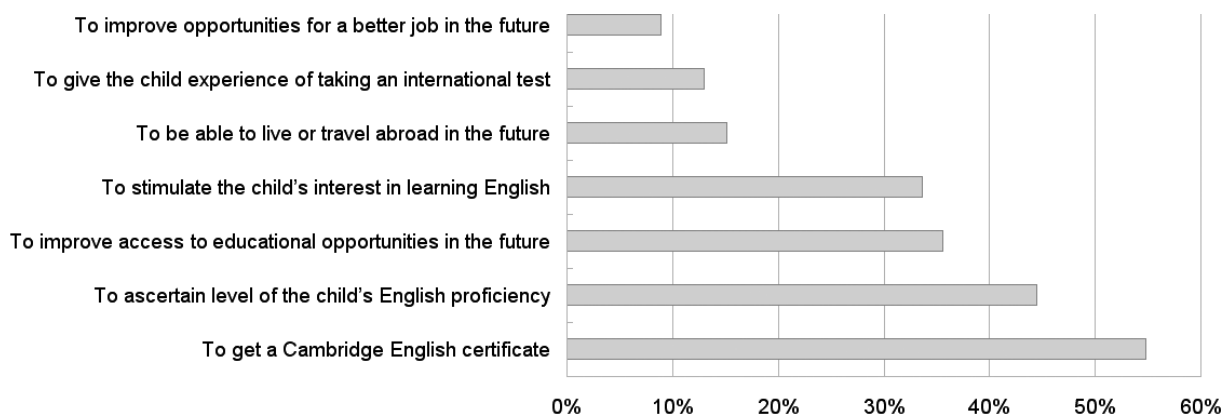
In China, teachers tend to be authoritative about EFL learning. Their recommendations are valued highly by parents, not only concerning exams but also learning materials, methods and time allotment. Two typical quotes from interviews are:

Mother of a Grade 5 primary school child, age 11, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: I seek advice from the teacher on what to read and what to listen to, and instruct and supervise my child at home accordingly.

Father of a primary school child, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: It was the teacher who told us that the child should take the exam. So we registered the child to do it.

As the English classes at training institutions which are attended by children take place mostly at weekends, parents usually deliver their children and wait for the end of the classes. Thus, they have opportunities to consult the teachers and to communicate with each other about their children's EFL learning and related information as below:

Grandmother of a Grade 4 granddaughter, age 9, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: My daughter-in-law got to know the exam through the internet and through other parents. She registered the child to take the exam and the child was confident about her performance this time. This was not the first time my granddaughter took the exam.

Figure 4: Parents' motivations for letting their children take the exam

Parents have various motivations for their children to take the Cambridge English exams (see Figure 4). On the whole, the motivation appeared instrumental rather than integrative (Gardener and Lambert 1959).

In China, children are required to go to primary and junior middle schools in their own neighbourhood. However, teacher quality and other resources differ from school to school. Thus, many parents pay higher fees to send their children to better schools. However, such schools have limited capacity, so some use Cambridge English test scores as part of the admission decision process. This may partly explain why getting a Cambridge English certificate heads the list of possible motivations.

In China, Cambridge University is a brand known to almost every family, particularly in the cities, in no small measure thanks to the famous Chinese poet Xu Zhimo's poem *Leaving the Revisited Cambridge* (1928), which created a strong image of Cambridge University in the minds of Chinese people. Even though some parents do not know much about the two target exams, they are inclined to trust them because they are Cambridge English exams, and so are keen to let their children take them. For some parents (and children), getting a Cambridge English certificate is seen as trustworthy proof of their children's English proficiency.

The interviews revealed more in-depth information about these various motivations:

Mother of a primary school daughter, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: If a child wants to apply to attend a better junior middle school outside their neighbourhood, a good application should include certificates to demonstrate their abilities such as English. That is why my daughter has to take the exams to get the certificates.

Mother of a primary school son, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: The exam certificates do not play a decisive role in the child's school promotion. It is good if he can get the certificates; if not, it does not matter. What matters is that he gets trained and becomes more disciplined during the process of preparing and taking the exams.

Father and mother of a primary school child, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: Cambridge English: Key for Schools and Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools certificates are no longer needed in the child's promotion from

primary to junior middle school, though the GESE (Graded Examinations in Spoken English) Certificates are. Our aim in sending the child to learn for *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* is not for school promotion, but for a good foundation of EFL learning.

Parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards the exams were generally very positive according to the questionnaire data (see Table 1).

Table 1: Parents' perceptions and attitudes towards the two exams (percentage)

| | Yes | No | Not sure |
|--|------|------|----------|
| Do you think the preparation for the exam has helped your child's English proficiency improve? | 89.0 | 3.4 | 7.5 |
| Will you let your child take other Cambridge English exams in the future? | 78.8 | 6.2 | 15.1 |
| Do you think the exam has given your child a sense of achievement concerning learning English? | 68.1 | 16.0 | 16.0 |
| Do you think the exam can accurately assess your child's English proficiency? | 65.3 | 12.5 | 22.2 |
| Do you think the exam has helped your child develop confidence in learning English? | 63.7 | 15.8 | 20.5 |
| Do you think the exam has motivated your child in learning English? | 54.2 | 18.8 | 27.1 |
| Do you think the exam has positively influenced your child's study of other subjects? | 25.5 | 41.4 | 33.1 |

More in-depth information about parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards exams in general and *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* in particular are obtained in the interviews, as revealed in these examples:

Mother of a son, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: It is very necessary for a child to take exams. Test scores represent a child's state of learning, particularly after a few exams. Exams diagnose the weaknesses of the child's learning. Taking exams also tests a child's psychological qualities and test-taking competence. I think my child is in a better psychological state because of taking the exams.

Father of a Grade 6 son, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: To take the exam is to raise the child's horizons by experiencing an international exam. The exam covers

the four skills with good standards, particularly the test of listening and speaking, which can diagnose the child's weaknesses. The exam can motivate the child to learn. The English exams in normal school are too easy. They just cover reading and writing.

Mother of a primary school son, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: After preparing for *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*, the child has made improvements in reading and listening, test-taking strategies, understanding the importance of writing. He has increased his vocabulary considerably and become more at ease taking exams. As a whole, his English proficiency has improved, but his interest in English has not changed much.

However, parents held divergent views on whether the exam has had a positive influence on their children's study of other subjects. At interviews, parents especially compared learning English with learning Chinese:

Mother of a primary school child, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: English is just a communicative tool, a means of getting or being 'melted into' the global village. It cannot be regarded as a fundamental thing in deciding one's life. The decisive element is still Chinese and Chinese culture.

Father of a Grade 6 son, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: Now children spend more time in learning English rather than learning Chinese. The gap among children is in Chinese rather than in English because they are all good at English.

Mother of a Grade 6 son, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: English is the *lingua franca*. It is and will be for a long time. So, English is very important. But Chinese is more important. It is the basis. Now we have forgotten this. We will realise it sooner or later. There is no conflict between the positions of English and Chinese.

Parent responses by exam

When analysing parent data according to the exam their children took, we found differences between the two groups on five items.³

First, children's interest in learning English is significantly different across the two groups (Chi-Square Sig. = .045 < 0.5). Ninety-seven per cent of the parents whose child took *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* reported that their child liked learning English, more than the parents whose child took *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* (85.3%), though both sets of responses are very positive.

Second, when asked whether they would let their child take other Cambridge English exams in the future, a lower percentage (70.1%) of the parents whose child took *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* said 'yes' than those whose child took *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* (86.5%) (Chi-Square Sig. = .044 < 0.5).

On a positive note, as many as 89.7% of the parents in our questionnaire-completing group thought that the children

concerned liked their English teachers and liked learning English. More evidence of this is revealed in the interviews:

Third, the sources from which the parents heard about the exams are different across the two groups. For *Cambridge English: Key for Schools*, parents got information from their child's teachers/schools, while for *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*, they got their information from other parents (see Table 2).

Table 2: Difference in sources of exam information between the two groups (percentage agreement)

| Source | Cambridge English: Key for Schools (N = 75) | Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools (N = 66) |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Child's teacher/school | 54.7 | 39.4 |
| Other parents | 29.3 | 56.1 |
| Child | 2.7 | 4.5 |
| Colleagues/friends | 4.0 | 24.2 |
| Bulletins | 4.0 | 1.5 |
| Lectures | 4.0 | 6.1 |
| Internet | 12.0 | 15.2 |
| Television | 0 | 1.5 |
| Radio | 0 | 1.5 |
| Others | 9.3 | 4.5 |

Fourth, for both exams, the following parent motivations were prominent: to get a Cambridge English certificate, and to ascertain levels of the child's English proficiency (see Table 3). *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* parents may have indicated rather more of an international perspective for their children, with higher ratings for the relevance of *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* to foreign travel and international test experience.

Some of the inter-exam differences may mainly be due to the ages of the children concerned and the time they spent learning English. Explanations of differences in parents' perceptions of the two exams were also suggested in the interview data.

Mother of a Grade 5 daughter, age 11, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: My daughter was interested and confident in learning English previously. She passed *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* easily, but found *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* much more difficult, particularly listening and reading. She felt frustrated, tending to lose interest and confidence in learning English. Now I am hesitating on whether to let her re-sit the exam or to take other Cambridge English exams.

Parent of a child, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* is too difficult for primary school children. The children's cognitive capacity has not reached that level. For some topics, the children might not be able to understand even the Chinese version.

Mother of a primary school child, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* could help the child

³ The first two items are multiple-choice questions with one answer only, thus Chi-Square significance can be provided. The last three items are multiple-choice questions with more than one acceptable answer, thus we cannot calculate significance but can compare the percentages.

Table 3: Cross-group differences in motivations for the children taking the exams (%)

| Motivation | Cambridge English: Key for Schools (N = 75) | Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools (N = 66) |
|--|---|---|
| To get a Cambridge English certificate | 50.0 | 61.2 |
| To improve access for better educational opportunities in the future | 36.5 | 34.3 |
| To improve opportunities for a better job in the future | 10.8 | 7.5 |
| To be able to live or travel abroad in the future | 12.2 | 17.9 |
| To ascertain level of the child's English proficiency | 47.3 | 43.3 |
| To stimulate the child's interest in learning English | 32.4 | 34.3 |
| To meet the child's own requirements | 4.1 | 10.4 |
| To meet the teacher's requirements | 2.7 | 0 |
| To meet the school's requirements | 6.8 | 4.5 |
| To give the child experience of taking an international test | 9.5 | 16.4 |
| To make sure the child does the same as other children do | 8.1 | 6.0 |
| Others | 2.7 | 6.0 |

develop confidence and sense of pride if the child performs well, otherwise it could make the child feel frustrated.

After preparing for *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*, it is much easier for the child to learn English in their normal school.

Comparison of data by parents' educational background

When looking at parents' educational background, the more educated the parent, the younger or earlier their children started learning English (see Table 4), and there was evidence of more balance in terms of their children's four macro-skills practice at home (see Figure 5).

Table 4: Differences in age when children start learning English

| | N | Mean | SD |
|----------------|----|------|-------|
| Below bachelor | 26 | 6.08 | 1.521 |
| Bachelor | 70 | 5.12 | 1.561 |
| Above bachelor | 32 | 4.41 | 1.388 |

ANOVA Sig. = .000

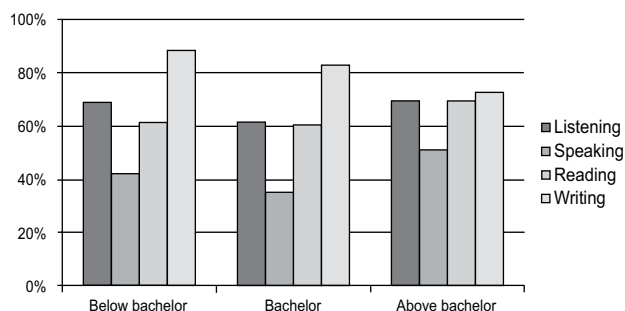
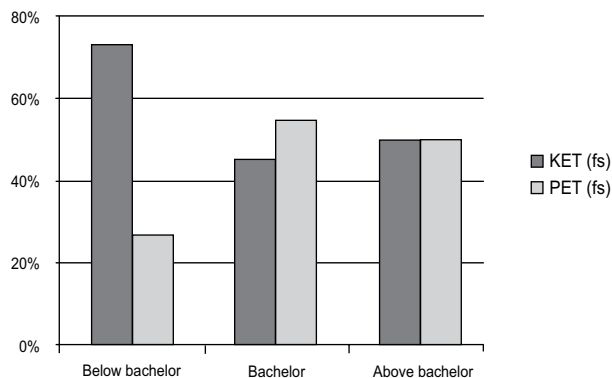
Figure 5: Difference in children's four-skill practice at home

Figure 6 shows that there is a relationship between the exams children are enrolled in and their parents' educational background. Parents without bachelor degrees were less likely to have children taking *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* than more educated parents. This finding could be related to the age at which the children started learning English (see Table 4) or other factors which will need to be investigated further in future studies.

Figure 6: Relationship between parent educational qualifications and exams taken by the children

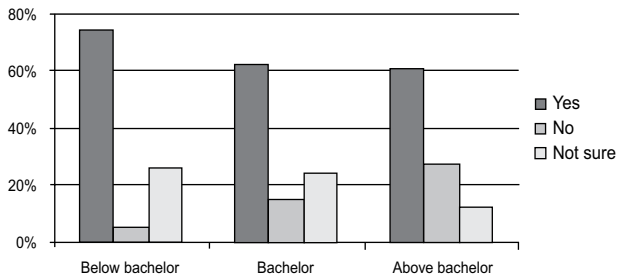
In addition, parents with different educational backgrounds had different motivations for letting their children take the exams. Note, for example, in Table 5 that the less academically qualified parent groups were more motivated by receiving a Cambridge English certificate than the higher qualified parent group.

Table 5: Parents' motivations for letting their children take the exam

| | Below bachelor | Bachelor | Above bachelor |
|--|----------------|----------|----------------|
| To get a Cambridge English certificate | 59.3 | 66.7 | 32.4 |
| To ascertain level of the child's English proficiency | 44.4 | 52.0 | 38.2 |
| To stimulate the child's interest in learning English | 37.0 | 29.3 | 47.1 |
| To improve access for better educational opportunities in the future | 40.7 | 34.7 | 38.2 |
| To improve opportunities for a better job in the future | 22.2 | 6.7 | 5.9 |
| To be able to live or travel abroad in the future | 18.5 | 17.3 | 2.9 |
| To give the child experience of taking an international exam | 7.4 | 14.7 | 17.6 |

However, parents without bachelor degrees were more likely to think the test positively affected their children's confidence in learning English (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: The test has a positive impact on children's confidence in EFL learning



Chi-Square Sig. = .043 < 0.5

All these differences demonstrate that parents' educational backgrounds may well exert some influence on their children's EFL learning. The major reason for the differences indicated above may lie in the fact that parents who had a longer period of formal education are also likely to have more experience of taking English as a compulsory subject. This may result in higher English proficiency levels and possibly more frequent use of English in their daily work and life. Thus they may be more capable of giving their children guidance and instruction in English at home, and they may attach more importance to their children's English learning as well. Of course, the standard deviation in Table 4 shows differences from group to group with respect to the age their children started learning English.

More information was revealed in the interviews about parents' roles in their children's EFL learning:

Mother of a Grade 5 daughter, age 11, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: I persuaded my child to learn English for 30 to 60 minutes every day. But it is hard to maintain, particularly for listening practice. I usually follow the transcript of the listening materials while the child is listening to the tape. Then I ask her to retell the story to see how much has been understood. For speaking practice, she likes me to interact with her, particularly with picture descriptions. She is more interested in getting direct feedback from me.

Mother of a Grade 6 daughter, age 12, taking Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools: I cannot give English instruction to my child. She must depend on herself to reach whatever level she can. What I did was to register her in a training class, accompany her to her classes, and take her to the exam.

Father of a primary school son, taking Cambridge English: Key for Schools: My wife watches over our child's English study at home. The child is unwilling to learn unless his mother accompanies him to learn. My wife feels the child is forced to learn instead of doing it on his own. She has tried every thing to develop his interest in learning English, for example, watching movies in English. Education in China is too instrumental, which kills the child's interest in learning. The child is growing resentful of English due to the exam.

Conclusions

This paper describes an investigation of the impact of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* in China on parents. This study is the first of its kind in a Chinese context. The findings from the study's questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provide important insights into the attitudes and perceptions of an influential parent group that is of particular relevance to the exam developers, researchers and users. The major conclusions are as follows.

First, children started learning English quite early both in formal classroom settings and in informal family environments. They learned English mainly at training institutions and/or at normal schools. Parents think the English instruction their children receive at training institutions is better than that at normal schools because it is at a higher level, but the quality of training courses varies from teacher to teacher and from institution to institution.

Second, parents held positive attitudes towards the two Cambridge English exams – *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* and *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools*. Parents were mainly motivated instrumentally in letting their children take the exams. They thought that the two different levels of Cambridge English exams exerted different impacts on their children's EFL learning. Parents with different educational backgrounds influenced their children's EFL learning experience differently.

Third, it is clear that more communication is needed between test providers and their stakeholders, parents in this case. Different types of support need to be provided for different groups of stakeholders using different levels of Cambridge English exams. Parents' views about teaching quality of the training courses indicate that professional development is essential to teachers.

As noted, this paper is one part of the research project investigating the impact of Cambridge English exams in China. The impact on students investigated through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and the impact on teachers explored through classroom observation, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will be presented in future papers. All the data will be triangulated with the parent data to provide new insights into test impact in general, and the impact of Cambridge English exams in Chinese contexts in particular.

It is hoped that this article underlines the value of joint ventures between local and international researchers. The study described was implemented in a major city in China with local academic researchers based there, but informed by international research expertise and experience, in this case from Cambridge ESOL. As co-author of the article, Gu, currently visiting professor at Cambridge ESOL, has been able to play a key 'bridging' role helping to 'translate and interpret' the central linguistic and cultural elements in the two contexts – Cambridge ESOL and China.

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