



**CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH**  
Language Assessment  
Part of the University of Cambridge

# Research Notes

Issue 65 • February 2017

Impact of Cambridge English exams and English  
language learning programmes in a variety of contexts

*A quarterly publication reporting on teaching, learning and assessment*

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### **Issue 65/February 2017**

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# Research Notes

## Issue 65 • February 2017

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## Editorial

In this issue of *Research Notes* we share six educational reform projects that Cambridge English has undertaken in collaboration with ministries of education and other institutions in a variety of international contexts. From 2013 to the present, Cambridge English has supported educational initiatives in Malta, Portugal, the Basque Country, Chile, Colombia and Lebanon; we have used our English language exams and qualifications for teachers to build a profile of the attitudes and aptitude of learners, teachers and parents, with the intention that our findings and recommendations help to support the country or region's education strategy.

The opening article by Khababbashi, Khalifa, Robinson, Ellis, and Mifsud outlines the efforts by the Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment to benchmark the English language level of Maltese school students and the training of Maltese teachers at an institutional level. Cambridge English Language Assessment provided the language tests and then compared the results according to background factors. Surveys were also conducted to discover the attitudes of learners, teachers and parents towards learning and assessment. The CEFR level according to students' gender and school sector was ascertained for each skill, and responses regarding attitudinal factors such as views on assessment and factors influencing performance such as use of technology, were triangulated. The article presents and reflects on these findings, and concludes with recommendations on how to narrow the achievement gap amongst learners, improve learner motivation and autonomy, and provide greater scope for improvements in teaching practice.

In the following article Lloyd, Blaus and Sousa detail a multi-phase study where the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science used a Cambridge English exam to measure and monitor Grade 9 pupils' language learning and to inform how teacher development could be refined; and additionally to offer an internationally recognised qualification to pupils of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. *Cambridge English: Preliminary* was introduced as the external exam for the 2014/15 academic year. Quantitative data such as responses to attitudinal questions and candidate test scores were gathered and analysed, including descriptive and factor analyses. The findings led to the conclusion that use of English outside the classroom and increased pair work had a positive effect on language learning, and the nature of the feedback given to pupils needs to be reviewed to increase its positive influence on test scores.

The third article, by Cerdà, Blackhurst and Walker, is a third European study which provides insights into the performance of the 2014 primary (4th and 6th year) and secondary (1st and 3rd year) cohort of the Marco de Educación Trilingüe (Trilingual Framework project), to whom Cambridge English and the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education simultaneously administered language tests of English and Spanish. This project aimed to ascertain the CEFR levels and compare the performances of two control groups and an experimental group, with one control group receiving the minimum legal requirement of English teaching and the second control group receiving additional teaching. The second control group was found to contain the strongest performers, but all three groups displayed strengths and weaknesses which has provided a strong argument to support further improvements in foreign language education and proficiency in the Basque Country.

Moving to South America, the next article focuses on Chile, in which Walczak, Harrison, Muratorio, Flores, Brunner and Docherty investigate the background factors that

influence English language attainment for school students. The article analyses the data gathered from the 2012 and 2014 administrations of the *Simce Inglés* exam provided by Cambridge English. After establishing the educational context in Chile, the article addresses the questions of what CEFR level the 2014 cohort achieved, how performances changed between 2012-14, as well as the influence of background factors. Questionnaire responses from students, parents and teachers provide insights into their socioeconomic background, education level, use of English within and outside the classroom, and motivation for learning or teaching English. Based on extensive analysis, the authors conclude that students' increased exposure to English, greater scaffolding for teachers' professional development and self-reflection, and increased monitoring of school resources and policy to ensure equality of opportunity for all students are the steps needed to close proficiency gaps in Chile.

We remain in South America for the next article, in which Brooker, Lloyd, Robinson and Casals discuss the Colombian province of Antioquia's 'English in the Park' Initiative. In collaboration with the Education Secretariat of Antioquia, Cambridge English developed self-access web portals, workshops and provided language placement tests to improve motivation, professional development and equality in language teaching and learning in the province. This article investigates the impact of this initiative through the analysis of attitudinal and demographic data on pupil and teacher motivation and practice. The findings showed that the initiative led to a positive response to language learning and teaching, and that the introduction of Cambridge English teaching qualifications and gathering data for specific year groups taking the placement test will provide a precise foundation to build on the findings obtained so far.

We go to the Middle East in the closing article, in which Docherty, Barakat, Kniveton, Mikati and Khalifa describe the Cambridge English evaluation of the Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools and Teachers Improvement (D-RASATI 2) programme designed to support the Lebanese Ministry of Higher Education in improving the public school system, involving both teachers of English and teachers teaching through English. A key indicator in this project was for 245 teachers to sit the *Cambridge English: First* exam, as its B2 level is the target proficiency for English-medium teachers, and investigations of key stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions of D-RASATI 2. By analysing both qualitative and quantitative data, it was found that the initiative gained the positive result of increased teacher self-reflection and communication, and established that some current misconceptions and misunderstand of the purpose of language courses could be combated through the use of increased promotion and training of teaching methodology.

The educational reform projects presented in this issue demonstrate how ministries are moving towards international benchmarking of their English language education systems through collaboration with one of the world-renowned assessment boards. All of the projects described in this issue have succeeded in securing the engagement of stakeholders and have shown improvements in test scores based on evidence, but all acknowledge that now pupils and teachers better understand the benefits of participating in these programmes, future programmes must focus on closing achievement gaps and expanding professional development possibilities for teachers and teacher trainers.

# Understanding language learning in Malta

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## Introduction

The Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) in Malta has a strategic objective to maintain and strengthen standards of English language proficiency within the school education system so that Malta remains a high-performing Commonwealth and European Union country. This should perpetuate the existing, successful provision of bilingual education (Mifsud and Vella forthcoming 2017, Ministry of Education 2016) which prepares individuals from early on in life, who are equally fluent in Maltese and English, for the global employment market. To this end, the Ministry and Cambridge English Language Assessment entered into an agreement for an integrated solution which included the benchmarking of student English language levels in the school sector (Year 1) and the institutional capacity-building of Maltese teachers (Year 2).

Cambridge English Language Assessment, in collaboration with the Ministry, conducted the Year 1 benchmarking project, which aimed at presenting a snapshot of English language proficiency in two key grades at Primary and Secondary education in relation to international standards, namely the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). The six CEFR reference levels are now widely accepted as the international standard for grading an individual's language proficiency.

In addition to benchmarking learner proficiency, a comprehensive profile of learner, teacher and parent attitudes towards English language education in Malta was investigated. This aspect of the project was designed to provide a comprehensive profile of the Maltese educational context by bringing together views from the main stakeholders. Results also feed into the Ministry's desire to deliver institutional capacity-building in assessment and teaching methodology, a strategic plan for continuous professional development of the teaching cadre, and potential international certification for learners and teachers.

## Project aims

The aim of the project was to provide MEDE with a clear picture of how a representative sample of learners at two key school stages – Primary Year 5 and Secondary Form 4 – is currently performing against internationally recognised

English language standards. The two factors of 'school sector' and 'gender' were also identified as key variables in the project. Their impact on performance was investigated and will be discussed in more detail.

Results of surveys designed to elicit attitudes of the main stakeholders (i.e. learners, parents and teachers) towards English language learning, teaching and assessment will also be presented. The findings and recommendations from this phase of the project will serve as an evidence-based framework of current and target proficiency levels and can be used to inform further areas for research.

## Conceptual framework

The construct of communicative language competence, which has become widely accepted as the goal of language education and as central to good classroom practice (Bachman and Palmer 1982, Canale and Swain 1980) was central to the design of this project. Communicative language competence comprises linguistic competence, as well as the ability to functionally use that competence in language activities which involve oral and/or written reception, production and interaction in different domains. The communicative view of language is also very much in line with the principles and learning outcomes identified in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for All (Ministry for Education and Employment 2012) for language competence.

All instruments used in the benchmarking project (tests and surveys) were therefore designed with the communicative view of language competence in mind. The assessment instruments are also linked to the CEFR, which provides the gold standard for measuring language competence and which allows the findings of the project to be considered against a broader international context where the CEFR is used.

Finally, an important approach to investigating English language proficiency in this project is the triangulation of data from multiple sources; while the current project is predominantly quantitative in nature, efforts were taken to (a) collect qualitative data in the form of open comments in surveys and (b) ensure that any resulting data can systematically inform future projects by linking the survey items and open comments to areas of interest by the Ministry (e.g. professional development of

teachers, language policies across sectors, sharing of good practices). Such an approach ensures that results of current and future research can be brought together coherently in developing an in-depth view of the Maltese English educational context and in highlighting areas that warrant further attention.

## Research questions

The project was guided by the following key research questions (RQs):

RQ1. How do learners at two key school stages – Primary Year 5 and Secondary Form 4 – in Malta perform on a set of Cambridge English language tests on the four skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking against the CEFR?

RQ2. How do learner performances at Primary and Secondary stages compare according to school sector (State/Church/Independent) and gender (female/male)?

RQ3. What are the attitudes of learners, parents and teachers towards the learning, teaching and assessment of English language in Maltese schools?

RQ4. What are some key trends in English language teachers' pedagogical and assessment practices in Maltese schools?

## Methodology

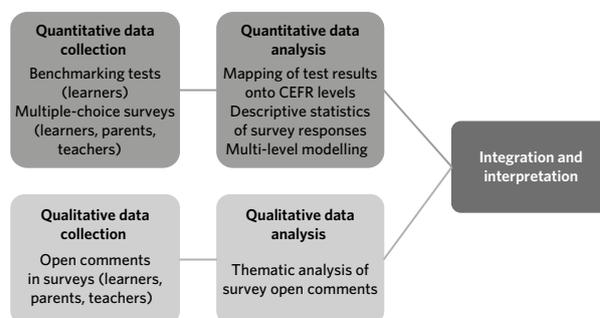
The benchmarking project aims at (a) building a profile of English language ability levels in Malta, (b) establishing stakeholder attitudes to English language learning, teaching and assessment, (c) identifying the professional development needs of English language teachers and (d) highlighting areas that require further attention in creating a truly bilingual educational system. The scope of the project therefore necessitates a research design which allows for the collection of different types of data from a variety of sources and using a range of instruments. A premise recognised in educational reform is that 'a key characteristic of the educational process is that student learning is influenced by many small factors rather than a few large ones' (Chapman, Weidman, Cohen and Mercer 2005:526); therefore, any recommendations made in this project needed to be based on an in-depth understanding of all aspects of the educational system in order to ensure that they are achievable and reduce the chances of any negative unintended consequences. As a result, the project focuses not only on measuring English language levels of learners, but also on investigating the context of learning both inside and outside of school, the availability of resources, the extent of parental support, and stakeholder perceptions. A mixed methods approach therefore formed the basis of the study and an explanatory sequential design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011) was selected in addressing the study's research questions.

## Research design

Given the Ministry's emphasis on continuous research and multi-phase projects, a mixed methods explanatory sequential design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011), where a quantitative stage is followed by a qualitative stage, was considered to be the most appropriate design for a multi-phase project. Using this design, the results of the Year 1 data can systematically inform the focus of future work; for example, the benchmarking data can be used to identify high- and low-performing schools and classes and to subsequently focus observations on differences in pedagogies and practices in these schools (which will also have been stratified by school sector). Questionnaire data from Year 1 can also be used to design observation instruments and inform areas to be addressed in focus groups in future stages, and together provide a more systematic and comprehensive approach to addressing the research questions in more depth.

It is important to note that while the Year 1 benchmarking project is predominantly quantitative, care was taken to also collect a small sample of qualitative data (through open comments in the questionnaires administered to the different stakeholders) to complement the quantitative data and provide a more in-depth understanding of the educational context. These two strands of data were brought together and integrated in drawing conclusions and making recommendations using Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) convergent parallel mixed methods (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Research design for Year 1 benchmarking project (based on Creswell and Plano Clark 2011)**



## Sampling framework

A stratified sampling design was used as the sampling framework for the project and ensured the inclusion of a representative sample of learners across the two key variables of school sector and gender. Schools were sampled from a comprehensive national list of schools in Malta. Sampling was undertaken separately for Primary Year 5 and Secondary Form 4. The agreed total number of learners to be sampled was 1,255 (Primary N=624; Secondary N=631) for the administration of the Reading, Listening and Writing exams. Given practical constraints and the resource-heavy nature of examining Speaking face-to-face, it was agreed for the Speaking tests to be administered to a smaller proportion of the sample. Approximately 50% of schools from the original sample

were chosen for the administration of the Speaking test using a purposeful sampling approach. This smaller sample for Speaking means that the precision criteria of results are different from the ones from Reading, Listening and Writing tests. Therefore, more caution is needed in interpreting the Speaking results. Note that in the purposeful sampling approach, important variables such as school sector and gender segregation of learners in Church and Independent schools were taken into account for school selection. This means that the quality of purposeful sampling is high, but we still cannot make the same statistical inferences as with the full sample. Nevertheless, given the importance of assessing Speaking face-to-face and in interaction, the fact that Speaking was included is an important strength of the project. A similar sampling framework was also recommended for learner surveys. Parent and teacher participation in the study was on a voluntary basis.

It should be noted that while the original sampling framework specified approximately 625 learners per year (for Reading, Listening and Writing), MEDE administered the Reading, Listening and Writing exams to *all* Primary and Secondary classes within selected schools for equity purposes. This resulted in a larger number of learners than that outlined in the sampling framework. Cambridge English marked all available Reading and Listening exams (N=3,073) and the agreed number of Writing (N=1,375) and Speaking (N=714) exams. A total of 1,250 learners, 793 parents and 132 teachers completed the surveys. Please note that not all survey respondents completed all sections of the surveys (the total number indicates all who attempted the surveys).

## Data collection instruments

A range of instruments was used to collect both the quantitative and qualitative data. More details are presented below. Ethical guidelines from the University of Cambridge, the British Association for Applied Linguistics and the British Educational Research Association were followed during all data collection and data analysis phases of this project.

### Benchmarking English language tests for learners

The Cambridge English benchmarking tests aimed to provide information on learners' language proficiency, in terms of the four skills of Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking as measured against the CEFR.

### Attitudinal and background surveys

A series of learner, teacher and parent surveys were used in the project in order to gather stakeholder perceptions of and attitudes towards English language learning, teaching and assessment in the Maltese context. Validated statements were selected from the Cambridge English Questionnaire Item Bank and additional questions, specific

to the Maltese context and the identified areas of focus in the project, were developed in collaboration with MEDE. The statements include a variety of response options with the most common being Likert scale items consisting of a 4-point scale as well as Not Sure or Not Applicable options where relevant. The most typical response options are: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. A key feature of the surveys is the inclusion of parallel statements, which allows for a comparison of responses from learners, parents and teachers where relevant and is used for triangulation purposes and for providing a more comprehensive picture. Paper-based versions of the surveys were distributed to learners. Online and paper-based versions of the surveys were made available to parents in both Maltese<sup>1</sup> and English so that they could select the language in which they were most comfortable responding. Teachers were invited to complete the surveys online and in English using SurveyMonkey.

## Data analysis

The data analyses comprised the following for the quantitative strand:

- CEFR level mapping: Rasch analysis and ability estimates.
- Descriptive statistics in the quantitative strand: aimed to provide an overall picture of CEFR language level, stakeholder perceptions, as well as the amount of variability within each group. The analysis focused on the cohort as a whole (e.g. all Form 4 learners) and on specific variables within the cohort (e.g. Form 4 boys and girls; Form 4 Church, Independent, State schools).
- Chi-square test of independence: aimed to investigate whether the different variables of interest (school sector, gender, etc.) were related to questionnaire responses. These variables were used to define groups within the data and compare responses. Standardised residuals were also computed to identify which responses were contributing to the test of significance.
- Multi-level modelling: aimed to explore and confirm whether any background or attitudinal variables (school sector, gender, language used at home, etc.) played a significant role in predicting the language level of learners.

For the small qualitative strand, a thematic analysis of open comments in surveys was carried out with the aim of identifying key themes that indicated (any) important issues brought up by the different stakeholders participating in the project. A final stage involved the integration of different sources of data in providing a coherent narrative on the main findings from the project.

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the parent surveys from English to Maltese was arranged by MEDE.

## English language proficiency

In addressing the study's first three research questions, this section provides a snapshot of the established learner proficiency levels for Primary and Secondary learners and highlights the most salient and meaningful differences in proficiency levels that could be attributed to key variables of interest, such as school sector and gender.

A greater number of learners took the Reading, Listening and Writing tests (paper-based) compared to Speaking (face-to-face). The Reading, Listening and Writing results can therefore be generalised to the Maltese Year 5 and Form 4 populations. The smaller sample for Speaking means that the precision criteria of results are different from the ones from Reading, Listening and Writing tests. Therefore, caution is needed in interpreting the Speaking results.

## Overall profile: Primary (Year 5)

Primary school learners in Malta achieved a mode of A2 in the skills of Listening, Reading and Writing whereas a mode of B2 was observed for the skill of Speaking.

When looking at the proportion of candidates at the B1/B2 levels, results are very positive and show that a large proportion of learners are at the B levels and can be considered independent users of English (65.8% for Speaking, 45.3% for Writing, 41.3% for Listening and 20.1% for Reading). Speaking is the learners' strongest skill, with 18% of candidates achieving Levels C1 and above. The high levels of performance for Speaking at this age group can be explained by the bilingual context of Malta, the reported levels of English language use at home and outside of school, and the use of English in a variety of domains in Malta (Council of Europe 2015).

Compared to the other skills, Reading has the comparatively highest proportion of learners at A1 level (32.8%) which highlights Reading as the learners' weakest skill. A possible explanation for the comparatively lower performance on Reading can be that of literacy. According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2011) surveys of learner competence in Reading, Maths, Science and Literacy, Maltese 10-year-olds were performing significantly lower than the international average on Reading. The PISA (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2009) surveys also suggested that the proportion of 15-year-olds in Malta who were classified as low achievers in reading literacy was significantly higher than the EU average (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2009:41-42). It is recognised in the second language acquisition literature that first language literacy can affect the development of second language reading and writing (Bernhardt 2005, Koda 2007). In response, the National Literacy Strategy (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014) is now

committed to improving biliteracy in English and Maltese through a number of initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

The distribution of CEFR levels, which cover a range from pre-A1 to C levels, reflects Malta's educational context and linguistic milieu in which language levels vary quite widely, with Maltese as the dominant language for some learners and English for others.

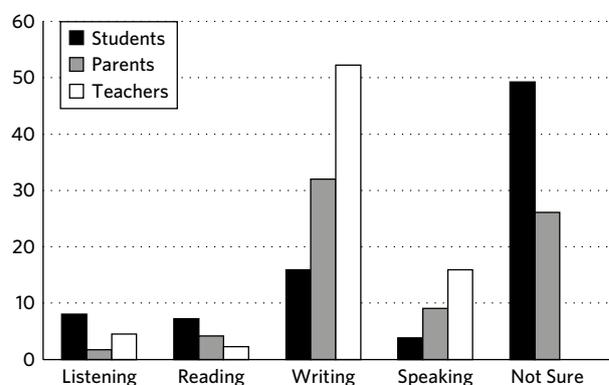
The score results were cross-checked against Primary learners' self-reports of their weaknesses in English as well as parents' and teachers' perceptions. The results in Figure 2 show that learners, parents and teachers all unanimously believe Writing to be the learners' weakest skill. Speaking is the second most selected skill by parents and teachers even though the data suggested Speaking to be the strongest skill for the sub-sample. These findings show a mismatch between score data and stakeholder perceptions of weaknesses in English and suggest that Reading should be given more emphasis for Primary learners, although a review of both parents' and teachers' open comments suggests that more focus on Reading is already considered an important priority:

*If students would take the time to read every day they would improve considerably. (Secondary teacher, Church school)*

*My daughter's level of English would certainly improve if she reads more. (Father of State Secondary learner)*

Another noteworthy observation in Figure 2 is that approximately 50% of learners had selected the 'not sure' option when asked to identify their weaknesses in English, which might indicate the absence of self-assessment skills. While this is expected for younger learners, an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses will allow learners to develop self-regulatory learning strategies which can in turn enhance learner autonomy (in line with key areas of focus within the NCF).

**Figure 2: Weaknesses in English: stakeholder perceptions (%) - Primary**



<sup>2</sup> [education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf](http://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf)

## Overall profile: Secondary (Form 4)

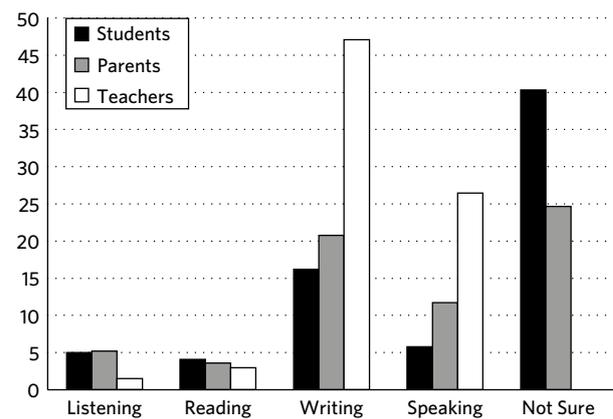
The most frequently occurring level in secondary school learners was B2 in all skills except for Listening, where B1 was the observed level. When focusing on the proportion of candidates at the B1/B2 levels, results show that, on average, about 60% of candidates are at the B1/B2 levels and that a large proportion of candidates (approximately 28%) achieve C levels for the skills of Speaking and Listening. These results reflect the bilingual context of Malta where the strong use of Speaking and Listening in everyday contexts and a variety of domains (Council of Europe 2015) is observed in the score results. On the other hand, findings also show that a proportion of learners are still at A1/A2 levels (17% for Listening, 24.7% for Reading, 26.8% for Writing and 9.7% for Speaking) and therefore below average compared to the target attainment levels of the English Language Syllabus for Secondary Schools (attainment levels 4-5 aligned to B1/B2 on the CEFR) (English Language Resource Centre 2007).

Compared to the results of the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) (European Commission 2012), in which 60% of Secondary learners were reported to achieve B2 level on the CEFR using the global average of the three skills of Reading, Listening and Writing (Jones 2013), the findings from the benchmarking project show that approximately 50% of learners are at Levels B2 and above, with 33% of Form 4 Secondary learners achieving Level B2 and a further 15% achieving C levels when the average of the three skills is used. Focusing on the skill of Speaking, results show that approximately 62% of Secondary learners have achieved CEFR Level B2 and above.

The Secondary score results were cross-checked against learners' self-reports of their weaknesses in English as well as parents' and teachers' perceptions. Similarly to the Primary results, Figure 3 shows that learners, parents and teachers all unanimously believe Writing to be the learners' weakest skill but unlike Primary results, this perception matches the score data where, compared to all other skills, Writing had the highest proportion of learners at pre-A1 and A1/A2 levels (26.8%).

Figure 3 also shows that similar to the Primary learners, a large percentage of Secondary learners (40%) selected the 'not sure' option when asked to identify their weaknesses in English. This is somewhat concerning; Secondary school learners should have more meta-cognitive awareness about their language ability and as a result more capacity to self-assess. Engaging learners in awareness-raising activities in their lessons can help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses and in turn, allow them to set appropriate language goals for themselves.

**Figure 3: Weaknesses in English: stakeholder perceptions (%) – Secondary**



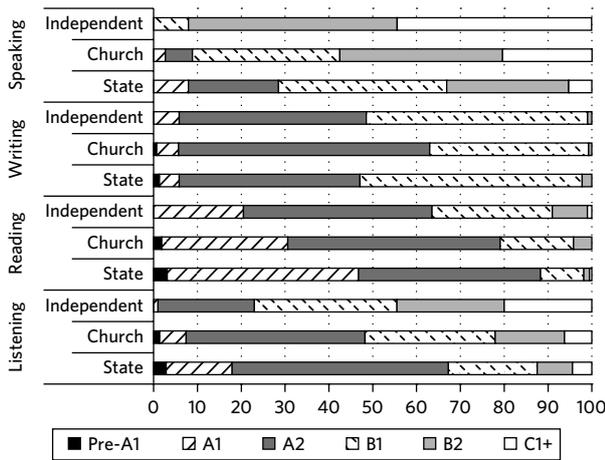
## School sector profiles

Figures 4 and 5 display the distribution of CEFR levels for each of the four skills by school sector for Primary and Secondary learners respectively. It is worth reiterating that a representative sample of learners from the different school sectors was included in the project. The figures show some differences amongst the school sectors in terms of learner performance; for example, for the skill of Listening at Primary level, approximately 67% of learners in State schools are at the A levels on the CEFR whereas these proportions are comparatively lower for Church (48%) and Independent (23%) schools. However, in the skill of Writing, Primary learners in State schools outperform learners in both Church and Independent schools, with a comparatively higher proportion of State learners at the B1/B2 levels (53%) compared to Independent (51%) and Church (37%) schools.

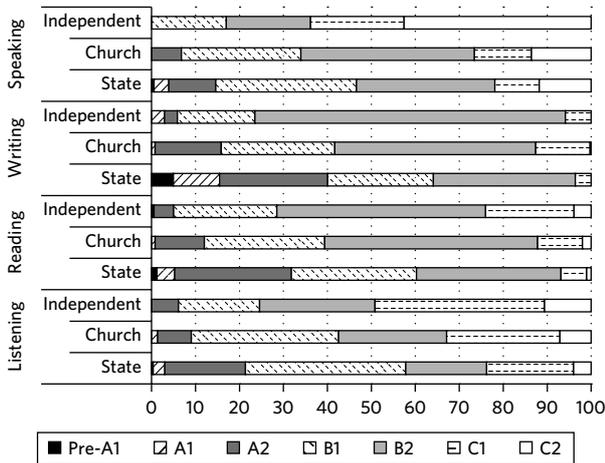
For the skill of Listening at Secondary Form 4, there is a higher proportion of learners at C1/C2 levels in Independent schools (49%) compared to Church (33%) and State (24%) schools. However, at the CEFR B levels, these proportions are much more similar across school sectors, with 45%, 55% and 58% of learners achieving B1/B2 levels at Independent, State and Church schools respectively. For the skill of Speaking, a similar proportion of learners at State (22%) and Church (27%) schools achieve C1/C2 levels on the CEFR. This proportion was highest for Independent schools, with 64%.

It is important to draw attention to the observed variations *within* each school sector where a distribution of performances is observed from A levels to C levels for State, Church and Independent schools. While there is a trend of higher performance at Independent schools compared to Church and State schools, no individual school sector is associated with a clustering of only high- or only low-performing learners.

**Figure 4: Distribution of CEFR levels by school sector (%) - Primary**



**Figure 5: Distribution of CEFR levels by school sector (%) - Secondary**



### Gender profiles

Performances by boys and girls were also compared (see Tables 1 and 2 for Primary and Secondary levels). Results show that girls systematically outperform boys on all skills, with a higher proportion of boys at the lower CEFR levels compared to girls and an associated higher proportion of girls at the higher CEFR levels compared to boys. These differences are generally small, except for the skill of

Writing at Secondary level (Table 5) where 49% of girls are at B2 level compared to 31% for boys and approximately 11% of girls are at the C levels compared to 4% for boys.

One tentative explanation for the observed differences in performance of boys and girls relates to the differential rate of literacy development in the two groups, which has been supported in previous research (Maccoby and Jacklin 1974). Another possible explanation put forward by Chavez (2000) relates to the differences in the approach to learning that boys and girls have been found to have. There is a tendency for boys to focus more on competition and achieving mastery goals, resulting in less willingness to take risks in language classes (e.g. experimenting with the language) whereas girls emphasise co-operation and collaboration in their language learning, which is associated with better learning outcomes. While differences in performance of boys and girls are generally found to be small and not a cause for concern, it is nevertheless an area that can be monitored by MEDE to ensure that all learners receive the kind of support that they need in their language development.

### Primary versus Secondary performance

The shift in language levels can be seen in the notable decrease in the proportion of learners at CEFR A levels in Primary and a higher proportion of learners achieving the higher B and C levels in Secondary stage.

The CEFR levels can roughly be seen as representing three important thresholds for success in a bilingual context: Level B1 represents low intermediate learners who are independent users of the language, but in a limited range of familiar contexts; Level B2 is widely recognised as the threshold for high intermediate, independent users of a language who can function in a second language in a range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts; Level C1 is seen as the level at which advanced language proficiency is displayed.

The high proportions of Secondary learners at B2 and C1+ levels generally suggest readiness for independent functioning in a variety of contexts for a large percentage of Secondary learners. However, there is still a considerable proportion of Secondary learners who are at the A levels (Listening=17%, Reading=24.7%, Writing=26.8%

**Table 1: Distribution of CEFR levels by gender (%) - Primary**

Skill	Gender	Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1+
Listening	Male	1.8	8.3	44.3	25.2	14.2	6.2
	Female	1.5	8.6	35.7	28.4	15.1	10.8
Reading	Male	2.4	35.4	43.9	15.2	2.7	0.4
	Female	1.5	29.7	45.8	17.4	5.2	0.4
Writing	Male	1.6	6.3	51.6	39.7	0.9	
	Female		3.5	46.0	48.8	1.7	
Speaking	Male		5.3	11.8	30.5	35.3	17.1
	Female		3.6	11.4	31.4	34.3	19.3

**Table 2: Distribution of CEFR levels by gender (%) - Secondary**

Skill	Gender	Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening	Male	0.2	2.6	17.3	35.3	19.7	20.0	4.9
	Female	0.3	1.8	12.8	33.4	21.3	24.9	5.7
Reading	Male	0.9	4.4	25.1	28.4	33.8	5.7	1.6
	Female	0.8	1.8	17.8	27.3	41.0	9.9	1.4
Writing	Male	3.8	9.3	27.5	23.6	31.0	4.4	0.3
	Female	1.0	2.0	11.4	25.5	49.0	11.1	
Speaking	Male	0.6		11.5	31.0	35.6	8.6	12.6
	Female		2.8	4.7	25.8	31.5	16.0	19.2

and Speaking=9.7%).<sup>3</sup> While it is expected for a small proportion of the population to not go beyond the A levels, about one quarter of the learners have yet to become independent users of English, which may require further investigation. The NCF emphasises the need for a high level of proficiency in the bilingual context of Malta and for a variety of social, educational and employment purposes: 'in Malta it is considered paramount that young people are enabled to develop a high level of proficiency in English for active participation in society, success in education, employment and personal life, and the expression of identity' (Ministry for Education and Employment 2015:6) as well as in meeting the competitive demands of a 'globalised economic environment' (Ministry for Education and Employment 2014:41). These requirements roughly translate into a minimum English language level of B2 across the four skills for Secondary school leavers. It is recommended for MEDE to take into consideration the language levels established in the benchmarking project and the proportion of Secondary learners who have not yet progressed beyond the A1/A2 levels on the CEFR in reviewing and/or setting of language proficiency and attainment levels.

## Attitudinal and background factors

In order to better understand the context of learning and teaching in Malta, learners, parents and teachers were asked to complete surveys which focused on key variables that might affect performance and levels of achievement. These included learners' level of exposure to English at school and outside of school, learner attitudes towards learning, and parental support and encouragement amongst others. The results from the different surveys that touch on similar themes are pulled together and integrated. As far as possible, results for Primary and Secondary levels are presented together for ease of comparison. The key findings which emerged as significant<sup>4</sup> and meaningful are summarised in the next sections.

## Respondent profiles

An overview of the distribution of learner, parent and teacher respondents by school sector and gender is provided in Table 3 and shows that the project has been successful in including a representative sample of survey respondents across the different school sectors. While there is a gender balance in the learner data, the distribution for parent respondents (over 82% female) suggests that mothers are primarily responsible for overseeing their children's education. The teacher data also shows that the majority of teachers (84%) are female. This might suggest the absence of male language role models for boys, which could also explain why boys were outperformed by girls.

**Table 3: Distribution of survey respondents by school sector and gender**

Participants	Grade	School sector			Gender	
		State	Church	Independent	Male	Female
Learners	P	40%	45%	15%	56%	44%
	S	51%	37%	12%	50%	50%
Parents	P	36%	47%	17%	15%	85%
	S	42%	50%	8%	18%	82%
Teachers	P	57%	31%	12%	15%	85%
	S	71%	22%	7%	16%	84%

P=Primary, S=Secondary

## Exposure to English

It is a widely accepted premise both in the theoretical and practical language learning domains that exposure to a foreign language within the learning environment and/or the home environment plays a positive role in learning. The ESLC (European Commission 2012) found that greater use of English, by both learners and teachers, in the classroom was positively related to language ability (Jones 2013). The ESLC also found that parents' knowledge of the foreign language being studied and learners' exposure to it in

<sup>3</sup> The results of candidates at pre-A1 and A1 levels were cross-checked against the special circumstances information provided by MEDE; approximately 1-5% of these candidates were listed as special circumstances candidates for the different skills.

<sup>4</sup> For the chi-square analysis, the critical value to determine statistical significance was  $p < 0.05$ . Standardised residuals were also computed to identify which responses were contributing to the test of significance. Values larger than +2.0 or -2.0 were used to determine whether any particular response was showing a meaningful difference between groups.

the home or community was positively related to learner outcomes (Jones 2013). Therefore, in the surveys, we investigated the extent to which learners are exposed to English either in their home environment or at school.

### Language spoken at home

When learners were asked to select their first language and language spoken at home, the distribution of responses was very similar. Therefore, only the results of language spoken at home are presented here. For Primary learners, there was a split between Maltese (approximately 50%) and English or bilingual (47%) with a small percentage (3%) selecting 'other'. The distribution was more skewed for Secondary learners; 71% of respondents selected Maltese as their first language, 27% selected English or bilingual and a small percentage (2%) selected 'other'<sup>5</sup> which suggests the presence of linguistic minorities in the Maltese educational context. The parent reports of language spoken at home match the learner response data.

These findings suggest very different levels of exposure to English in the home environment, which can influence performance in schools; a finding that is illustrated in the following teacher comments:

*Parents have limited knowledge in English language usage. This is reflected in their children. (Primary teacher, State school)*

*Due to the fact that most children have a Maltese speaking background most of them find difficulties to communicate in English all the time. (Primary teacher, State school)*

### English language levels of parents/guardians

Learners were also asked to indicate how well their parents/guardians spoke English on a Likert scale from 'cannot speak English' to can speak English 'very well', with a 'not sure' option. The results indicated that a strong majority of parents can speak English either 'very well' or 'moderately well'. However, as pointed out by the teachers in the previous section, a small minority of parents cannot speak English and 7–23% cannot speak English very well. When cross-checked with parents' self-reports of language proficiency, similar results were found. These findings once again show the disparity in learners' English language experiences in the home environment.

### English language use outside of school

The strong majority of Primary and Secondary learners report using English 'very often' or 'sometimes' when they watch TV or films, use the internet, talk to tourists and read books. However, the distribution of responses for activities such as talking in English with family and friends is more varied, with a much larger proportion of learners reporting 'never' speaking English with family, friends, or other people in their home towns. Note that in order to triangulate the data, these responses were checked against parents' reports of how often their children engage in different activities in English.

It is also interesting to note that when looking at pattern of responses for watching TV or using the internet, there were no statistically significant differences between responses across school sectors. However, in terms of English language use with friends and family, those in Independent schools were more likely to select speaking English 'very often' compared to Church and State schools. This may reflect a different milieu, with learners in Independent schools having family and friends with whom they can speak English whereas learners at State schools may not have the same access to English speakers in their immediate social circle. This differential exposure to English outside of school is likely to have an impact on performance at school level and can contribute to widening the achievement gap between learners. Approximately 20% and 10% of Primary and Secondary learners respectively reported taking private English language lessons. When parents were asked to provide reasons for why their child takes private lessons, comments generally fell in the following categories<sup>6</sup>:

- improving Reading
- improving English (amongst other subjects such as Maths and Maltese)
- learning issues (e.g. dyslexia) and need for more support
- for the purpose of revision and exam preparation.

### English language use in the classroom

The extent of English language use in the classroom was elicited on a 4-point Likert scale from 'never' to 'very often' from both learners and teachers. Findings show a clear trend of high English language use by the teachers, with decreasing levels of use by learners as they talk to the teacher and as they talk to each other, and also demonstrate a high level of consistency between what is independently reported by teachers and learners, which strengthens the findings from these surveys.

When looking at pattern of responses across school sectors, no statistically significant differences were found for English language use by teachers (as reported by learners). However, both Primary and Secondary learners in Independent schools were more likely to select speaking English to their teacher and other learners 'very often' compared to Church and State schools. This may reflect a different approach to English language instruction in the different school sectors and/or differences in the characteristics/profile of the learners who attend these schools.

Teachers report switching to Maltese only occasionally during English classes and their open comments suggest that code-switching practices take place mainly due to lower English ability levels of some learners or for classroom management purposes.

90% of Primary and Secondary learners reported studying other school subjects in English, with similar results for

<sup>5</sup> The listed first languages are Chinese, Filipino, French, German, Greek, Italian, Libyan, Nigerian, Serbian and Spanish.

<sup>6</sup> These comments refer to both Primary and Secondary students.

English language use as above. The trend of lower English language use by learners can also be explained by an open comment by one of the teachers, which sheds light on the complex socio-cultural roles of English and Maltese which can manifest themselves in the classroom:

*English is still regarded as an artefact [sic] in which only snobs take pride. Most of the time students address me in Maltese – I either switch to French ‘threatening them’ that I can’t follow because we’re not speaking Maltese during class. Sometimes I am successful but most of the time I am bugged by their insistence to switch to their native tongue – typical answer but I’m Maltese so why do I need to learn English? They are not concerned by any answer which I provide and this may be possibly a backlash from our Maltese colonial attitude. Will have to consult Edward Said about this.*

Another possible explanation could be that English lessons are too teacher dominated and thus limiting learners’ opportunities to use English and/or to speak English to other learners. Earlier findings suggested that paired and group activities do not occur as frequently as other activities in the classroom. Given that no classroom observations were carried out, this explanation is only tentative and would need to be further explored in the second phase of the project.

### Opportunities to use English outside of the classroom (in schools)

Teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which their schools offer opportunities for learners to use English outside of the classroom (English clubs, English books, films, etc.). Results show that schools generally offer such opportunities although there is still a 10% disagreement rate. Note also that statistically significant differences were observed for teachers from Independent schools selecting ‘strongly agree’ for this statement compared to State and Church schools. This suggests that Independent schools may offer more English language support compared to other school sectors. These out-of-class activities create not only opportunities to use and practise English, but can also lead to the increased popularity of English and enhance learner motivation and positive attitudes towards English. This finding also links in with the previous section where it was shown that learners in Independent schools were more willing to speak in English in the classroom. These results may reflect differences in the school sectors such as background characteristics of learners enrolled in Independent schools. It is also likely that Independent schools emphasise these features such as additional English language support to differentiate their schools from the other sectors, in order to attract parents to their schools.

### Attitudes towards learning English

The academic literature on second/foreign language acquisition has indicated that learners’ attitudes towards learning a language and the extent to which they perceive the language to be useful can influence learner behaviour, both in terms of the amount of effort exerted on language learning and the extent to which they persist with learning

it when it becomes difficult (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005, Gardner 1985, Oxford and Ehrman 1993). Learners’ beliefs about their own capacity to learn – often referred to as self-efficacy – have also been found to be positively associated with academic outcomes (Mills, Pajares and Herron 2006, Multon, Brown and Lent 1991). These constructs were elicited in the surveys.

Several statements in the surveys were designed to shed further light on the motivational factors that may be influencing learners’ language learning behaviour, such as instrumentality or milieu (Gardner 1985). Instrumental motivation refers to the utilitarian benefit or incentives associated with learning a language, such as getting a job or travelling, whereas the motivational dimension of milieu refers to the influence of learners’ immediate social environment (i.e. parents, family and friends), excluding teachers, in shaping their attitudes to learning. Learners who perceive family support for language learning are more likely to persist with it and more willing to work harder at it (Colletta, Clément and Edwards 1983, Gardner 1985). Although these two dimensions of motivation are not necessarily causally linked to learner outcomes because other variables such as instructional quality, learning opportunities and learner ability all play a crucial role, the results nevertheless provide an indication of how much effort learners are willing to place on learning.

Parental attitude towards education and learning, as well as the extent of support and encouragement, have also been identified as having an influence on their child’s level of attainment (see Bartram 2006, Gu and Saville 2012) and were therefore included in the surveys.

Teacher attitudes towards a language can influence learner behaviour in terms of effort expended on learning and learner success (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005, Dörnyei 2003, Horwitz 2001). Teacher beliefs in learners’ capacity to learn can also influence or reinforce learner attitudes towards a language (Bandura 1977, Mills, Pajares and Herron 2006, Multon et al 1991). Therefore, the value placed on learning English by the teachers and attitudes towards learning English were considered important constructs to evaluate. Key survey findings on these different constructs are summarised below.

### Learner attitudes and self-efficacy

Approximately 90% of Primary and Secondary learners agreed or strongly agreed that (a) they like learning English, (b) learning English is important to them, (c) they believe they can learn English and (d) they know how to improve their English, all of which demonstrate positive attitudes towards English and high levels of self-efficacy in learning within the Maltese educational context.

These results are confirmed in both the teacher surveys, where 94% and 86% of Primary and Secondary teachers agree or strongly agree that their learners like learning English, and in the parent surveys, where 95% of Primary parents and 90% of Secondary parents agree or strongly agree that their child (a) enjoys learning English, (b) is

motivated to learn English and (c) believes he/she can learn English. Over 90% of parents also strongly agreed with the statement 'It is important to me that my child learns English', which further demonstrates the value placed on learning English in the home environment.

When comparing the pattern of responses for the above statements for Primary and Secondary learners, a statistically significant difference was found for the statements pertaining to enjoyment of learning English, importance of learning English and motivation to learn, with a smaller proportion of learners and parents opting for the 'strongly agree' option for Secondary learners compared to Primary learners. This might suggest a shift in learners' attitudes and/or enthusiasm towards language learning (or learning in general) as they grow older. This is in line with previous research (e.g. Lepper, Corpus and Iyengar 2005:192) that 'positive academic beliefs and behaviours gradually erode as children progress through the school system'. Research from other educational contexts points to the more fun-oriented nature of lessons in Primary school, where teaching can be done through games, 'whereas in secondary school, learners are dealing with more cognitively demanding tasks and there is the added dimension that learners at this age are developing their sense of self, which can affect their attitude and motivation' (Docherty, Gratacós Casacuberta, Rodríguez Pazos and Canosa 2014:8). Secondary learners may also start to think more seriously about the exams and their future, which could potentially detract from the joys of learning. The majority of Primary (92%) and Secondary (81%) learners nevertheless reported enjoying English language lessons at their schools, which suggests that the schools are successful in creating a positive environment for English language learning. The following comment by a Primary learner captures this:

1. My teacher love English. 2. I love English. 3. My friends love English. 4. Every one love English. (Primary learner, State school)

Note that a statistically significant difference was observed for the pattern of responses for the statement 'I enjoy English lessons at my school' across school sectors, where 'strongly agree' was selected more than expected in responses of Independent school learners compared to Church and State schools, with the widest gap observed between Independent and State schools. This was the case for both Primary and Secondary data.

### Learner motivation

The results in Table 4 show that learners recognise the functional role and importance of learning English e.g. for employment and university entrance purposes, with the majority of both Primary and Secondary learners opting for the 'very important' option when evaluating these different reasons for learning English. Some of the open comments further illustrate the value placed on English:

*I am learning English because I wish to be an Accountant and it requires English. (Secondary learner, State school)*

*For an amazing future. (Secondary learner, Independent school)*

*Everything. English is just very very important. Easy to communicate with people who can speak it. (Secondary learner, State school)*

High levels of importance were also placed on other reasons, such as understanding English films, TV series and programmes. Open comments included 'understanding English music', 'talking to English people' and using English for 'social media', which indicate cultural interest in English.

Learning English to please parents/guardians was not perceived to be as important as the other reasons, although over 60% of Primary learners still regarded this as 'very important'. Not surprisingly, Secondary learners attributed far less importance to pleasing parents, suggesting that parental influence is becoming less important as learners become older.

**Table 4: Reasons for learning English and perceived importance (%)**

Learning English will . . .	Grade	Very Important	Important	Not Very Important	Not Important At All	Not Sure
. . . help me get into a good university.	P	81%	13%	3%	1%	2%
	S	77%	20%	2%	1%	1%
. . . help me get a good job.	P	83%	14%	1%	0%	1%
	S	81%	17%	1%	1%	0%
. . . make it easier for me to travel to other countries.	P	68%	21%	6%	2%	3%
	S	74%	23%	2%	0%	1%
. . . make it easier for me to talk to people who don't speak my first language (either online or in person).	P	70%	20%	6%	1%	3%
	S	77%	20%	1%	0%	1%
. . . help me use the internet to get information.	P	69%	22%	5%	2%	3%
	S	70%	26%	3%	1%	0%
. . . help me understand English films/TV series/programmes.	P	72%	19%	5%	2%	2%
	S	69%	25%	5%	1%	1%
. . . please my parents/guardians.	P	65%	22%	6%	2%	5%
	S	26%	33%	29%	8%	4%

P=Primary, S=Secondary

The strong majority of Primary and Secondary teachers (over 95%) agreed or strongly agreed that learning English is important to their learners. Parents of Primary and Secondary learners also place great importance on learning English for a variety of reasons but particularly for university entrance and employment purposes, with 98% selecting 'important' or 'very important' in their evaluation. Parents' open comments generally referred to the instrumental role of English for education and jobs, the ability to talk to relatives and family members and English as a universal language. Some illustrative examples are presented below:

*It is imperative to learn English even for daily use e.g. to understand what is going around you Euro news and CNN. Ingredients on products are not in Maltese. Core subjects like physics, accounting, economics, sciences etc. are to be studied in English so how can you understand a subject if you do not hold a strong understanding and communication in English?* (Mother of Primary learner, State school)

*It is a universal language and our second official language.* (Mother of Primary learner, State school)

*I work in a bank and all communication through emails is always in English though we are Maltese.* (Mother of Primary learner, State school)

Generally speaking, the results show great importance given to English from the perspective of all major stakeholders – learners, parents and teachers – in the Maltese context with evidence of high motivation for learning English for a variety of reasons.

### Parental support and encouragement

In terms of the motivational dimension of *milieu*, the degree of parental support was elicited in the learner surveys. While 75% of Primary learners agreed with the statement 'My family encourages me to learn English', the disagreement rate (compared to other statements) was relatively high at 16%. This disagreement rate was much lower for Secondary learners at 5%; a tentative reason might be that Secondary learners are at a more crucial stage in terms of taking English exams, applying to university or entering the employment market where English plays a more important role, and as such learning English is more actively encouraged by families.

The extent of parental support in improving English outside of school (e.g. by helping with homework, or providing opportunities to use English) was elicited in the parent surveys. 90% of Primary parents reported providing this support 'sometimes' or 'very often', with 2% reporting never providing such support. The proportion of Secondary parents providing this support was lower, with 75% selecting 'sometimes' or 'very often' and 10% never providing such support.

The extent to which parents actively participate in their children's English education (participating in school activities, talking to teachers about progress, etc.) was also elicited from teachers. 35% of Secondary teachers reported that parents did not actively participate in their children's education compared to 12% for Primary learners.

This is also confirmed in the parents' survey results for the statement 'I know a lot about my child's English programme at school', which received relatively high disagreement rates of 17% and 25% for Primary and Secondary learners respectively. It may therefore be necessary for schools to allocate additional time to inform parents about the English programme at their school.

Teachers' open comments suggested that the degree of parental encouragement can vary widely for a number of reasons, including parents' educational background. Teachers also touched on the complex linguistic milieu in Malta where the choice of language has strong social connotations which can influence the extent of family encouragement in learning English:

*Some parents tend to help and encourage their children, others just don't care or they are not able to do so due to social and educational issues.* (Secondary teacher, State school)

*There is a rift in the country between the Maltese speaking and the so called 'tal Pepe' [the English-speaking Maltese], some learners want to distance themselves from their Maltese heritage in an effort to appear more forward thinking, others insist on their heritage and resist English influence on their lives. This all depends on the parents' outlook and how they treat English in the homestead. It's a complicated linguistic milieu.* (Secondary teacher, Independent school)

Schools can also ensure that they have established a clear language policy which could be used to guide and support parents in the most effective ways to help their children learn English. The absence of strong parental engagement with learning as children grow older was touched on in the teachers' open comments, where it was noted that parents can still play an important role in their children's education and that they should continue their support in Secondary school:

*I believe that we need to educate parents to involve themselves more in what their children are doing as at times they believe as soon as they start attending Secondary school they no longer feel the need to follow on them doing homework and at times some students tend to feel lost or fall behind.* (Secondary teacher, State school)

## Teacher attitudes, pedagogic practices and professional development needs

In order to better understand the context of learning and teaching in Malta, and also, identify teachers' professional development needs, teachers at the two key school stages – Primary Year 5 and Secondary Form 4 – were invited to participate in the benchmarking project on a voluntary basis. The Senior Management Teams (SMT) at different schools, the Malta Union of Teachers and MEDE informed schools and teachers about the project and encouraged participation. A total of 132 teachers completed the teacher surveys. The following sections present the findings from the surveys. The data for all Primary and Secondary teachers is generally presented together, except

for statements for which patterns of responses were significantly different for the two school stages. Where relevant, data from parent and learner surveys which relate to classroom activities and practices and their attitudes is integrated to provide a more comprehensive picture of the learning environment.

### Attitudes to teaching English

The survey results suggest that teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching English, with all but 1.4% of teachers reporting that they enjoy teaching English and are confident in their ability to plan appropriate English lessons for their learners, all of which can positively influence learning outcomes in the classroom.

The results of both learner and parent surveys suggest that teachers are generally successful in creating a positive environment for English language learning, as the majority of learners report enjoying their English lessons at school. The following learner comment illustrates this:

*I believe I have a good English teacher. She takes pride in her work and explains well. She gives us hints and ideas to do better. (Secondary learner, State school)*

These results are confirmed in parent surveys, with over 90% of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing that their child (a) enjoys his/her English lessons at school, (b) is making good progress in English and (c) likes his/her English teacher.

### Key trends in pedagogical practices

The surveys included a section on teachers' pedagogical practices, and teachers were asked to report on the frequency of the listed activities – which represent examples of good practice in the classroom – throughout the school year.

Overall, the listed activities are reported to occur in some or most lessons, which is a positive finding. The four most frequently occurring practices are those related to assigning homework, linking the homework to classroom learning, reviewing learner homework as well as checking understanding of topics. Only 35% of teachers report explicitly stating the learning goals and objectives of the classroom in almost every lesson and a smaller percentage (29%) report providing a short summary of the previous lesson. These activities can direct learners to what they need to focus attention on in the classroom and to also help them recognise the link between different lessons, and should ideally occur in every lesson. Learners will not be able to develop autonomy if they are not clear on the objectives of their lessons. Results also show that only about 10% of teachers use paired/small group work in almost every lesson. It is therefore not surprising that more highly learner-centred activities such as asking learners to suggest topics for the classroom or to help plan classroom activities were reported to occur far less frequently in the lessons. The above findings suggest that classes may benefit from more activities that promote self-regulated learning. This is also in line with areas of prioritisation in the

NCF, which puts emphasis on promoting learner autonomy: 'given that one of the greatest effects on learning is when learners become their own educators (Hattie 2012), a pedagogy that cultivates learner autonomy should be cultivated' (Ministry for Education and Employment 2015:30). On the other hand, as noted by one of the State Secondary teachers, time restrictions and the demands of the curricula may be a limiting factor:

*Although we have 6 lessons per week we have to prepare students for 2 O Levels (Lang & Literature) and we are restricted with time so there isn't enough time for students to suggest topics they'd like to discuss. By the time one sets up the laptop and does the class correction there isn't much time left for creativity etc. (Secondary teacher, State school)*

The impression of time restrictions may be due to the shortening of lesson times, which may also be compounded by the recent introduction of co-ed in all State schools which may have led to new challenges for some teachers.

The statement 'Students work in groups based upon their abilities', where only 22% of teachers report incorporating this practice 'in almost every lesson' or 'in most lessons', suggests that teachers may not be recognising the importance of group work not only as an opportunity to practise speaking but also to talk about learning. Language is the tool learners use to think about a subject and talk about their thinking, which leads to cognitive development. When the response to this statement is combined with the high disagreement rate of 30% for the statement 'I find it easy to adapt lessons to cater for different student abilities in the same class', the findings suggest that teachers could benefit from more support in the area of differentiated instruction. This is particularly important in the Maltese educational context where the wide range of ability in the observed score data as well as the striking differences in levels of exposure to English would most likely translate into mixed-ability classes, and a key aspect of differentiated instruction is how to strategically group learners for different purposes to improve learning opportunities.

The above findings are restricted to teacher self-reports, and while classroom observations would have greatly enhanced the robustness of the findings, this was not possible in the first phase of the project. Nevertheless, in order to address this limitation, some of these teaching practices were repeated in the learner surveys as a different approach for triangulating the data.

Table 5 shows the learner statements paired with the associated teacher statements and the distributions of responses for the frequency of occurrence of different activities. Results generally show comparability across the two data sets, thus increasing confidence in the findings. One of the most noticeable differences in the table is the extent to which learners work on their own in completing classroom tasks, with learners reporting it to happen more frequently than teachers. While learners can certainly benefit from focused individual work, increasing well-planned, paired and group activities can enhance learner

**Table 5: Triangulation of teaching practices**

Frequency of English use in classroom	Source	In Almost Every Lesson	In Most Lessons	In Some Lessons	Never or Hardly Ever	N/A
The homework is useful for learning English.	Learners	65%	21%	9%	4%	1%
I link the English homework to what students are learning in class.	Teachers	76%	20%	2%	0%	2%
Our teacher gives us English homework.	Learners	65%	26%	9%	0%	0%
I give my students English homework.	Teachers	55%	39%	4%	2%	1%
Our teacher tells us what the learning goals of the lesson are.	Learners	56%	23%	17%	4%	2%
I explicitly state the learning goals/objectives/outcomes to the students.	Teachers	35%	40%	22%	2%	0%
At the beginning of the lesson, we revise the previous lesson.	Learners	28%	30%	28%	11%	3%
At the beginning of the lesson I present a short summary of the previous lesson.	Teachers	29%	33%	37%	2%	0%
The teacher asks us to think about how well we are learning and how we can improve.	Learners	42%	27%	18%	10%	3%
Students evaluate and reflect upon their own work.	Teachers	27%	34%	31%	6%	2%
I work on my own in completing classroom tasks.	Learners	44%	31%	20%	3%	2%
Students work on their own in completing classroom tasks.	Teachers	15%	37%	41%	6%	1%
The teacher walks around the classroom and helps me while I'm working.	Learners	38%	28%	24%	9%	2%
I work with individual students.	Teachers	14%	29%	45%	10%	2%
I work with other students (in pairs or groups) in completing classroom tasks.	Learners	23%	25%	39%	10%	2%
Students work in pairs or small groups in completing classroom tasks.	Teachers	10%	29%	60%	2%	0%
The teacher gives us a test or quiz to check our learning progress.	Learners	22%	22%	38%	16%	3%
I administer a test or quiz to assess student learning.	Teachers	10%	31%	53%	5%	2%

interaction and opportunities to use English, and also help promote learner autonomy.

### Use of textbooks and technology in the classroom

90% of teachers report using English textbooks in their lessons, the majority of whom find them useful (84%). Nevertheless, textbooks are not the main focus of most lessons according to teachers, and over 98% of teachers use additional material/resources to supplement the textbooks and also express confidence in their ability to create these materials. Teachers' open comments on textbooks suggested that some textbooks may be too old, not suitable for all ability levels, not necessarily related to end-of-year exams and lacking practice materials, which explains why teachers frequently need to supplement the textbook with additional materials – something which they do not always find easy due to 'huge teaching loads and limited time'. These findings suggest that teachers may benefit from further training in textbook adaptation.

Learner and teacher perceptions of technology and its usefulness were also elicited in the surveys. Technology is reported to be used in most or almost every lesson by the majority of teachers. There is also a strong consensus (98%) amongst teachers in the usefulness of technology

for learning English and high levels of confidence in their ability to use technology for teaching English. Teachers also unanimously agree that their learners like using technology in the classroom, all of which highlight the important role that technology is increasingly playing in educational contexts.

Technology is generally viewed positively and sometimes in contrast to textbooks:

*Technology makes lessons more attractive and students participate more, cooperate with each other, and learn through exploration. It's a resource which [makes] students interact more than when using textbooks. (Primary teacher, State school)*

Other comments referred to the complementary use of different resources: 'I tend to be very eclectic in my choice of material, usually moving between basic textual resources and more digital ones.' Another comment referred to the usefulness of audio books and exposing learners to 'poems read out by their actual creators like Ian McEwan'. One teacher believed 'blogs' to be very useful for learning, subject to teaching loads.

However, the issue of lack of technological access or few opportunities for use were listed as problematic, and a

perceptive comment by a teacher also questioned the value of (current uses of) technology in enhancing learning:

*Technology is yet to be introduced into the classroom in a way that actually aids the acquisition of language. Interactive white boards only serve to reiterate outdated concepts of teacher centred practice. Learners need the technology, not us. iPads are also meaningless in terms of providing linguistic acquisition for all, their interface is simple, but it lacks the input options for learners to input language in ways deemed necessary by the NCF. (Secondary teacher, Independent school)*

The observation that education plus technology does not necessarily equate to better learning is echoed in a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) report on *Students, Computers and Learning*, where analysis of the PISA data suggested that where technologies are used in the classroom, the impact on performance is 'mixed, at best' (2015:15). An interpretation offered by OECD was that 'building deep, conceptual understanding and higher-order thinking requires intensive teacher-student interactions, and technology sometimes distracts from this valuable human engagement'. While the report is based on student achievement data in reading, mathematics or science, the findings certainly hold relevance for language learning. These are important issues to consider in terms of integrating technology in the classroom, and efforts should be made to incorporate 'pedagogies that make the most of technology' as 'adding 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies to 20<sup>th</sup> century teaching practices will just dilute the effectiveness of teaching' (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015).

It is therefore useful to consider how technology can best be incorporated in Maltese educational settings in ways that can increase opportunities to communicate in English and improve the provision of feedback. It is also important to offer professional development support to teachers in using these technologies in a linked-up fashion and in a manner that best supports the provision of individualised learning. Technologies can also have great potential in assisting teachers with differentiated instruction.

### English literature in the classroom

While the above sections focused on general pedagogical practices in the English classroom, this section focuses specifically on the use of English literature in the classroom. This is in light of the emphasis placed on English literature in the Maltese Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) (Ministry for Education and Employment 2015:29) in which the importance of regularly exposing learners to a variety of literary texts is highlighted in order to 'enhance [learners'] sensitivity to language and fire their imagination'.

Approximately 90% of teachers believed that using literature can help learners learn English. While teachers generally believed that their learners were good at understanding English literature, there was a 17% disagreement rate. Teachers' positive sentiments towards teaching English through literature are captured in the following quotes:

*If language is not experienced (and enjoyed) through literature, what would be the point of learning grammar? (Secondary teacher, State school)*

*Literature allows students to delve into the literary not factual world and allows them to widen their imagination. (Secondary teacher, Church school)*

*Students understand English literature but the challenging part is to get them to become critical learners and to analyse and discuss important themes. (Secondary teacher, State school)*

*My students really enjoy the literature lessons and it allows them to explore different aspects of the language. (Secondary teacher, State school)*

The majority of Secondary learners (79%) agree or strongly agree that using English literature in the classroom helps them learn English. However, there was a 15% disagreement rate for the statement 'I believe I am good at understanding English literature', which is in line with the teacher evaluations. A close examination of learner open comments illustrates learners' mixed feelings towards English literature, with some enjoying these lessons:

*It is my favourite part of the lesson and it is quite interesting to . . . and understand the thought of . . . it. (Secondary learner, State school)*

*I really love English literature and I think it's amazing how writers make use of the language and make it sound so lovely. (Secondary learner, State school)*

Other learners, however, find the lessons more challenging or do not see their value:

*I think it is boring + difficult. I don't know why we have to do it since I'm not going to study further on English. I wish it was an option. (Secondary learner, State school)*

*I don't think English Literature really helps us in life. (Secondary learner, Church school)*

*I personally think it's useless, because I only need grammar for my writing. It's not like I'm going to University and write an Essay on English Literature. (Secondary learner, Church school)*

It therefore seems that, unlike learning English, not all learners attribute as much importance to studying English literature. These findings may also reflect a recent change in the teaching and assessment of literature which requires a more critical response from learners. These perceptions can nevertheless be changed by teachers through awareness-raising activities that outline the benefits of using English literature, e.g. in enhancing English language competence: Slater and Collie (1987:3) list 'valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement' as reasons for using literary texts. Other reasons include 'universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity' (Hişmanoğlu 2005:54).

Text selection is also a key consideration. Some of the teacher open comments referred to the need for texts which are both accessible in terms of language levels but also appropriate for different age groups.

*Our school definitely is in need of a much wider choice of literature texts which cater for all abilities. This is especially useful and important when teaching literature to the lower tracks. (Secondary teacher, State school)*

*Finding the right texts which are accessible but not babyish is a difficulty as my students are 15 years old but their English is below elementary level. (Secondary teacher, State school)*

Using graded readers linked to the relevant CEFR level of the learners is recommended in order to control for the difficulty levels of texts. Selecting literary texts which are relevant for young adults is also key in motivating learners. Another recommendation from a parent (in an open comment) was to 'make literature more accessible through arts e.g. theatre and drama'.

### Attitudes to assessment and assessment practices

Assessment has multiple functions in education, including the measurement of achievement, public accountability and providing feedback to learners, and it also tells learners what we value or what they should pay attention to (Boud 2000). Learning-oriented assessment (LOA) represents an approach that recognises that the main function of

assessment, whether formative or summative in nature, is that it should improve learning (Carless 2009). LOA involves 'the collection and interpretation of evidence about performance so that judgements can be made about further language development' (Purpura 2004:236). This approach to assessment requires learners to be involved in assessment through self/peer assessment as well as by using the feedback they receive from different sources (e.g. teachers, peers, tests) to decide on what they need to do next. LOA practices have the potential to increase learner autonomy, motivation and engagement, and as such the use of LOA practices was investigated in the questionnaire. The next sections focus on stakeholder attitudes to assessment by bringing together the results of teacher, learner and parent surveys as well as the extent to which LOA practices are observed in the Maltese educational contexts based on teacher and learner reports.

### Learner views on assessment

Results in Table 6 suggest a strong link between summative forms of assessment and learning from the perspective of learners, with the strong majority of both Primary and Secondary learners attributing an important role to tests

**Table 6: Learner attitudes towards assessment**

Statements	Grade	Strongly Agree & Agree	Strongly Disagree & Disagree	Don't Know
Tests are important because they motivate me to study.	P	95%	4%	2%
	S	80%	18%	2%
Tests are important because they help me focus on what I need to learn.	P	95%	5%	1%
	S	87%	11%	2%
I really have to understand the lessons to get good marks in English.	P	95%	4%	1%
	S	82%	15%	2%
I work harder in class when preparing for a test.	P	92%	6%	2%
	S	82%	15%	4%
It is clear to me what I am supposed to learn.	P	95%	3%	2%
	S	84%	10%	5%
It is clear to me what I will be tested on.	P	88%	8%	4%
	S	82%	12%	6%
It is clear to me how what I am supposed to learn fits in with what I will be tested on.	P	88%	6%	6%
	S	81%	11%	8%
The feedback the teacher gives me during class helps me perform better at the end-of-year exams.	P	92%	5%	3%
	S	87%	11%	3%
The annual exams are related to the work we do in the classroom throughout the year.	P	90%	5%	5%
	S	89%	6%	4%
Taking English tests helps me understand my strengths and weaknesses.	P	88%	9%	4%
	S	89%	9%	3%
Judging my own work and/or the work of other students in class is useful for learning English.	P	77%	16%	7%
	S	72%	21%	7%
I am able to judge the quality of my work and the work of other students in my class.	P	75%	15%	11%
	S	75%	18%	7%
I worry about taking English tests.	P	53%	43%	4%
	S	54%	41%	4%

P=Primary, S=Secondary

in motivating them to study harder, focusing them on what they need to learn and making them work harder in class, despite half of the respondents reporting feeling worried about taking English tests. Note that the proportion of Primary learners who agree with the statements is consistently higher than Secondary learners, which might suggest a shift in attitude towards exams at the different school stages, which possibly reflects the higher-stakes nature of tests at higher levels. Although assessment within Malta has a formative component in providing feedback to students and parents (e.g. half-yearly exams), some exams are used for determining the banding/setting of the Primary and Secondary English classes which may explain why learners indicate some anxiety about examinations.

Learners also notice the relationship between annual exams and work that is done in the classroom, and attribute a strong positive role to teacher feedback in influencing their performance. There is also evidence of learner awareness of the diagnostic value of tests, with the majority of learners agreeing with the statement *'Taking English tests helps me understand my strengths and weaknesses'*. In light of these positive attitudes, it is important to build a continuous assessment programme that takes advantage of these positive attitudes by encouraging student reflection based on results and helping learners identify next steps in their learning programme.

The highest proportion of disagreement is observed for statements relating to the usefulness of self and peer assessment for learning English as well as learners' ability to carry out this evaluation. The percentage of Primary (11%) and Secondary (7%) learners selecting the 'don't know' option in terms of their ability to self/peer assess confirms earlier findings regarding weaknesses in self-regulating learning.

### Parent views on assessment

Parental attitudes towards different forms of assessment were also elicited in the surveys. No statistically significant differences were found between patterns of responses of parents of Primary and Secondary school learners. It is interesting to note that the statement *'It is important that my child is able to assess his/her own progress'* elicited the highest agreement rate from parents, indicating the value placed on self-assessment and increasing children's autonomy from the parents' perspective. Similar to learners, parents also view the diagnostic role of tests in helping children understand their strengths and weaknesses. Results suggest a positive attitude towards summative assessment in increasing motivation and focusing learning, and the low agreement rate for the statement *'In general, preparing for tests will not help my child's English improve'* shows that parents also see a link between summative forms of assessment and learning.

Parents' open comments on assessment touched on the need for more feedback, past papers, model answers and holistic assessment of English (not limited to testing Writing). It should be pointed out that summative assessment of all four skills takes place regularly in both

Primary and Secondary stages. English literature is also assessed at Secondary school and feedback is provided on all components. Nevertheless, parents emphasised the need for assessment at more regular intervals (rather than annually or bi-annually) as an efficient approach in reducing cramming and test-related anxiety, and encouraging regular work and studying. There was also evidence of mixed attitudes towards tests:

*In my opinion it's important for my child to have tests and assessments in English to see where she stands. (Father of Secondary learner, Church school)*

*I do not believe that exams reflect a child's true capability or potential in any subject. (Father of Primary learner, Church school)*

### Teacher views on assessment and LOA practices

Results show that approximately 90% of teachers attribute a positive and important role to tests in motivating learners to study, helping them focus on what they need to learn and improving learning in general. Teachers in general have a positive attitude towards summative forms of assessment and annual exams in supporting learning. While the majority of teachers (83%) believe the annual exams to be at an appropriate level for their learners, further analyses of responses by school sector suggested that teachers in State schools were less likely to 'strongly agree' with this statement compared to Church and Independent schools. This might reflect different assessment policies across school sectors; the State annual exams are set centrally and include an evaluation process whereby teachers are invited to send in their feedback, whereas Independent and Church schools set their own school exams.

It is interesting to note that while half of the teachers believe that learners see summative assessment as jumping through hoops, the learner results suggested otherwise, with the strong majority of both Primary and Secondary learners reporting feeling motivated by tests. One of the teacher comments refers to the double-edged sword of summative assessment in not only motivating learners but also creating test-related anxiety:

*Exams do motivate students to study harder but it is also true that they bring a lot of stress on students as well as parents. (Secondary teacher, State school)*

The majority of teachers (95%) strongly agree or agree that learners should assess their own work. However, this proportion is markedly lower for peer evaluation (58%); this result should be further examined, given the importance placed on self/peer assessment in the LOA framework in promoting learner autonomy.

Teachers also report engaging in LOA practices such as informing learners about the criteria on which they will be evaluated and providing feedback on learner strengths and weaknesses following tests. These results were confirmed in the learners' reports of classroom practices and therefore triangulate the teacher self-reports. A teacher's open comment also referred to alternative ways of assessment in the classroom with a focus on learning:

*I believe that testing and exams should not be the centre of teaching. Children should be made more aware of the need to learn English. I can still assess my pupils by giving them short tasks to perform such as writing a story or engage in a discussion. (Primary teacher, State school)*

Lastly, the majority of teachers (86%) report developing their own classroom tests and also express their confidence in their ability to design appropriate classroom tests. Given the common practice of test development by teachers, an assessment literacy course could greatly benefit teachers in designing high-quality tests that best support learning.

### Improvements to English language learning and teaching

Lastly, learners, parents and teachers were asked to describe the one thing that they believed would improve the learning and teaching of English. The most recurrent themes are summarised below:

- providing more resources (textbooks, books, films) in schools and more opportunities to use English outside of class (e.g. film clubs, school trips)
- implementing full English immersion in classes, with a consistent language policy across school sectors
- teacher training that focuses on bilingual education and differentiated instruction
- motivating learners through extra-curricular activities, use of educational technologies, integrating literature with English learning and introducing a wider variety of activities (e.g. games, videos and quizzes)
- increased (and better) use of educational technologies
- revising textbooks, making them more interesting and relevant to the Maltese context
- reducing class sizes to allow more teacher-learner interaction
- increase in paired and group work
- increased feedback from teachers and monitoring of learner progress
- more regular revisions for exams
- less emphasis on final tests/exams and more focus on formative assessment.

### Factors influencing performance

A multi-level analysis (hierarchical linear modelling – HLM) was performed on the score data in order to explore whether performance of Primary and Secondary learners in the Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking<sup>7</sup> tests varies by a number of different individual (e.g. gender, first language) and grouping (e.g. school sector) variables. Given the sample size, there was a limit on the number of

variables that could be entered into the model so factors hypothesised to have a strong impact on performance (e.g. school sector, level of exposure to English, gender) were included in the analysis. The following is a summary of the results.

#### Primary

- **School sector:** in the skills of Reading, Listening and Speaking, learners in Independent schools performed better than learners in State schools. A different trend was observed for the skill of Writing: learners in State schools outperformed those in Church schools, which was statistically significant.
- **Gender:** in the skills of Reading, Listening and Speaking, there was no statistically significant difference between performance of male and female learners, although girls performed slightly better than boys. In the skill of Writing, girls outperformed boys with a statistically significant difference.
- **Language spoken at home:** results showed that those learners who report speaking both English and Maltese at home (bilinguals) perform significantly better on the Listening and Speaking exams compared to those who report only speaking Maltese at home. No statistically significant difference was observed for performance on Reading. Those learners who had reported 'other' as the language spoken at home (i.e. linguistic minority learners) performed significantly worse than Maltese L1 learners on the Writing exam.
- **Speaking English with family:** learners who reported speaking English 'very often' with their family performed significantly better in the Listening exam than those who reported 'never' speaking English with their families.
- **Use of technology in the classroom:** learners who reported using technology in the classroom in 'some/most/almost all' lessons performed significantly better than those classes where technology was 'never/hardly ever' used for Listening and Speaking.
- **Paired and group work in the classroom:** learners who reported working with other learners in most lessons performed significantly better than learners who 'never' or 'hardly ever' participated in pair/group work for Speaking and Reading.

#### Secondary

- **School sector:** no statistically significant effects were found for school sector for the skills of Listening and Reading, although a trend of higher performances in Independent schools compared to Church and State schools was observed. However, learners in Church schools outperformed those in State schools on the Writing exam and this difference was statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup> The results of HLM analysis on Secondary Speaking scores are not reported because only 67 observations were available in the data matrix (due to missing values in the dependent and explanatory variables).

- **Gender:** girls outperformed boys in all three skills of Listening, Reading and Writing, although this difference only reached statistical significance for Reading and Writing.
- **Language spoken at home:** unlike the Primary results, no statistically significant differences were found for the effects of the language spoken at home, although a trend of higher performances by those who either use both English and Maltese or just English at home compared to those who only use Maltese in the home environment was observed.
- **Speaking English with family:** learners who reported speaking English with their family 'not very often' performed slightly better in the Writing exam than those who reported 'never' speaking English with their family.

## Recommendations

### Improving language levels and narrowing the achievement gap amongst learners

Findings from the benchmarking study generally showed high levels of English language performance by learners; a large proportion of Primary Year 5 learners were found to be at the B1/B2 levels, with Speaking as their strongest skill and Reading as the weakest skill. A high proportion of Secondary learners achieved CEFR Levels B2 and above across the four skills, which generally suggests readiness for independent functioning in a variety of contexts. However, a considerable proportion of Secondary learners were still found to be at A1/A2 levels and yet to become independent users of English. Focusing on school sector, some variations were observed amongst the different sectors in terms of learner performance, with a trend of higher performances by Independent schools compared to Church and State schools, although there were exceptions to this trend. Variations were also observed *within* each school sector where a wide range of performances was observed from A levels to C levels for State, Church and Independent schools. In other words, no individual school sector was associated with a clustering of only high- or only low-performing learners. Lastly, the wide range of observed CEFR levels from pre-A1 to C2 reflects a complex educational context and linguistic milieu in which language levels vary quite widely in the population. In light of these findings, the following recommendations are suggested for improving language levels and narrowing the achievement gap between learners:

- MEDE to take into consideration the language levels established in the benchmarking project in reviewing and/or setting of language proficiency/attainment levels.
- It is important for the Ministry to investigate why a proportion of Secondary learners have not progressed beyond CEFR A1/A2 levels (26.8%, 24.7%, 17% and 9.7% for the skills of Writing, Reading, Listening and Speaking respectively) and are yet to become independent users of English. An understanding of the reasons may allow

MEDE to identify a variety of measures to best support this group of learners in their language learning journey. The results would also need to be taken into account in ensuring that the LOF has the necessary procedures in place to support teachers in addressing the needs of lower-level learners and in helping them improve their language proficiency. Note that a number of interventions have already been put in place by the Department of Curriculum Management within the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and include the introduction of Core Curriculum Programme (CCP) and Alternative Learning Programme (ALP).

- Benchmarking results suggested Reading to be the weakest skill at Primary Year 5. This is likely to be associated with literacy levels. More emphasis on quality experiences at Primary school and in Reading (literacy) is therefore recommended. These efforts can support the work of the National Literacy Strategy, 2014, which is committed to improving literacy in Maltese and English through a number of initiatives.
- The wide range of observed abilities from A1 to C1 and/or above within classrooms and the striking differences in levels of exposure to English outside the classroom and in the home environment reflect the bilingual context of Malta. In order to reduce the achievement gap between learners, it is important for schools to offer additional support and opportunities for practising English outside of the classroom, e.g. English clubs, libraries, school events or online activities. Providing parents with straightforward and non-technical information on how people learn languages, the importance of exposure to English in the home environment and its positive effects on learning along with useful tips on what this means for them as parents and how they can support their children may also prove useful.
- The wide range of observed abilities from A1 to C1 within classrooms means that teachers can greatly benefit from training in differentiated instruction and techniques for teaching mixed-ability classrooms; a professional development need which was heavily emphasised in the teacher surveys.
- Steps should be taken to reduce variations in performance across the school sectors. Sharing of best practices can be one solution. The teacher surveys suggested a strong collaborative learning community amongst the Maltese teachers. This can be built upon by bringing teachers from different school sectors together, arranging peer observations between schools so that examples of good practice could be shared. Language policies which are considered effective at the school level (e.g. Content and Language Integrated Learning) could be shared in the teaching community in an effort to reduce achievement gaps between learners and within school sectors.
- Girls systematically outperformed boys at both school levels. While these differences in performance

were generally found to be small and not a cause for concern, it is nevertheless an area that can be monitored by MEDE to ensure that all learners receive the kind of support that they need in their language development. Boys can also benefit from having more male language role models in increasing their motivation to learn English.

### Improving learner motivation and attitudes towards English

Generally speaking, the survey results showed great importance given to English from the perspective of all major stakeholders – learners, parents and teachers – in the Maltese context, with evidence of high levels of motivation for learning English for a variety of reasons. However, a few issues such as the socio-cultural role of English in Malta, the extent of parental support at different school stages and attitudes towards English literature emerged from the surveys. The following recommendations are made in light of the findings:

- Teachers in Malta touched on the complex linguistic milieu in Malta where the choice of language in daily life has strong social connotations. This can influence English learning, with some learners positively associating the use of English with the modern world while others resist the English influence in their lives as they negatively associate it with Malta's colonial past. This can affect attitudes towards learning and their motivation to learn English or Maltese, and care should be taken to address (any) such stereotyping at schools sensitively in order to reduce any negative attitudes towards language learning.
- More parental involvement in learner education (particularly for Secondary learners) was emphasised by teachers. It is therefore recommended for schools to encourage more parental involvement and raise awareness of the important role of parents in increasing their children's motivation. For example, parents could be directed to useful online sources such as Cambridge English TV ([www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeenglishtv](http://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeenglishtv)) or the Cambridge English website, which offers tips and advice for parents in supporting and motivating children's language learning ([www.cambridgeenglish.org/learning-english/parents-and-children/information-for-parents](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/learning-english/parents-and-children/information-for-parents)), or other similar online materials. Schools can arrange for and/or allocate more time for face-to-face information sessions with parents about the English programme and the language policies adopted at their children's school or engage with parents through more regular communication and via different media, e.g. school website, texts, emails or tweets.
- While learners (and parents) at both school stages placed great importance on learning English, attitudes towards learning English literature were more mixed. These perceptions can nevertheless be changed by teachers through awareness-raising activities that outline the benefits of using English literature, e.g.

in enhancing English language competence. It is recommended for teachers to select texts which are both accessible in terms of language levels but also appropriate for different age groups. Using graded readers linked to the relevant CEFR level of the learners is recommended in order to control for the difficulty levels of texts. Selecting literary texts which are relevant for young adults is also key in motivating learners.

- Teachers emphasised the need for more resources (e.g. textbooks, books, films) in schools and more opportunities to use English outside of class (e.g. film clubs, school trips). Out-of-class activities not only create opportunities to use English but can also lead to its increased popularity and enhance learner motivation and positive attitudes towards English.

### Improving pedagogic and assessment practices and promoting learner autonomy

Survey results generally suggested that teachers have a highly positive attitude towards teaching English and report high levels of confidence in their ability to plan appropriate English lessons for their learners, all of which can positively influence learning outcomes in the classroom. Findings showed that a number of different pedagogic activities – which represent examples of good practice in the classroom – occur in some or most lessons, which is a positive finding. However, some more learner-centred activities did not occur very regularly in the classrooms. Technology was reported to be used frequently in the classrooms and was viewed positively by learners and teachers alike, although lack of technological access, opportunities for use as well as the extent of technology's effectiveness in enhancing learning were listed as possible issues. In light of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Results showed that only about one third of teachers explicitly state the learning goals and objectives of the lesson while about 10% use paired/small group work in almost every lesson. Highly learner-centred activities such as asking learners to suggest topics for classroom lessons or to help plan classroom activities are reported to occur far less frequently. Learners will not be able to develop autonomy if they are not clear on the objectives of their lessons or if they are not regularly engaged in peer interaction and group work as well as other learner-centred activities. Altogether these findings suggest that classes may benefit from more activities that encourage self-regulated learning. Classes may therefore benefit from more paired and group work which is monitored and supported by the teacher in order to increase the effectiveness of such activities. Another suggestion is to incorporate more online resources and activities which can be completed outside of the classroom in order to promote self-regulated learning. Some schools in Malta are encouraging their students to reinforce their learning on the Virtual Learning Environment and through digital lessons. If proven to be useful, these practices can be more widely shared amongst schools.

- Results suggested the absence of self and peer assessment skills amongst learners. It is recommended for teachers to include more awareness-raising activities in the lessons in order to help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses and in turn, allow them to set appropriate language goals for themselves. As an example, teachers can introduce the concept of learning contracts where students, with their teachers' support, set their own language goals and outline actions which they will take to achieve these goals. Teachers should also be trained to support learners in effective self and peer assessment skills as part of their teacher training.
- Technology is used frequently in the classrooms and it is viewed positively by learners and teachers alike, although lack of technological access, opportunities for use as well as the degree of the technology's effectiveness in enhancing learning were listed as possible issues. When integrating technology in the classroom, it is important not only to ensure access to all but also to incorporate 'pedagogies that make the most of technology' (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015). It is therefore recommended for schools and teachers to consider how technology can best be incorporated in Maltese educational settings in ways that can increase opportunities to communicate in English and improve the provision of feedback. It is also important to offer professional development support to teachers in using these technologies in a linked-up fashion and in a manner that best supports the provision of individualised learning. Technologies can also have great potential in assisting teachers with differentiated instruction. One of the areas of professional development that teachers rated as having high levels of impact was 'individual or collaborative research on a topic of professional interest'. Technology and how to best incorporate it in the Maltese educational contexts can be one such area of focus for action research and can be promoted by the Ministry. In order to encourage collaborative research, teachers should also be presented with incentives such as the opportunity to publish papers.
- Classroom test development was found to be commonly practised by teachers. An assessment literacy course can therefore greatly benefit teachers in designing high-quality tests that best support learning.
- The scope of the current project did not allow for the inclusion of more qualitative methods such as classroom observations in examining teaching practices in the classrooms. Future phases of the project could include such methods in order to more accurately capture what goes on in the classrooms and to illustrate a richer picture of the teaching and learning context in Malta.

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# An investigation of Portuguese students' attitudes to assessment and Cambridge English exams

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## Introduction

This is a report on a multi-phase study which began in 2013, when the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) made a public commitment to improve the standard of English language teaching and learning throughout Portugal, with a focus on Grade 9 pupils. The MEC made the strategic decision to introduce *Cambridge English: Key for Schools*, which targets A2 level, as a mandatory external exam to be taken by all Grade 9 pupils at the end of the 2013/14 academic year. The overall aim of the initiative is the improvement of teaching and learning of English in secondary school by using exam performance to:

- monitor and evaluate language learning in the Portuguese secondary school system
- inform future English language policy and decisions regarding teacher development initiatives and training
- provide pupils with an opportunity to obtain an internationally recognised certificate of language proficiency regardless of socioeconomic background.

In order to determine the extent to which these aims are being met, and to help the MEC achieve its overall long-term goal to raise standards in English language teaching and learning in Portugal, Cambridge English undertook an impact study in collaboration with the MEC and Instituto de Avaliação Educativa, I P (IAVE).

Year 1 of the study, which took place in the 2013/14 academic year, provided a baseline profile of the different stakeholder groups (i.e. learners, teachers, school heads, parents and caregivers). It reported on their attitudes and perceptions at the beginning of the initiative, following the introduction of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools*.

Year 2 of the study builds on the main findings in Year 1 of the project. These findings revealed consensus among head teachers, teachers and parents regarding the need to improve the teaching and learning situation in Portugal, and a generally positive reaction to the initiative, alongside some differing views on the appropriateness of the exam, which some stakeholders felt had been at too low a level. Attitudes towards English were very positive and certification in English was similarly valued, with the majority of respondents considering it essential to have an internationally recognised certificate of proficiency. Pupils and teachers found the English classroom environment

highly motivating and there was a shared understanding of the need to prioritise speaking development. Assessment in general was viewed as an important tool that could provide diagnostic information to enhance learning in the classroom. As a result of the findings in Year 1 and the exam results in 2013/14, *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* was introduced as the external assessment for the 2014/15 academic year, the second year of the project.

## Research aims

The impact study was expected to take place over three academic years in total, but was shortened to two years in the light of a governmental decision to measure proficiency in maths and Portuguese. It aimed to investigate stakeholder attitudes to English learning, teaching and assessment in Portugal in order to answer the following research question: What is the intended/unintended effect of MEC and IAVE's strategic decision to ensure the quality of English language provision through the use of external assessment, i.e. Cambridge English for Schools exams?

In addition, the impact study attempted to answer the following question: Do the attitudes and perceptions of the Grade 9 pupils, their teachers, school directors and parents towards the introduction of Cambridge English for Schools exams change over time?

Year 1 of the study, which took place in the 2013/14 academic year, provided a baseline profile of the different stakeholder groups (i.e. learners, teachers, school heads, parents and caregivers). It reported on their attitudes and perceptions at the beginning of the initiative, following the introduction of *Cambridge English: Key for Schools*. Year 2 of the study, which took place during the 2014/15 academic year, concentrated on a detailed analysis of the Grade 9 pupils. The focus was on attitudes to English, English learning and assessment. It also aimed to highlight any factors, including demographic, situational or attitudinal factors, which related to proficiency levels within the Grade 9 cohort, and selected those which IAVE may be able to influence, either directly or indirectly. The study did not contain detailed investigation of factors beyond the control of IAVE, such as gender, for example, or city of residence. It aimed to address the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the Grade 9 population?
- What are the characteristics of the learning environment?
- What are common attitudes and perceptions in the Grade 9 population?
- Which situational and attitudinal factors relate to Grade 9 performance?

This article discusses the findings of the demographic and attitudinal pupil questionnaire completed in May 2015. In Year 1, a small percentage of Grade 9 pupils (around 3,000) completed the questionnaires. In Year 2, 96% of the population completed the questionnaires, so comparisons must be interpreted cautiously.

## Methodology

### Research design

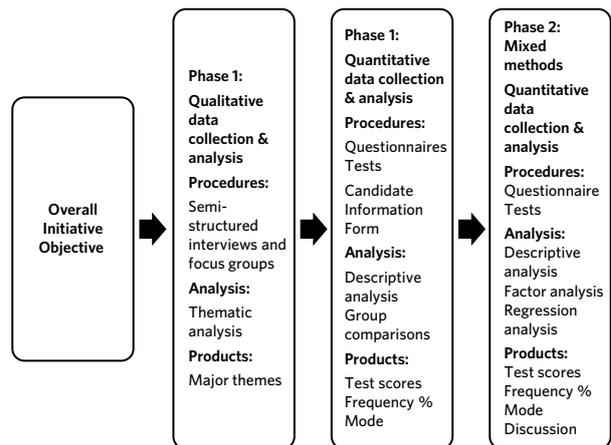
This study is designed to investigate the impact of the initiative over time. A sequential transformative research design formed the basis of the study (see Figure 1). The research design involved the collection and analysis of the qualitative data (from interviews and focus groups) and quantitative data (questionnaires) in the first year of the project. These findings informed the refinement of the instruments for the data collection of the quantitative phase (i.e. pupil questionnaires) in the second year. As a result, the research design built up a fuller picture of the effects of the initiative.

### Constructs

The constructs in Table 1 formed part of the conceptual framework for the research, and fed into the design of the instruments for both phases, which is described in the next section.

The constructs in Table 1 were researched in Year 2 of the study via a scannable questionnaire administered to all Grade 9 pupils on the exam day and analysed alongside test scores and enrolment data for the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* certificate.

Figure 1: Example diagram of multi-phase design (adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark 2011:118)



## Quantitative data: Questionnaires and test data

The quantitative data consisted of:

- demographic data collected from exam candidates on the day of the written exam
- responses to attitudinal questions completed by pupils on the day of the written exam
- candidate test scores
- enrolment data for the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* certificate.

The questionnaire administered to test takers on the exam day was used to gather demographic information, attitudes and perceptions from the whole Grade 9 candidate population. It consisted of multiple-choice questions in Portuguese, asking candidates to indicate their age and mother tongue, for example, and whether they agreed with statements like ‘I enjoy my English classes’ and how often they engaged in various activities, such as using websites in English.

The questionnaire developed in Year 1 was used as the basis for the Year 2 questionnaire. The attitudinal section of the questionnaire was developed by selecting validated

Table 1: Research constructs in Year 2

Area of investigation	Construct	Data type	Instrument
Attitude towards English	Motivation/attitudes Exposure to English Exposure to other foreign languages English ability/proficiency	Quantitative	Questionnaire to pupils
			Test scores
			Certificate enrolment data
Characteristics of the home environment	Motivation/attitudes Exposure to English Parental proficiency Parental involvement in school life	Quantitative	Questionnaire to pupils
Characteristics of the learning environment	Perceptions of teaching, learning and assessment	Quantitative	Questionnaire to pupils
Attitude towards assessment	Motivation/attitudes	Quantitative	Questionnaire to pupils
			Certificate enrolment data

statements from the Cambridge English Questionnaire Item Bank. The statements included Likert scale items consisting of a 5-point scale requiring a single response. The most typical response options were: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree' and 'not sure'. In preparation for Year 2, the Year 1 questionnaire was reviewed. Questions which were found not to provide useful information were deleted, and new questions were added to explore issues raised, such as the frequency of pair and group work in class. Candidate performance on the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* exam was analysed, and reported on in September 2015. Candidate scores were linked to the questionnaire responses via the candidates' unique exam identifier. Enrolment data for the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* certificate was collected prior to administration of the exam and linked to the test responses via the candidates' unique exam ID.

## Study participants

All of the 95,992 pupils who appeared in the exam report analysis fully or partially completed the initial demographic questions. In addition, a total of 91,464, or 94.30% of the Grade 9 exam population, also completed some or all of the contextual and attitudinal questions. Since the contextual and attitudinal questions were more likely to yield findings which could be acted upon, in terms of influencing future performance, it was decided to concentrate on these contextual and attitudinal questions for the impact study, and to report detailed demographic findings (such as gender, and regional location) in the exam report. Since this group accounted for 94.30% of the test takers on the day, it was sufficiently representative of the Grade 9 population as a whole to allow meaningful generalisations to be made. Only 82,281 Grade 9 pupils completed all test components. A higher number of Grade 9 candidates completed the demographic questions. This indicates that some candidates completed only the demographic information, but not the exam papers. For the attitudinal analysis the data comprises of the 91,464 Grade 9 pupils who completed the demographic, attitudinal and contextual questions.

## Grade 9 participant profile

The Grade 9 exam population seems a homogenous one in terms of demographics, with the majority of candidates being

Portuguese speakers (91%) who attend public schools (87%). French is the most commonly taught additional language (67%) followed by Spanish (22%). Most pupils receive two (40%) or three (50%) hours of English instruction a week at school and complete one (60%) or two (23%) hours of English homework per week. Therefore any variations in exam scores are unlikely to be due to any significant difference in the amount of English language provision in schools across the country or the type of school attended.

On the exam day, some candidates completed the Reading and Writing sections of the test, but not the Listening paper. Some did not sit the Speaking test. Table 2 shows Grade 9 performance on each paper, including candidates who sat only certain components. The first column shows the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) level awarded as an overall level, which was calculated for the 82,281 candidates who sat all components.

The highest percentage of candidates for each skill (marked in bold in Table 2) was at the following CEFR level for each paper: Reading (A2), Writing (Below A2), Listening (A2), and Speaking (A2). However, grouping B1 (a Pass or Merit at this level) and B2 (Distinction) together to show total percentages at or above the target level, reveals Speaking to be the strongest skill, closely followed by Writing, with Reading being the weakest skill. In terms of the awarding of an overall level for performance, A2 was the most common (35.2%). However, 38% of Grade 9 pupils were awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction, achieving B1 or higher. This contrast between the most common CEFR level achieved, of predominately A2, and the percentage of candidates performing at the pass level or even higher, indicated there are different test populations within the cohort. This study aims to identify which factors can be used to separate out these different populations.

## Findings and discussion

This section reports on the findings from the pupil questionnaire. First, the descriptive data is presented in a discussion of pupil attitudes towards English, characteristics of the home learning environment, and of the learning environment, and finally, attitudes towards assessment. Secondly, it investigates which of these attitudinal and situational factors relate to performance in Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking.

**Table 2: Distribution of Grade 9 learners by CEFR level and paper**

Grade 9	Reading		Writing		Listening		Speaking		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Below A2</b>	23,523	25.5%	<b>30,702</b>	<b>33.3%</b>	22,951	24.9%	20,510	23.8%	22,045	26.8%
<b>A2</b>	<b>43,572</b>	<b>47.2%</b>	22,088	23.9%	<b>37,129</b>	<b>40.2%</b>	<b>28,529</b>	<b>33.2%</b>	<b>28,939</b>	<b>35.2%</b>
<b>B1</b>	19,446	21.1%	27,107	29.4%	21,863	23.7%	26,463	30.8%	23,823	29.0%
<b>B2</b>	5,775	6.3%	12,419	13.5%	10,414	11.3%	10,541	12.3%	7,474	9.1%
<b>Total</b>	92,316	100.0%	92,316	100.0%	92,357	100.0%	86,043	100.0%	82,281	100.0%
<b>B1 + B2</b>	25,221	27.3%	39,526	42.8%	32,277	34.9%	37,004	43.0%	31,297	38.0%

## Data analysis

The analysis was carried out in four stages. In the first stage, descriptive analysis was carried out to identify overall patterns and trends in the data. Initially, constructs were grouped together according to expert judgement.

In the second stage, factor analysis was carried out in order to uncover the relationship patterns underlying the statements in the pupil questionnaire. This was done to identify how statements grouped together most appropriately under the four umbrella constructs. The analysis was carried out using SPSS, a statistical software package. The extraction method was Principal Component Analysis. The rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

In the third stage, the responses to the pupil questionnaire were analysed using regression analysis, in order to investigate the relationship between each construct, individual questionnaire items and performance in each skill in English. Analysis was carried out individually on each of the four skills tested.

In the final stage, the data was analysed to discover how well the score data and the components highlighted by the factor analysis were correlated. Some additional analysis was run to confirm unexpected findings in the data.

The results for each construct are given in Tables 3 and 4, starting with the descriptive statistics. The results of the factor analysis are given next, giving the number of components highlighted by factor analysis. This is followed by the results of the regression analysis. The pupil responses to statements, such as 'strongly agree' or 'agree', were conflated into two categories and recoded: 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were coded as one and 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' as zero. In this way, pupils who reported higher levels of engagement or frequency of activities such as reading in English, or a more positive attitude, could be separated out from those who did not.

The individual responses to the questionnaire statements were regressed onto the exam scores to determine which item predicts the most variance in exam scores, when controlling for variance in other statements. The results show the relationship between the questionnaire statements that make up each construct, and the scores on the tests. The final column indicates whether the relationship is significant or not. Values above .05 suggest no relationship when controlling for variance in other responses in the same section of the questionnaire.

The Unstandardised Coefficients column B gives the increase in raw score for the pupils who demonstrated 'more' agreement with the questionnaire statement. Pupils who indicated they liked English tended to score 2 points more in Reading (2.194 plus or minus the standard error) compared to those pupils who indicated they did not like it, when controlling for variance in other questionnaire statements.

All skills papers in the test have a total score of 25. This means that a 1 point score in Listening, for example, would indicate the same increase in overall score as a 1 point increase in Reading. Items which have a coefficient of under

0.5 were removed, since this would not round up to one point, leaving only those which are close to 1 point or higher.

While reading these tables, it is important to note that the analysis only indicates a significant relationship, but does not show causality. In other words, the analysis does not indicate that pupils score more *because* they feel positive about English, nor feel more positive about English *because* they score more. Only significant findings are included which meet the threshold of +/- 1 point and .05 significance.

## Attitude towards English

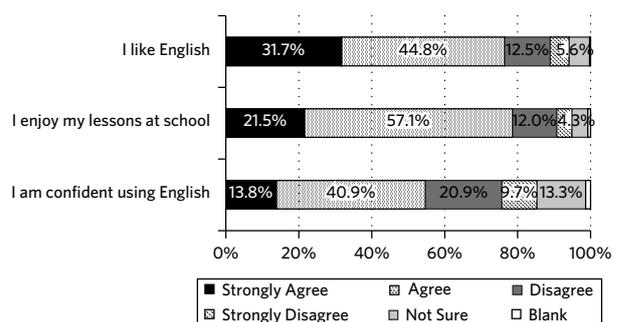
The academic literature on second and foreign language acquisition has indicated that learners' attitudes towards learning a language and the extent to which they perceive the language to be useful can influence learner behaviour, both in terms of the amount of effort exerted on language learning and the extent to which they persist with learning it (Bernat and Gvozdenko 2005, Csizér and Dörnyei 2005, Dörnyei 2003, Horwitz 2001, Noels 2001). Therefore attitude towards English is an important construct to evaluate. In this section we present findings on Grade 9 attitudes towards the importance of studying English and attitudes to the language in general.

### Enjoyment of English

In order to investigate learners' level of engagement with English, how much they value it and how linguistically self-confident they feel, pupils were asked to what extent they agreed with three statements about English, which are listed in Figure 2. It shows that almost 80% of pupils enjoy their lessons at school and like English generally. Although they enjoy the subject, their confidence ratings are not as high, with just over half the pupils (54.7%) reporting they are confident using English.

In Year 1 of the study, pupils had a generally positive

**Figure 2: Pupils' enjoyment of English**

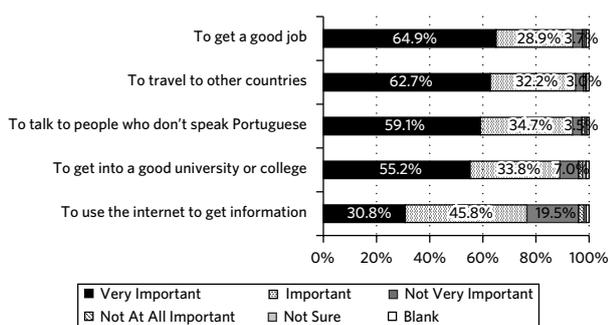


attitude towards the study of English. In the 2014/15 academic year, the pupils who responded reported that they liked English (81%) and that they enjoyed their lessons at school (82%), whilst 66% agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident using English. Compared to the findings in Year 1, the level of agreement is slightly lower. However, this current sample is much larger and therefore more diverse than the group of pupils who responded in Year 1. The majority of pupils are still positive in their views.

### The importance of studying English

Grade 9 pupils were presented with five reasons why people study English, and asked how important each of these reasons was to them, as shown in Figure 3. The majority of pupils consider getting a good job, travel, interaction with non-speakers of Portuguese and access to a good university or college all to be important or very important reasons for studying English. Almost 80% of pupils think that English is also important or very important for accessing information on the internet.

Figure 3: Pupil reasons for studying English



In Year 1, the reasons for studying English were ranked in exactly the same order. Over 90% of pupils indicated that the first four reasons were important or very important reasons, and over 80% indicated that using the internet to get information was an important or very important reason.

### Factor and regression analysis

Statements were in two related groups: one about enjoyment of English and a second grouping related to reasons for studying English. Interestingly, two of these reasons, using the internet to get information, and talking to people who don't speak Portuguese, overlap with the 'Enjoyment of English' grouping. This suggests that more immediate uses of English, such as using the internet or interacting with other speakers of English, contribute to enjoyment in a way that more long-term extrinsic motivations do not. The aspirational goal of future proficiency also related to the Enjoyment of English group.

Table 3 shows the relationship between the items that make up the 'Attitude to English' scale, and the scores on the tests. The Unstandardised Coefficients column B gives the increase (or decrease, a minus number) in score for the pupils who demonstrated 'more' agreement with the item. So for example, a pupil who strongly agreed that they liked English, also had a 3 point increase in Writing compared to pupils who did not agree that they like English.

The analysis shows there is a relationship between enjoyment of and confidence in learning English and better performance in all four skills. When controlling for variance in other items, there is also a relationship between feeling that the ability to speak to non-Portuguese speakers is important and better performance, which is most apparent in Writing. There is also a relationship between feeling that English is important for using the internet and higher scores. This is

Table 3: Attitude to English and scores

Question	Skill	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
I like English.	R	2.194	.091	.132	24.186	<.001
	W	3.857	.119	.172	32.300	<.001
	L	2.533	.111	.125	22.821	<.001
	Sp	3.379	.111	.173	30.499	<.001
I am confident using English.	R	2.602	.062	.215	41.708	<.001
	W	3.536	.082	.217	43.053	<.001
	L	3.370	.076	.229	44.188	<.001
	Sp	3.114	.075	.222	41.447	<.001
What level of English would you like to achieve?	R	2.559	.052	.240	49.629	<.001
	W	3.410	.068	.238	50.239	<.001
	L	2.846	.063	.220	45.150	<.001
	Sp	2.603	.062	.212	41.972	<.001
It is important to learn English to talk to people who don't speak Portuguese.	R	1.134	.235	.027	4.816	<.001
	W	2.080	.310	.037	6.710	<.001
	L	.827	.288	.016	2.871	.004
	Sp	1.618	.296	.032	5.460	<.001
It is important to learn English to use the internet to get information.	R	.651	.166	.021	3.926	<.001
	W	1.427	.218	.033	6.533	<.001
	L	.613	.203	.016	3.020	.003
	Sp	1.108	.202	.030	5.473	<.001
It is important to learn English to get into a good university or college.	W	1.386	.233	.032	5.938	<.001
	Sp	.781	.218	.021	3.576	<.001

R=Reading; W=Writing; L=Listening; Sp=Speaking

more noticeable in Writing and Speaking. The aspirational level of pupils has a relationship with better performance in all skills. When controlling for variance in other items, enjoyment of lessons at school does not have a significant relationship with better performance in any skill. There is no significant relationship between the importance of travelling to other countries or getting a good job and higher scores in any skill, when controlling for variance in other items.

### *Engagement with English*

Pupils reported how frequently they use English to talk to others, to read books, magazines or newspapers in English, to play computer games or use websites in English, or to listen to songs or watch movies in English in daily life.

The most frequent use of English is listening to songs, or watching TV programmes and films in English, with over 80% of pupils reporting they do this almost every day, and a further 11.6% reporting they use English to do this about once a week. Using English online also ranks highly as a frequent activity. Over 60% of pupils report using English to speak to tourists or visitors. This is not as frequent an activity as listening to songs or going online, but most likely this is linked to the opportunity to do so. Reading books and magazines is also a reasonably frequent activity, with just below 40% reporting reading in English at least once a month. A further 23.2% report infrequent reading of books, magazines or newspapers in English. It is possible that this level of engagement for reading in English may not be that different from the amount of reading in Portuguese for this age group, and would also be linked to the availability of reading material in English outside of school.

In Year 1, 83% indicated they listened to songs, watched movies or TV programmes in English, and 48% that they played computer games or used websites. The most common response for speaking to tourists or visitors in English was also 'A few times a year' (49%) and 'never' for reading books, magazines and newspapers (35%).

### *English proficiency at home*

The level of English proficiency at home contributes to the amount of English pupils are exposed to outside the classroom. In a household where English proficiency is higher, there may be an increased likelihood of access to English in the ways described previously, such as access to films or books in English, and possibly increased interest in and discussion of English lessons. Therefore pupils were asked to match the English language ability of their parents to brief CEFR descriptors. Since not all pupils have a mother or father living at home, pupils had the option to select 'not applicable' for these questions. This question had a lower response rate than others. It may be that the pupils were unable to rate the level of their parents' English with any certainty. Looking at the responses where a level was indicated, the majority of parents were categorised as having no English ability, or being at A1 or A2 level. In other words, they are perceived to be below the target level of the exam. While we do not know the actual level of English for the parents, it is likely that if pupils perceive their parents'

ability to be low, they will be less likely to request help with homework, or discuss it in detail, or talk about their English classes. In Year 1 the most common level selected was 'No English' for both parents, and the majority of parents were also perceived to be below the target level of the exam, at A2 or lower.

### **Parental attitudes and involvement**

Active parental involvement in school life can contribute towards academic success for pupils and can influence their children's attitudes. For language learning, the use of English at home, and the English language ability of family and friends is also an important factor. Therefore questions were included in the questionnaire on parental involvement with the pupils' English study, the use of English at home or for leisure purposes, and the level of English of their parents.

When asked how often their parents discussed their English classes with them or their homework, the two most common responses for both homework and classes were 'about once a week' and 'never'. Both activities were represented to a similar degree in all the categories, with the exception of homework which was rated 'never' slightly more often than lessons. The responses in Year 1 were similar. Pupils were asked how often they discussed English classes at home, and the three most common responses were 'a few times a year' 'about once a week' (both 24%) and 'never' (21%). Homework was not directly targeted in Year 1, but a more general question on engagement in school activities was included. Findings in Year 1 could not be generalised, so this question was changed to a more specific one on homework for Year 2.

### *Factor and regression analysis*

Three thematically linked groups were identified. They relate to 1) use of English at home by the pupils, or engagement with English; 2) the frequency with which parents talk to them about classes and homework; and 3) the pupils' perception of parental proficiency in English. Reading in English and accessing English online are more strongly associated with engagement with English than listening to songs, or involvement in other media. Table 4 shows the relationship between the statements grouped under the 'Home environment' scale, and the scores on the tests.

The analysis shows there is a relationship between increase in scores in all skills and regular activity and exposure to English outside the classroom, ranging from a 0.858 increase in scores in Reading for pupils who report they regularly speak to tourists or visitors in English, or use English abroad or on holiday, to an increase of 4.354 in Writing scores for those who report they listen to songs in English, or watch movies or TV programmes in English. There is also a relationship between a higher level of parental ability in English and a higher score on all skills.

What is notable is the tendency for pupils who report regular parental involvement, in terms of discussing homework, and lower scores. When controlling for variance in other items, this relationship is significant in all skills for

Table 4: The home environment and scores

Question	Skill	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
How often do you listen to songs in English, or watch movies or TV programmes in English?	R	2.528	.189	.065	13.410	<.001
	W	4.354	.248	.086	17.558	<.001
	L	2.742	.227	.059	12.056	<.001
	Sp	3.817	.230	.086	16.587	<.001
How often do you speak to tourists or visitors in English, or use English abroad or on holiday?	R	.858	.067	.065	12.886	<.001
	W	1.243	.088	.072	14.193	<.001
	L	1.268	.080	.080	15.816	<.001
	Sp	1.366	.077	.095	17.669	<.001
How often do you play computer games in English or use websites in English?	R	2.555	.077	.169	33.221	<.001
	W	3.129	.101	.157	30.936	<.001
	L	3.123	.093	.171	33.732	<.001
	Sp	2.926	.091	.173	32.164	<.001
How often do you read books, magazines or newspapers in English?	R	3.245	.059	.289	55.015	<.001
	W	4.241	.078	.287	54.681	<.001
	L	3.862	.071	.286	54.380	<.001
	Sp	3.426	.069	.277	49.825	<.001
How often do your parents talk to you about your English homework?	R	-1.499	.075	-.136	-20.001	<.001
	W	-1.615	.099	-.112	-16.384	<.001
	L	-1.775	.090	-.134	-19.679	<.001
	Sp	-1.420	.088	-.117	-16.230	<.001
How often do your parents talk to you about your English lessons?	L	-.565	.092	-.042	-6.136	<.001
What level of English can your mother speak?	R	1.185	.069	.104	17.194	<.001
	W	1.741	.091	.116	19.213	<.001
	L	1.320	.083	.096	15.901	<.001
	Sp	1.262	.081	.100	15.599	<.001
What level of English can your father speak?	R	1.339	.068	.120	19.828	<.001
	W	1.701	.089	.116	19.164	<.001
	L	1.534	.081	.114	18.869	<.001
	Sp	1.168	.079	.094	14.761	<.001

R=Reading; W=Writing; L=Listening; Sp=Speaking

discussion of homework, and for Listening for discussion of lessons. As mentioned earlier, it is unusual for parental involvement to have a relationship with a decrease in performance. Therefore, in order to investigate this finding further, correlational analysis was carried out for these two responses, and the four skills. The results are shown in Table 5. This shows a significant negative correlation between parental involvement and scores.

It could be that pupils who are finding English challenging are the ones talking to their parents about their classes and homework, which would indicate that they and/or their parents are taking their studies seriously, and have some worries, or are being put under pressure by parents to complete homework. The questionnaire included a statement 'I am worried about taking the Preliminary for Schools exam'. In order to investigate whether it was pupils who indicated they were worried about their exam who were talking regularly to parents, further correlational analysis was carried out. When controlling

for the level of worry over the exam however, there was no large and significant correlation between those pupils who spoke to their parents, and exam scores (see Table 6). There is therefore not sufficient evidence that it is only the pupils who are worried about the exam and talking to their parents about their homework who find English challenging.

### The learning environment

As mentioned earlier, both exposure to and attitude towards the foreign language has an impact on learning. The amount of engagement with English partly depends on how much opportunity pupils have to use the language. Therefore it is useful to find out how much pair work and group work is taking place in class, when there are likely to be increased opportunities to use the language, compared to when the teacher instructs the class as a whole, and pupils work individually. It is also useful to investigate the amount of spoken English in class and the opportunities for the pupils to use the language, in addition to the teacher.

Table 5: Parental involvement and scores

		How often do your parents talk to you about your English lessons?	How often do your parents talk to you about your English homework?
How often do your parents talk to you about your English lessons?	Pearson Correlation	1	.758
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	91,085	90,737
How often do your parents talk to you about your English homework?	Pearson Correlation	.758	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	90,737	90,927
Reading	Pearson Correlation	-.084	-.127
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001
	N	90,966	90,807
Writing	Pearson Correlation	-.040	-.081
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001
	N	90,977	90,818
Listening	Pearson Correlation	-.091	-.130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001
	N	90,898	90,741
Speaking	Pearson Correlation	-.040	-.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001
	N	81,236	81,089

Table 6: Parental involvement and scores, controlling for worry

Control variables			Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	How often do your parents talk to you about your English homework?
I am worried about taking the Preliminary for Schools exam	Reading	Correlation	1.000	.778	.831	.720	-.094
		Sig. (1-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	.000
		df	0	75,641	75,641	75,641	75,641
	Writing	Correlation	.778	1.000	.752	.770	-.063
		Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	.000
		df	75,641	0	75,641	75,641	75,641
	Listening	Correlation	.831	.752	1.000	.707	-.094
		Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	.000
		df	75,641	75,641	0	75,641	75,641
	Speaking	Correlation	.720	.770	.707	1.000	-.054
		Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		.000
		df	75,641	75,641	75,641	0	75,641
	How often do your parents talk to you about your English homework?	Correlation	-.094	-.063	-.094	-.054	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		df	75,641	75,641	75,641	75,641	0

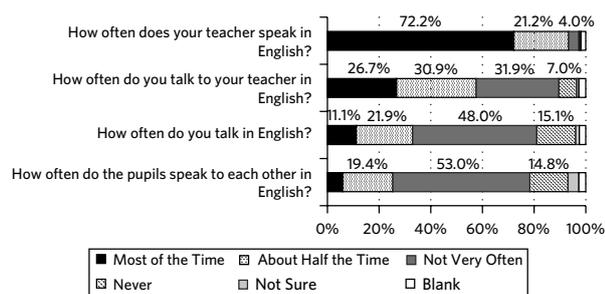
### Pair and group work

Pupils were asked how frequently they worked individually, and how often they worked in pairs or groups during English lessons. Individual work is the most common, with the highest percentage of pupils (36.7%) indicating they work individually most of the time, in contrast to 'not very often' being the most common response (46.4%) when asked how often they work in pairs or groups. This was a new question for 2014/15, addressing a gap identified in the analysis, so there is no comparable data for Year 1.

### Use of spoken English

In terms of use of English in the classroom, pupils were asked to indicate how frequently the teacher spoke in English, and how often pupils spoke to each other. They were also asked to consider their own use of English in class generally, which would include interaction with other pupils, and how frequently they spoke to the teacher in English, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows that teacher use of English in the class is frequent, both in terms of the teacher using English to

**Figure 4: Use of English in class by pupils and teachers**

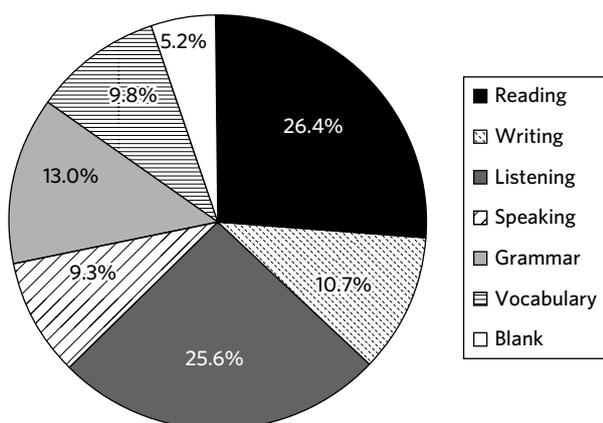
address the pupils and to interact with them individually. Over 90% of pupils report that their teacher speaks in English most of the time (72.2%) or about half the time (21.2%).

When pupils are asked how often they speak in English generally or to each other in English, the most common response in these cases is 'not very often'. This indicates that when the teacher is involved in exchanges with pupils, it is likely to be in English, but that exchanges between pupils are not in English as frequently. This is not surprising, given the information on the infrequent use of pair and group work.

In Year 1, 94% of pupils reported that their teacher used English most of the time or about half the time, and as with this year, when asked how often they speak in English generally or to each other in English, the most common pupil response was 'not very often'.

### Skills in English

When asked to identify their strongest skill in English, the two most common responses were Reading (26.4%) and Listening (25.6%) (see Figure 5). Speaking, Writing, Grammar and Vocabulary were each selected by approximately 10% of the pupils.

**Figure 5: Strongest skill in English**

Pupils were also asked to identify the skill they felt was most in need of improvement. The two skills selected by the highest number of pupils were Writing (22.1%) and Speaking (19.8%). When asked what most class time was spent on, the two most common responses were Grammar (28.2%) and Writing (19.4%). The two skills with the largest discrepancy between pupil perception of the need to

improve and their perception of what class time was spent on, are Speaking and Grammar. Speaking was selected as the skill most in need of improvement by nearly 20% of the pupils, but only 7.1% reported it as the skill most time was spent on in class. Despite Grammar being the area the highest number of pupils had selected in terms of class time, only 17.4% had selected this as the area most in need of improvement, which puts it in third place after Writing and Speaking. This pupil feedback suggests a level of anxiety about productive skills, and that pupils would welcome a more communicative approach to teaching.

In 2013/14, Reading (30%) and Listening (33%) were also the two most common responses in terms of strongest skill. In 2014/15, vocabulary and grammar were additional options available. The two most frequently selected areas last year in those most in need of improvement were also Speaking (39%) and Writing (32%).

However, this data needs to be considered alongside the exam results. In their performance on the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* test, the best performance was in Speaking, with 43.0% at the target B1 level or higher, followed by Writing (42.8%). Reading was the weakest skill, with 27.3% at the target level or higher. This indicates that pupil perception of ability may not be that accurate. It would appear that the comparatively less time devoted to Speaking did not have a negative impact on Speaking performance. It may be that the time devoted to Grammar, in addition to that spent on Writing activities, had a positive impact on pupil performance in Writing. They may also be doing Speaking or Writing activities to practise grammar. The comparatively lower amount of time spent on Reading and Vocabulary may have had a negative impact on Reading performance, or pupil performance may have been affected by pupil perception that this was a skill which they could pay less attention to.

### Factor and regression analysis

Three thematically linked areas were identified in the construct of 'attitude towards English', with overlapping items from the questionnaire. The clearest grouping was the set of questions which focus on use of spoken English in class, which included the question on frequency of pair work and group work. A feature of the second group appears to relate to individual preferences and use of time by individuals in class.

The addition of the question regarding what skill most time was spent on for this group is because the data for these three items was scaled in a different way from the other questions. Pupils selected a skill from six possible options (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Grammar or Vocabulary) whereas for the other questions they responded to a Likert scale.

Since the questions in this group are a mixture of scales and types of question, the regression analysis for this group was limited to those questions in the first component on the use of spoken English in the classroom. There was a clear relationship between higher individual use of English

by the pupils and higher scores in all four skills. The largest increase is in Writing (3.353) for pupils who report that they frequently speak in English to their teacher. However for pupils talking to each other, and for the teacher speaking in English, there is a relationship with a decrease in score for all skills, when controlling for variance in other items.

In addition to regression analysis, a correlational analysis was carried out to determine if there was a correlation between the skill area pupils reported spending most time on in class, and scores on the four skills. The results are shown in Table 7. The first column indicates which skill area pupils reported as the one most time was spent on in class. The last four columns show the correlation between the pupil response and the score on the test for that skill.

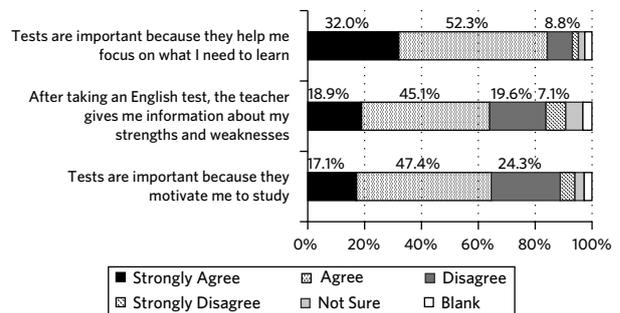
The table illustrates several negative correlations, such as that pupils who respond that they are spending the most time on that skill tend to receive lower scores on the skills than pupils who do not report spending the most time on that skill.

One possible interpretation, if pupil perceptions are accurate, is that teachers are spending more time on those skills where the pupils do need more help, and that this is having a negative impact on other skills, when most time is spent on Reading, Listening or Vocabulary. Spending most time on Writing appears to have little impact on scores. More time spent on Speaking has a beneficial effect in all skills. It appears teachers should spend as much time as possible on Speaking. Individual use of English by pupils and a greater focus on Speaking in class is recommended. Further investigation of the use of pair and group work is necessary to discover why this is not linked to an increase in scores.

### Diagnostic and motivational aspects of assessment

Pupils were asked to comment on three statements related to assessment in general (see Figure 6). Over 80% of pupils agreed that tests helped them to focus on what they need to learn. In terms of the diagnostic use of assessment by teachers, over 60% of pupils agreed, or strongly agreed that their teacher gave them information about their strengths and weaknesses after taking an English test. A similar percentage agreed that tests motivated them to study. In Year 1, the percentages were almost identical: 82% agreed tests helped them to focus on what they need to learn, 60% agreed their teacher gave them diagnostic information, and 64% agreed that tests motivated them to study.

Figure 6: Pupil attitude to test taking in general



These results show that assessment is valued for its diagnostic aspects, and that pupils are generally motivated by tests. From this we can conclude that the majority of pupils have a positive attitude towards tests and assessment. However, Figure 6 shows that almost 40% of pupils do not receive diagnostic feedback, and nor do they find tests motivating. A smaller percentage, just over 15%,

Table 7: Use of class time and scores

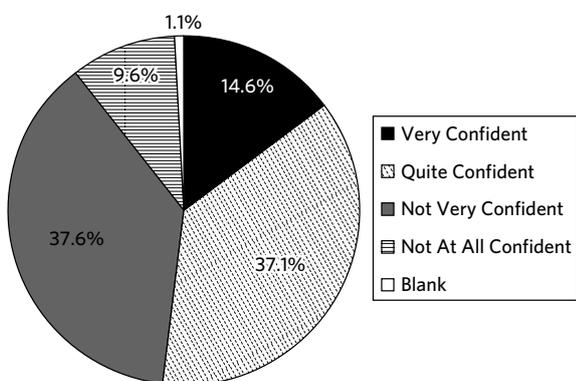
Pupil response		Reading Score	Writing score	Listening score	Speaking Score
Reading	Pearson Correlation	-.025**	-.029**	-.020**	-.021**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	83,239	83,249	83,177	74,381
Writing	Pearson Correlation	-.006	.008*	-.002	.001
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.095	.023	.567	.779
	N	83,239	83,249	83,177	74,381
Listening	Pearson Correlation	-.044**	-.040**	-.031**	-.029**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	83,239	83,249	83,177	74,381
Speaking	Pearson Correlation	.080**	.074**	.083**	.084**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	83,239	83,249	83,177	74,381
Grammar	Pearson Correlation	.035**	.028**	.016**	.010**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	.006
	N	83,239	83,249	83,177	74,381
Vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	-.036**	-.039**	-.035**	-.035**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	83,239	83,249	83,177	74,381

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

did not agree that tests helped them to focus on what they need to learn. The different percentages in response to the statements show that some of these pupils did not receive diagnostic information from their teachers, but they did use the test results to assess their own performance. This would account for the discrepancy between the responses for the less positive group to the three statements.

**Figure 7: Pupil confidence**



Moving on to pupil confidence, as shown in Figure 7, when asked how confident they felt about taking English exams in general, the pupils fall into two groups of broadly the same size, with just over half indicating they were 'quite confident' or 'very confident' about taking tests, and the remainder indicating they were 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident'.

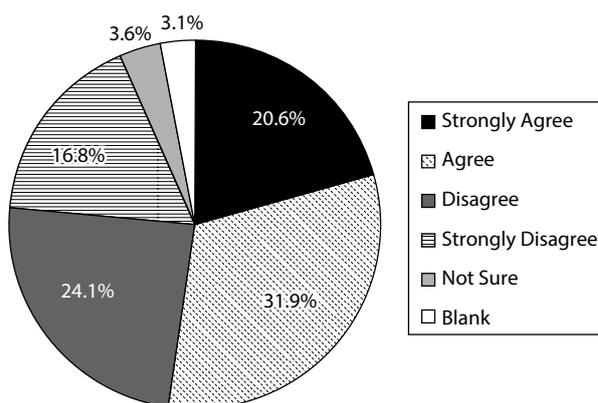
In Year 1, the most common response was 'quite confident' (36%) followed by 'not very confident' (32%). As with this year, over half indicated they were 'quite confident' or 'very confident' about taking tests (58%).

### Attitudes to Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools

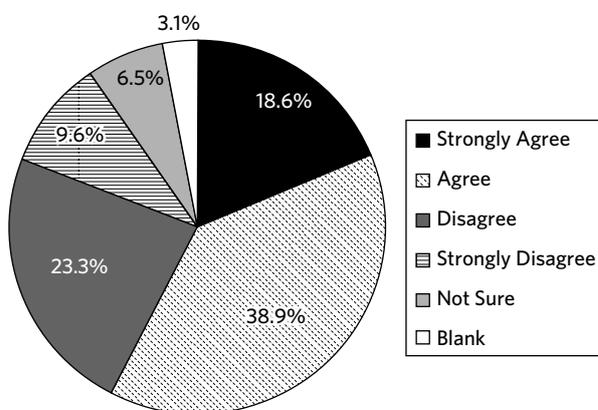
A similar level of confidence was reported when pupils were asked whether or not they were worried about taking the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* test. Just over half the pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they were worried, and the remaining pupils indicated that they were not worried (see Figure 8). It is important to bear in mind that a certain level of anxiety over a test is normal for test takers. These results indicate a slightly smaller percentage of pupils who were worried about taking the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* test, compared to the levels reported for test anxiety in general.

In Year 1, 60% of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they were worried about taking the *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* test. The slightly higher percentage (despite the lower target level of the exam last year) possibly reflects the unfamiliarity with Cambridge English exams, or external exams in general in the first year of the initiative. Figure 9 shows to what extent taking the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* exam motivated learners. 57.5% indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement that taking the test motivated them to continue with their English studies. This is similar to the percentage of pupils who indicated that they find tests motivating in general.

**Figure 8: 'I was worried about my performance on the Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools test.'**



**Figure 9: 'Sitting the Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools motivates me to continue to study English.'**



The majority of pupils in Year 1 also agreed that sitting the *Cambridge English: Key for Schools* test motivated them to continue studying English.

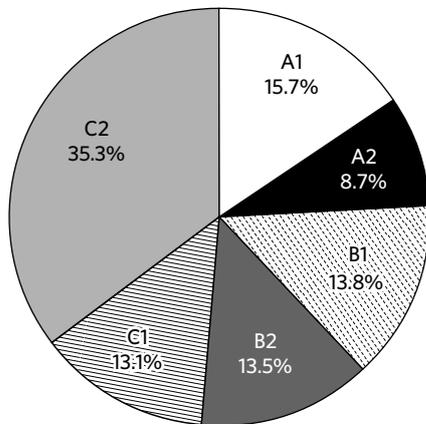
### Certification in English

The majority of pupils agree that it is essential to have an internationally recognised certificate of English proficiency. Approximately three quarters of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that it was important to have a certificate of this kind. In Year 1, 74% agreed it was important. If we compare these responses to enrolment rates for the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* certificate, a much lower percentage of the school population, approximately 15%, enrolled for a certificate prior to sitting the test. The greater agreement rates regarding the desire for a certificate in general, compared to those for this exam, may indicate more interest in certification at higher levels, or in obtaining certification at a later stage of the educational cycle, or a possible lack of awareness that certificates were available. As can be seen in Figure 10, approximately three quarters of the pupils, responding to short CEFR level descriptors, identified B1 (the target level) or above as the highest level of certification they would like to attain, with C2 the most common response (35.3%). However, just below a quarter of pupils indicated they would be happy with A1 (15.7%) or A2 (8.7%).

The pupils in Year 1 had a similar pattern of responses in terms of aspirations. The most common response was also

C2 (46%). In terms of the target level, a larger proportion (86%) identified B1 or higher as the level of certification they would like to attain.

**Figure 10: Aspirational level reported by pupils**



### Factor and regression analysis

The first group of statements analysed relate to the usefulness of assessment and its diagnostic aspect. The second group is made up of statements which relate to self-confidence. The statement 'I am worried about taking the Preliminary for Schools exam' was coded to have a higher value for Strongly Disagree/Disagree, so that it would be a measure of self-confidence, rather than worry. Analysis showed it fitted into the first grouping, about the usefulness of assessment, indicating that there is a relationship between being worried about exams, and appreciating their value. Table 8 shows the relationship between the items that make up the 'Attitude to assessment' scale, and the scores on the tests.

Pupil motivation and attitude to assessment has both positive and negative relationships with scores. This

may be because of the complex relationship between motivation and test anxiety. General positive attitude to assessment has a relationship with increase in scores on all skills. There is not a significant relationship between the diagnostic aspects of tests and those pupils who report that the teacher regularly gives them feedback on their performance, when controlling for variance in other items. This suggests that there is a need to investigate in more detail the characteristics of feedback being given to pupils.

## Main findings

The main findings here are summarised under the four key investigation points for this phase of the impact study, and also in terms of the constructs under investigation for each of the four areas, as detailed in Table 1: Research constructs in Year 2.

### Attitude towards English

The findings show that many pupils are positive about studying English at school and enjoy using English, and for those pupils who like English generally there is evidence of increased performance. English is perceived as intrinsically and extrinsically useful. There is an increase in scores in Speaking and Writing for pupils who feel English is important to get information from the internet. Enjoyment of lessons or activities such as travelling abroad or finding a good job, do not have an impact on scores for this group. This suggests that pupils may not find these factors relevant because of a lack of certainty about their future.

### Characteristics of the home environment

The findings show high levels of engagement with English where the pupils have ready access to it. The level of English ability of parents is not perceived to be particularly

**Table 8: Attitude to assessment and scores**

Question	Skill	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
Taking the Preliminary for Schools exam motivates me to continue to study English.	W	1.023	.091	.055	11.284	<.001
	Sp	.847	.084	.052	10.044	<.001
Tests are important because they motivate me to study.	L	-.738	.112	-.032	-6.586	<.001
Tests are important because they help me focus on what I need to learn.	W	1.001	.168	.029	5.961	<.001
It is essential to have an internationally recognised certificate of English proficiency.	Sp	.572	.097	.029	5.915	<.001
How do you feel about taking English exams in general?	R	5.185	.046	.504	112.318	<.001
	W	6.902	.062	.498	111.352	<.001
	L	6.430	.056	.514	114.735	<.001
	Sp	5.716	.057	.483	99.902	<.001
What level of English would you like to achieve?	R	1.983	.047	.186	42.364	<.001
	W	2.792	.063	.195	44.430	<.001
	L	2.113	.057	.164	37.201	<.001
	Sp	2.131	.058	.173	36.605	<.001

W=Writing; Sp=Speaking; L=Listening; R=Reading

high by pupils, and the level of parental involvement, in terms of talking about homework or classes, cannot be generalised, and most likely varies from household to household. There is an increase in scores for students whose parents' level of English language proficiency is perceived to be higher. However, there is an inverse relationship between parental involvement and scores; that is, those pupils reporting their parents are involved have lower scores than pupils who report their parents are not involved. It may be that pupils who perform well are not so closely monitored by parents. This needs to be investigated further in Year 3.

Access to English at home via the internet, the media and reading material in English, or opportunities to interact with speakers of English is variable, and there is a relationship between frequency of activity in English in the home environment and increased levels of performance.

### Characteristics of the learning environment

Although there is evidence of some pair and group work taking place in class, there is enough evidence to suggest that classes tend to be didactic. It is also clear that there is more use of English in class by the teacher than the pupils. Pupils report that they use English to interact with the teacher, but that interactions with classmates in English are less common. Further investigation into the nature of pair and group work is necessary to discover why this is not linked to an increase in scores. General liking of English is related to an increase in scores, but in contrast, enjoyment of English classes is not linked to an increase in scores. Investigation into pair and group work may help to identify why enjoyment of classes also has no link to increased scores.

Reading and Listening are the two most common skills selected as the skills the pupils feel they are strongest in. Grammar receives comparatively more class time and Speaking receives comparatively less class time than other skills. Greater use of English in class by pupils and a greater focus on Speaking in class are both recommended, since these are linked to an increase in scores in all skills.

### Attitude towards assessment

The findings in this section show that the majority of pupils find tests and assessment motivating and useful. A positive attitude to assessment in general has a relationship with increases in scores, but there is no significant relationship between increase in scores and feedback. This would suggest that either the feedback is not something pupils are able to act on or implement, or that they do not understand the feedback. More investigation is needed to identify the characteristics of feedback being given to pupils on their test performance and why this is not linked to an improvement in test scores. There is interest in obtaining certification in English, although this is not reflected in the enrolment rates for the *Cambridge English: Preliminary for Schools* certificate.

## Recommendations

The analysis has shown that pupils' confidence and high parental proficiency in English have a positive relationship with pupil achievement. However, the recommendations in this section are limited to actions which IAVE may be able to influence and the Ministry of Education should implement. In addition, some of the recommendations could be addressed and included in teacher training programmes, either at an initial phase or within in-service training.

1. Use of English outside the classroom has a relationship with improvement in scores. All the activities discussed in this article, such as use of the internet, the media, real-life interaction in English and reading in the language should be encouraged by teachers and, where possible, incorporated into class activities or assigned as homework.
2. More individual use of English by pupils and more focus on Speaking in class are both recommended.
3. Further investigation at classroom level, either through class observation or teacher focus groups, could help to identify the characteristics of pair and group work being carried out in terms of tasks and content. This may help to identify why there is no identified link between this type of activity and increases in scores.
4. Further investigation is also recommended to identify the nature of feedback being given to pupils. This may help to identify why there is no link between this feedback and increases in scores.

## Conclusions

The findings fall under three main areas. These are motivation and attitude, access to English and engagement with English, and, finally, environmental factors. Many of these findings are positive and echo the views expressed by the Grade 9 population in the first year of the initiative, such as a general liking of English, use of English outside class, enjoyment of lessons and so on. However, given the comparatively small size of the cohort of Grade 9 respondents in Year 1, only very tentative comparisons can be made.

### Motivation and attitude

The analysis highlighted many positive attitudes to English and aspects of English which pupils found motivating, such as their English lessons, the usefulness of English beyond the classroom, and the importance of English, assessment and certification. There was a relationship between English scores and enjoyment of English, positive attitudes to assessment and aspirational level.

- Just over half the pupils (54.7%) reported they are confident using English.
- Almost 80% of pupils enjoy their lessons at school and like English generally.

- There is a relationship between liking English and better performance in all four skills.
- The majority of pupils consider getting a good job, travel, interaction with non-speakers of Portuguese and access to a good university or college all to be important reasons for studying English.
- 80% of pupils agreed that tests helped them to focus on what they need to learn.
- General positive attitude to assessment has a relationship with increases in scores on all skills.
- Three quarters of pupils agreed or strongly agreed that it was important to have a certificate.
- Three quarters of pupils identified B1 (the target level) or above as the highest level of certification they would like to attain.
- The higher aspirational level of pupils has a relationship with increased performance in all skills.

Less than 25% of pupils indicated they would be happy with achieving an A2 (15.7%) or A1 (8.7%) level. However this may simply be an indication of the level of English these pupils perceive they will need for the type of jobs, educational opportunities or way of life they will pursue after leaving school. It could also be an indication that students are not fully aware of the meaning of CEFR levels.

### Access to and engagement with English

Grade 9 pupils are engaging with English outside the class, and there is evidence of a relationship between an increase in scores and use of English outside the classroom. In the case of Writing, there is also a relationship between increased scores and a feeling that English is important for using the internet and speaking to non-Portuguese speakers.

- The most frequent use of English is listening to songs, or watching TV programmes and films in English.
- Almost 80% of pupils think that English is important or very important for accessing information on the internet.
- There is a relationship between increases in scores in all skills and regular activity and exposure to English outside the classroom.
- There is a relationship between feeling that English is important for using the internet and increased scores. This is more noticeable in Writing and Speaking.
- Over 60% of pupils report using English to speak to tourists or visitors.
- There is a relationship between feeling that the ability to speak to non-Portuguese speakers is important and increased performance, which is most apparent in Writing.

The analysis did not find any evidence of a significant relationship between the importance of travelling to other

countries or getting a good job and increased scores in any skill. This perhaps reflects a more positive attitude towards the usefulness of English for more immediate needs, rather than long-term ones or those activities which may not be perceived to be particularly likely or predictable by some pupils.

### Environmental factors

The analysis found evidence of supportive factors for learning and teaching, both at home and at school, such as use of English in the classroom and parental ability in English.

- There is a relationship between a higher level of parental ability in English and higher scores on all skills.
- Pupils report that teacher use of English in the class is frequent.
- There is a relationship between use of English by the pupils and increased scores in all four skills.
- Pupils would like to spend more time on improving Speaking and Writing skills.
- Over 60% of pupils agreed that their teacher gave them information about their strengths and weaknesses after taking an English test.

There are several findings which help to give a picture of the learning environment for Grade 9 pupils, and are useful for considering what further steps can be taken towards improvement. These are further subdivided into parental proficiency level, skills in English, classroom dynamics and assessment.

### Parental proficiency

- The majority of parents were perceived to be below the target level of the exam.
- A higher level of parental ability in English correlates positively with higher scores.

There is a correlation between pupils who report regular discussion of homework, and lower scores. These findings do not mean that parental involvement causes a decrease in scores, only that there is a correlation. It contradicts the findings of other large scale studies, such as TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA. This section of the questionnaire should be expanded in future assessments, as this relationship between parental attitudes and student scores needs further investigation.

### Skills in English

- The skills identified by the highest number of pupils as in need of improvement were Writing and Speaking.
- There is a discrepancy between pupil perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses, and their performance in different skill areas.
- When asked what most class time was spent on, the two most common responses were Grammar and Writing.

- Teachers are spending more time on those skills where the pupils do need more help, perhaps at the expense of other skills.
- Enjoyment of lessons at school does not have a significant relationship with increase in performance in any skill.

There is a pupil perception of Writing as a skill in need of improvement, and that this is a skill regularly worked on in class. However, pupil perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses are not necessarily reflected in their exam performance. It is recommended that teachers look at the results by skill for their schools and decide which skills to prioritise for subsequent academic years.

### Class dynamics

There is evidence of some pair and group work taking place, but pupils working alone is most common. Pair and group work is not currently contributing to an increase in scores. There is not a great deal of pair and group work taking place. It may be that it is not currently contributing to scores because it is not that prevalent. Teachers need to consider how pair and group work can be used to increase the amount of English used by pupils in class, and how to ensure this English is of a sufficient standard, and also how to increase the amount of pair and group work in their classrooms. The findings suggest that more controlled practice, monitoring, correction and feedback are necessary.

### Assessment

Over 60% of pupils report receiving diagnostic feedback, and that they find tests motivating. There is not a significant relationship between test scores and those pupils who report that the teacher regularly gives them feedback on their performance. These findings suggest that diagnostic feedback is not having a positive impact, either because it is not taking place, or because the pupils feel that the feedback they receive does not have any practical application. Teachers need to consider what type of feedback is most beneficial to pupils, and what can be done to make this more accessible to pupils. As a practical next step, further investigation at classroom level is needed

to ascertain the nature of feedback being given to pupils on their assessment performance, and also what kind of pair work and group work activities are being carried out. Use of spoken English in class and engagement with English outside the class should be promoted and encouraged.

The study so far has highlighted many positive outcomes, which should not be set aside simply because they are what might have been predicted, following on from the findings in the first year. It is clear that positive pupil attitudes are related to increased proficiency. It is to the credit of the Grade 9 pupils, their families and teachers that there is such a positive attitude to assessment and English generally, and that pupils enjoy their classes at school, and engage with English when they have the opportunities to do so.

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# Assessing the English language progress of students in a trilingual education framework in the Basque Country

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## Introduction

In 2011, upon initiation of the Marco de Educación Trilingüe (the Trilingual Education Framework project, hereafter referred to as MET), Cambridge English Language Assessment started working with the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education (ISEI-IVEI), which is maintained by the Basque Government's Department of Education, Universities and Research. The aim of this collaboration was to assess the English language progress of students participating in the MET programme in order to support ISEI-IVEI in evaluating the effects of the simultaneous introduction of Spanish, English and Basque as languages of instruction for content subjects.

This article focuses on the performance of the 2014 primary and secondary school students who formed the second cohort taking part in the MET programme (henceforward MET II). This group of students took an English language test in writing, reading, listening and speaking and we firstly compare their performance in 2014 against their performance in the 2012 English benchmarking test which they also sat. Secondly, we compare the performance of these primary and secondary students (the experimental group) against two control groups which were added to the MET programme in 2014. Thirdly, we evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in writing and speaking performance in the 2014 primary and secondary cohorts and suggest how their performance can be improved. We conclude by highlighting some characteristics that contribute to the success of such programmes based on our experience of the MET programme.

## Context of the MET programme

Since the 1990s, the Department of Education, Universities and Research has been promoting Plurilingual Education in the Basque Country, and in 2011 the MET programme was initiated to promote trilingual education. Trilingual education refers to the use of three languages as the means of instruction for content matter subjects (e.g. Geography, Maths, Art) and it can support students to achieve sufficiently high levels of proficiency in each language to allow them to continue to develop their language knowledge and skills

relatively independently, and to continue their studies or use any of these languages in their future employment.

The Basque Country is a region in the north of Spain close to the Pyrenees and the French border with a population of just over 2 million (according to the 2011 census, see [en.eustat.eus/estadisticas/tema\\_159/opt\\_0/ti\\_Population/temas.html](http://en.eustat.eus/estadisticas/tema_159/opt_0/ti_Population/temas.html)). The official languages are Basque and Spanish, and English is the most commonly taught foreign language. All students are taught either in Basque or Spanish and have English as a foreign language. Not all schools teach content subjects through the three languages and official time allocated to each language can vary. According to Seewald and Beetsma (Eds) (2002) one of the problems in the past was the weak position of Basque and the Basque language skills of teachers. This is generally not considered the case nowadays and one of the current challenges is related to the lack of a need to speak English outside the classroom and the varying levels of motivation. However, parents are felt to be fully supportive of trilingual education and the Basque Department of Education, Universities and Research supports the development of trilingual education.

The MET programme, which started in 2011, aimed to be able, via both the benchmarking tests administered by Cambridge English for English and the tests administered by ISEI-IVEI for Spanish and Basque, to evaluate the effects of the simultaneous introduction of these three languages as languages of learning and teaching. The MET programme was designed to provide flexibility and autonomy as participation in the programme was voluntary and participating schools were encouraged to develop their own linguistic approach whilst keeping within certain minimum requirements. For this reason it was felt more appropriate to refer to MET as a 'Trilingual Framework' rather than a model, with the framework promoting Basque, English and Spanish whilst consolidating bilingualism and activating English. The following criteria were identified for MET:

- Students would not need to take a language proficiency test in order to take part in the test and participation was the decision of the child's family.
- Each language (Basque, Spanish and English) had to be both a language of instruction and a subject in its own

right. In practice this means 5 hours a week in primary and 6 hours a week in secondary. From there each school could develop its own linguistic proposal.

- Preference was given to schools in different regions and with different systems in both primary and secondary, in order to ensure adequate representation.
- Preference was also given to schools whose permanent teaching staff had minimum B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) or who had obtained a recognised qualification in teaching a foreign language at primary level.
- Participating schools would have access to funding and support to compensate for the time necessary to implement and co-ordinate the project.
- The objective of the external assessment was not to assess the performance of individuals but rather evaluate the cohort as a whole and therefore the project in order to be able to inform future policy.
- The experimental phase has been accompanied by a plan of linguistic improvement and professional training for the participating teachers.

A call was therefore made for participation which was accepted by 25 primary and 15 secondary schools in MET phase I (henceforward MET I) and 57 primary and 32 secondary schools in MET phase II (henceforward MET II, the focus of this article). Whilst the overall aim of the MET programme was to evaluate the performance in Basque, Spanish and English of primary and secondary school children, MET also aimed to study the factors which could influence performance as well as provide support for decisions regarding CEFR attainment levels at the end of primary and secondary level education.

## Benchmarking student performance

Since 2011, groups of primary and secondary school students have taken an English language test each year within the MET programme outlined above. In 2011 and 2012 reading, writing and listening skills were tested, which were joined by speaking in 2013 and 2014. A control group was included in MET I in 2011 and 2013, whilst in 2012 the benchmarking test focused exclusively on the experimental

group of students. In 2014, in addition to the experimental group that sat the benchmarking test in 2012, there were two control groups in each of the primary and secondary cohorts of students. Control group type 1 students were students receiving the minimum legal requirement of English teaching and control group type 2 students were receiving additional lessons in English. Table 1 details the students who took part in MET II 2012/14 cohorts which we report on further in this article.

## Research questions

The MET II programme aimed to answer a number of research questions (RQs), which can be summarised as follows:

1. What is the CEFR level of the MET II primary and secondary student populations who took part in the benchmarking study in 2014 and how do their results compare with their results from 2012?
2. What is the CEFR level of the MET II primary and secondary populations in the 2014 control group split according to whether they are receiving the legal minimum of lessons in English or whether they receive additional lessons and how does it compare with the experimental group?
3. How does the performance across all four skills compare between the 2014 experimental, control type 1 and control type 2 groups?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the speaking and writing performances in the 2014 experimental, control type 1 and control type 2 groups?

This article presents a summary of the findings, along with some of our observations and recommendations that followed from this research. The following section describes the English language tests that the MET II participants sat in 2014.

## Cambridge English tests

### Cambridge English test: Primary Reading and Writing

This test consists of 51 items (30 reading and 21 writing items) measuring from A1 to B1 in the CEFR. The

**Table 1 Participating students' information for MET II 2012/14**

Year	Level	Number of students	Age range	Type	Benchmarking tests taken
2012	Primary (4th year)	1,998	9-10	Experimental	Reading, listening
2012	Secondary (1st year)	1,127	12-13	Experimental	Reading, writing, listening
2014	Primary (6th year)	1,880	11-12	Experimental	Reading, writing, listening
2014	Primary (6th year)	403	11-12	Control group type 1	Reading, writing, listening
2014	Primary (6th year)	418	11-12	Control group type 2	Reading, writing, listening
2014	Secondary (3rd)	911	14-15	Experimental	Reading, writing, listening
2014	Secondary (3rd)	127	14-15	Control group type 1	Reading, writing, listening
2014	Secondary (3rd)	222	14-15	Control group type 2	Reading, writing, listening

reading section (Parts 1–4) focuses on a range of skills: understanding lexis, grammar and cohesion in a variety of different text types (from dialogues to adapted magazine articles) through different task types (from matching prompt sentences, to notices and 3-option multiple choice). The writing section (Parts 5–8) focuses on lexical knowledge and accuracy using a variety of interactive task types. The main writing task tests the candidate's ability to produce a short text; employing correct grammar, the correct level of appropriacy and attention to detail, with the emphasis on the effectiveness of the communication over lexical and grammatical accuracy. Table 2 shows the contents of the test.

### Cambridge English test: Primary Listening

This test consists of 25 items measuring CEFR A1 to B1 levels. The test focuses on a range of listening skills and on

understanding of lexis, grammar and cohesion; and uses a variety of different text lengths and interactions, ranging from short dialogues to a medium-length monologue; and a range of different task types, from multiple choice with pictures to note-taking (see Table 3).

### Cambridge English test: Primary Speaking

This test consists of two parts in which an assessor examines two candidates for 8–10 minutes. The test is designed to assess candidates at CEFR A1 to B1 level. The test focuses on each candidate's ability to produce a range of accurate grammar and lexis, and on their pronunciation and ability to interact, both with the interlocutor and each other (see Table 4). The examiner submitted more detailed feedback on each pair of candidates (based on a Cambridge English brief) in order to provide quotes on speaking proficiency for the report.

**Table 2: Cambridge English test: Primary Reading and Writing**

Part	Task type and format	Task focus	Number of items and range of difficulty
<b>Reading</b>			
1	Matching five prompt sentences to eight notices (preceded by an example).	Gist understanding of real-world notices. Reading for main message.	Five items at A1 level
2	Five gapped sentences with three multiple-choice options for each gap. The sentences are linked by a storyline.	Reading and identifying appropriate vocabulary.	Five items at A1 to A2 level
3a	Eight discrete 3-option multiple-choice items.	Understanding functional language in verbal exchanges. Reading and identifying appropriate responses.	Eight items at A1 to A2 level
3b	Five matching items (plus an integrated example) in a continuous dialogue. For each item, selecting from eight possible responses.	Understanding functional language in verbal exchanges. Reading and identifying appropriate responses.	Five items at A1 level
4	Three short texts adapted from authentic magazine articles. Seven 3-option multiple-choice items.	Reading for detailed understanding and main ideas.	Seven items at A2 level
<b>Writing</b>			
5	Five dictionary-definition-type sentences (plus an example) requiring accurate completion of appropriate word.	Reading and identifying appropriate lexical items and producing them with correct spelling.	Five items at A1 to A2 level
6	Narrative text of kind that candidates could be expected to write. Ten gaps (plus integrated example) to fill appropriately and accurately with one word.	Reading and identifying appropriate lexical items and producing them with correct spelling, with focus on structure and lexis.	Ten items at A1 to B1 level
7	Two short authentic-style input texts to prompt completion of five spaces in a notes section output text with words or numbers (plus an integrated example).	Reading and writing down appropriate words or numbers with focus on content and accuracy.	Five items at A1 to A2 level
8	A short input text (email) with three questions to prompt a written response (also email) in answer to those questions.	Writing a short email of 25–35 words using an appropriate range of lexis and grammar, and including appropriate writing conventions for the audience and text type.	Targeted at A2 level

**Table 3: Cambridge English test: Primary Listening**

Part	Task type and format	Task focus	Number of items and range of difficulty
1	Five short neutral or informal dialogues, with five accompanying discrete 3-option multiple-choice items with pictures, plus one example.	Listening to identify key information (times, prices, days of week, numbers etc.).	Five items at A1 to A2 level
2	A longer informal dialogue with five accompanying matching items (plus one integrated example) and eight options.	Listening to identify key information.	Five items at A1 to A2 level
3	A longer informal dialogue, with five accompanying 3-option multiple-choice items (plus one integrated example).	Listening to identify key information.	Five items at A1 to A2 level
4	A longer neutral dialogue, with accompanying notes which have five gaps to fill with one or more words or numbers.	Listening and writing down specific information (including spelling of names, places etc. as dictated on recording).	Five items at A1 to A2 level
5	A longer neutral dialogue, with accompanying notes which have five gaps to fill with one or more words or numbers.	Listening and writing down specific information (including spelling of names, places etc. as dictated on recording).	Five items at A1 to A2 level

**Table 4: Cambridge English test: Primary Speaking**

Part	Task type and format	Task focus	Range of difficulty
1	The interlocutor asks candidates questions on familiar topics (school, family etc.).	Using language normally associated with meeting people for the first time and giving information of a factual personal kind, including spelling where appropriate.	A1 to B1 level
2	The interlocutor explains the activity using a standard rubric, then issues candidates with prompt cards from which they ask and answer questions about real-world notices.	Using factual information of a non-personal kind related to daily life, such as price, address and available facilities.	A1 to B1 level

### Cambridge English test: Secondary Reading and Writing

This test consists of 25 items for reading and two items for writing measuring from CEFR A2 to B2. The reading section focuses on a range of skills; on understanding lexis, grammar and cohesion in a variety of different text types, ranging from short notices to adapted magazine articles; and a range of task types, from 3-option multiple choice to matching information in one text to another. The writing section focuses on a variety of skills, from lexical and grammatical range and accuracy to knowledge of appropriate register and writing conventions, through two different task types: writing an email and writing a letter (see Table 5).

### Cambridge English test: Secondary Listening

This test consists of 25 items measuring CEFR A2 to B2 levels. The test focuses on a range of listening skills and understanding of lexis, grammar and cohesion with a variety of different text lengths and interactions, ranging

from short dialogues to a longer monologue, through a range of different task types, from multiple choice with pictures to note-taking (see Table 6).

### Cambridge English test: Secondary Speaking

This test consists of four parts in which an interlocutor examines two candidates for 10–12 minutes. The test is designed to assess candidates at CEFR A2 to B2 level and focuses on candidates' range and accuracy of grammar and lexis; pronunciation; discourse management; and interaction, both with the interlocutor and each other, summarised in Table 7. An assessor was present in a representative number of both primary and secondary exams.

### Test marking and scoring

Clerical marking of items and examiner marking of extended texts was carried out by Cambridge English. For the objectively scored test components (Reading and Listening) cut-off scores for CEFR levels were arrived at using a Rasch Ability table based on item difficulty values that were anchored to the Cambridge English Common Scale. The cut-off scores were criterion based (i.e. based on established proficiency levels). For the subjectively scored test components (Speaking and Writing) writing responses were marked by trained Cambridge English examiners using assessment scales linked to the CEFR and Speaking tests were conducted by trained Cambridge English Speaking Examiners using assessment scales linked to the CEFR. The mark schemes were based on the analysis of the features of performance at different levels, with marks awarded according to these mark schemes, and cut-off scores being criterion based in relation to these mark schemes. Overall cut-off scores for CEFR levels were based on a combination of the cut-off scores for the objectively and subjectively scored elements. Candidate performance was reported in terms of CEFR levels.

**Table 5: Cambridge English test: Secondary Reading and Writing**

Part	Task type and format	Task focus	Number of items and range of difficulty
<b>Reading</b>			
1	Five short texts (notes, labels, emails, signs) with accompanying discrete 3-option multiple-choice items.	Reading real-world notices and other short texts for the main message.	Five items at A2 to B1 level
2	Five items in the form of descriptions of people to match to eight short adapted-authentic texts.	Reading multiple texts for specific information and detailed comprehension.	Five items at A2 to B1 level
3	An adapted-authentic long text with 10 true/false items.	Processing a factual text. Scanning for specific information while disregarding redundant material.	Ten items at A2 to B2 level
4	An adapted-authentic long text with five 4-option multiple-choice items.	Reading for detailed comprehension; understanding attitude, opinion and writer purpose. Reading for gist, inference and global meaning.	Five items at A2 to B2 level
<b>Writing</b>			
1	Candidates are prompted to write a short informal email. The prompt takes the form of a rubric with three bullet-pointed items to include.	Writing an informal email of 35–45 words focusing on communication of three specific content points, using appropriate lexis, grammar and writing conventions to convey the message.	Targeted at B1 level
2	Candidates are prompted to write a longer informal letter. The prompt takes the form of an extract from a letter containing three questions to be answered.	Writing an informal letter of around 100 words focusing on answering three questions from the prompt, using appropriate lexis, grammar and writing conventions. Candidates are assessed using assessment scales consisting of four subscales: Content; Communicative Achievement; Organisation; and Language.	Targeted at B1 level

**Table 6: Cambridge English test: Secondary Listening**

Part	Task type and format	Task focus	Number of items and range of difficulty
1	Seven short neutral or informal dialogues or monologues with seven accompanying discrete 3-option multiple-choice items with pictures.	Listening to identify key information.	Seven items at A2 to B1 level
2	A longer interview with one main speaker, and six 3-option multiple-choice items.	Listening to identify specific information and detailed meaning.	Six items at A2 to B1 level
3	A longer monologue, with accompanying notes which have six gaps to fill with one or more words.	Listening to identify, understand and interpret information.	Six items at A2 to B1 level
4	A longer informal dialogue, with six true/false items.	Listening for detailed meaning, and to identify the attitudes and opinions of the speakers.	Six items at A2 to B2 level

**Table 7: Cambridge English test: Secondary Speaking**

Part	Task type and format	Task focus	Range of difficulty
1	The interlocutor asks candidates questions on familiar topics (school, family etc.).	Giving information of a factual personal kind. The candidates respond to questions about present circumstances, past experiences and future plans.	A2 to B2 level
2	The interlocutor explains the task through a standard rubric. Candidates are given a visual stimulus and a task, then asked to work together to complete it.	Using functional language to make and respond to suggestions, discuss alternatives, make recommendations and negotiate agreement.	A2 to B2 level
3	A colour photograph is given to each candidate in turn and they are then asked to talk about it for approximately a minute. Both photographs relate to the same topic.	Describing photographs and managing discourse, using appropriate vocabulary, in a longer turn.	A2 to B2 level
4	Using a standard rubric, the interlocutor explains that candidates should speak together on the same topic as in Part 3.	The candidates talk together about their opinions, likes/dislikes, preferences, experiences, habits etc.	A2 to B2 level

## Test population

The school students taking the benchmarking tests in 2014 comprised 4,026 students selected by ISEI-IVEI. Of these, 2,701 primary school students and 1,260 secondary students have results for Reading, Writing and Listening, with the remaining candidates being absent for one or more components. A subset comprising 420 primary and 378 secondary students also completed a Speaking component. The students were split into three categories:

- experimental – trilingual project students (MET II)
- control group type 1 – students taking statutory English lessons
- control group type 2 – students taking additional English lessons.

Control groups 1 and 2 were selected by ISEI-IVEI to represent the MET II sample as closely as possible according to their results in a diagnostic evaluation in 2013, the linguistic model they were following and the socio-economic status of their families. Information supplied by ISEI-IVEI indicated some differences in the composition of these three groups which might affect their performance. For example, 77% of control group type 2 schools are subsidised, rather than state schools, compared to 48% in the trilingual and 43% in control group type 1. Furthermore,

the families of students in control group type 2 tend to have a higher educational level than the other two groups (this applies both to the families whose children are in state schools, as well as to those which are in subsidised schools). Given that higher levels of education may well translate into higher socioeconomic status, this might contribute to stronger learning outcomes for this group. In addition, the data also reveals that children in control group type 2 have greater exposure to English outside class via extra-curricular activities. Again this may indicate that students in the different groups vary in their motivation or are differently placed to take advantage of the additional tuition in English, and this in turn would explain some of the variability in their performance in the benchmarking study in 2014.

We now summarise the results according to the research questions posed above.

## Results

This section reports on test performance based on the 2014 test administration and provides a picture of proficiency levels of students according to the CEFR. The analyses were carried out on data from experimental, control group type 1 and control group type 2 students. We firstly answer RQ1: What is the CEFR level of the MET II primary

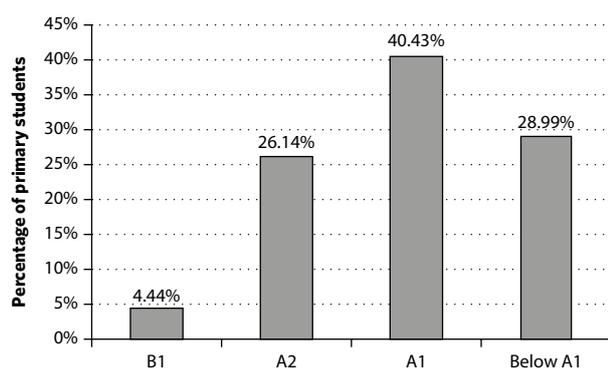
and secondary student populations who took part in the benchmarking study in 2014 and how do their results compare with their results from 2012?

### Overall performance in 2014

#### Overall performance: Primary

Figure 1 shows that for all primary students, 4.44% achieved B1 CEFR level; just over a quarter (26.14%) are at A2 level; 40.43% are at A1 level; and 28.99% are below the A1 CEFR level.

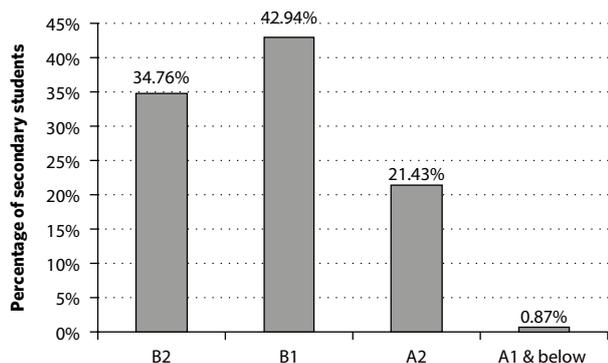
**Figure 1: Cambridge English test: 2014 distribution of primary student scores by CEFR level (N=2,701)**



#### Overall performance: Secondary

Figure 2 shows that over a third (34.76%) of all secondary students achieved B2 level. The majority (42.94%) are at Level B1; 21.43% are at Level A2; and 0.87% are at Level A1 and below.

**Figure 2: Cambridge English test: 2014 distribution of secondary student scores by CEFR level (N=1,260)**



Having summarised the MET II participants' overall performance in 2014, we now address the second part of RQ1: How do MET II students' 2014 results compare with their results from 2012?

### Comparative overall performance 2012-14

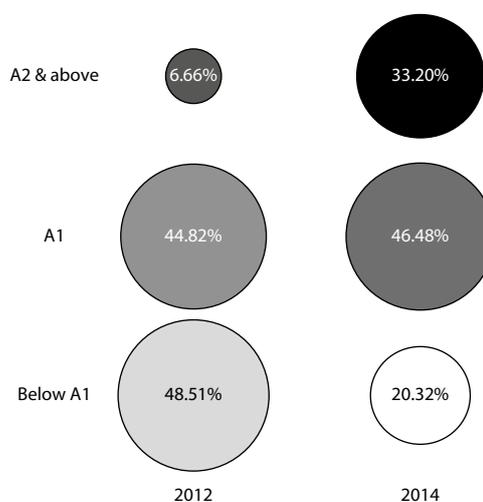
There were 1,816 primary and 863 secondary experimental students who had results from both 2012 and 2014 tests. In 2012, the primary benchmarking test consisted of Reading and Listening papers. In order to make a comparison between the years only the Reading and Listening results from 2014 were used (as the secondary benchmarking test

consisted of Reading, Writing and Listening in both years). In 2012, the CEFR levels reported for primary candidates were A1 and A2 and above, whilst for secondary the CEFR levels reported were A2 and B1 and above.

#### Comparative performance 2012-14: Primary

The primary students' comparative performance (N = 1,816) is shown in Figure 3, which shows that overall the percentage of primary students achieving a Level A2 and above increased from 6.66% to 33.20%. Correspondingly, the percentage of students at a level below A1 on the CEFR has dropped from 48.51% to 20.32%.

**Figure 3: Cambridge English test: Distribution of primary student scores by CEFR level in 2012 and 2014**



Of those experimental primary students who were at Level Below A1 in 2012, 67.88% had improved by one or two CEFR levels by 2014; and 48.16% of those at Level A1 in 2012 had improved by one CEFR level.

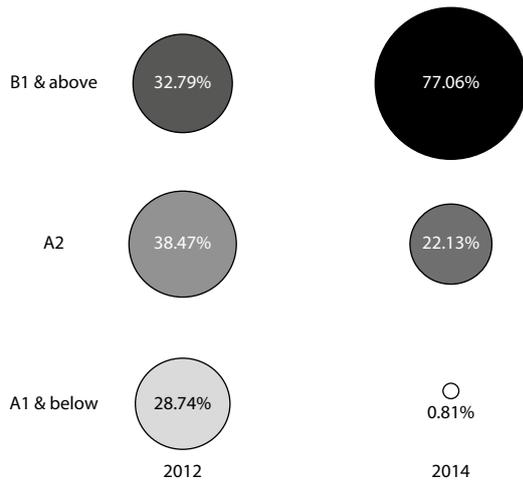
#### Comparative performance 2012-14: Secondary

The secondary students' comparative performance is shown in Figure 4 (N=863) based on their Reading and Listening scores in 2012 and 2014. Figure 4 shows that the percentage of secondary students achieving Level B1 and above has increased from 32.79% to 77.06%. Correspondingly, the percentage of students at Level A1 and below has dropped from 28.74% to 0.81%.

Of those experimental secondary students who were at Level A1 and below in 2012, 97.18% had improved by one or two CEFR levels by 2014; and 84.64% of those at Level A2 in 2012 had improved by one CEFR level.

To summarise the findings in relation to the first research question, in 2014 the results showed that in primary, 33.20% of students are Level A2 and above, 46.48% are A1 and far fewer than in 2012 are below A1, 20.32%. In 2012, 6.66% were A2, 44.82% were A1 and 48.51% were below A1. In primary, the strongest skill was speaking with 53% of the experimental group at Level A2. The weakest skill

**Figure 4: Cambridge English test: Distribution of secondary student scores by CEFR level in 2012 and 2014**



was writing with 38% of the experimental group below A1. This is not a surprising result as we would expect primary students to make slower progress in third language learning than in second language learning and slower progress in primary than in secondary. Neither is the skill performance surprising as in primary the focus is on speaking and listening (in L1, L2 and L3) and so we would expect primary school students to perform best in speaking and struggle most with writing.

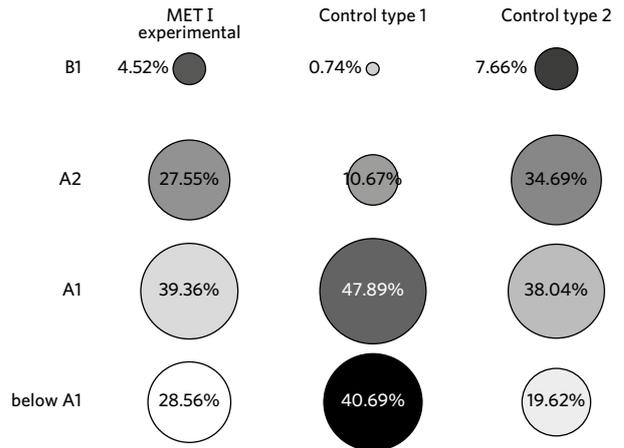
At secondary level, the results showed an even greater improvement in performance than at primary level. Of the 863 secondary experimental students who had results for both 2012 and 2014, in 2014, 77.06% of students were at Level B1 and above by the third year of secondary school with most of the remainder at Level A2 (22.13%). Compared to 2012 findings, we can see that the improvement has been significant: in 2012, 32.79% of students were at B1 and above, 38.47% at A2 and 28.74% A1 and below. In 2014 the secondary students' strongest skill is writing with 92% of the experimental group achieving Level B1 and above; the weakest skill is speaking with 51% of the experimental group at Level B1 and above.

Next, we report on RQ2: What is the CEFR level of the MET II primary and secondary populations in the 2014 control group split according to whether they are receiving the legal minimum of lessons in English or whether they receive additional lessons and how does it compare with the experimental group?

**Overall performance by grouping: Primary**

Of the 2,701 primary school students included in the analysis, 1,880 were in the experimental group, 403 were in the control group type 1 and 418 were in the control group type 2. Figure 5 shows that the overall performance of the control group type 2 students was stronger than both the experimental students and the control group type 1 students, with a higher percentage of students achieving CEFR Levels B1 and A2 (42.35% compared to 32.07% and 11.41% respectively).

**Figure 5: Cambridge English test: Distribution of primary student scores by CEFR level for each category**



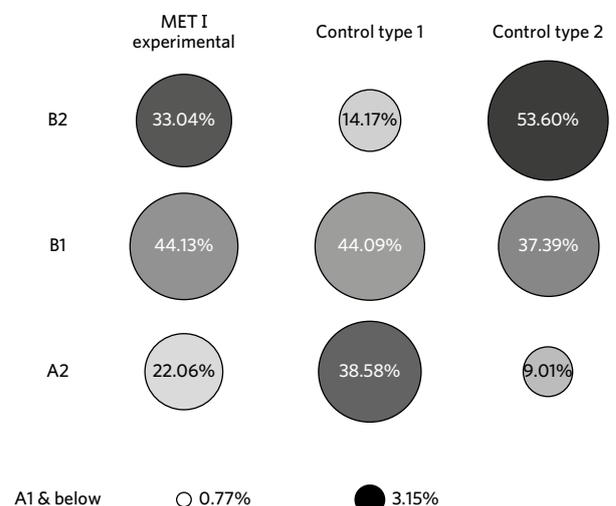
To compare the performance of the experimental students and the two control groups, independent t-tests were run for each component which showed that the differences between the experimental group and the control group type 1 group was statistically significant by  $p > 0.05$  in all three skills, with the experimental group consistently achieving higher mean scores (e.g. reading mean was 12.40 over 10.25, writing 10.58 over 7.58). The differences between the experimental group and the control group type 2 were statistically significant for all three components, with the experimental group achieving lower mean scores in all three skills.

**Overall performance by grouping: Secondary**

Of the 1,260 secondary school students included in the analysis, 911 were in the experimental group, 127 were in control group type 1 and 222 were in control group type 2.

Figure 6 shows that the overall performance of the control group type 2 students was stronger than both the experimental students and the control group type 1 students, with a higher percentage of students achieving CEFR Levels B2 and B1 (90.99% compared to 77.17% and 58.26% respectively).

**Figure 6: Cambridge English test: Distribution of secondary student scores by CEFR level for each category**



To compare the performance of the experimental students and the two control groups, independent t-tests were run for each component, which showed that the differences between the experimental group and control group type 1 were statistically significant for all three components ( $p > 0.05$ ), with the experimental group achieving higher mean scores in all three skills (e.g. listening mean was 15.64 over 13.46, reading mean 19.60 over 17.27). The differences between the experimental group and control group type 2 were statistically significant for all three components, with the experimental group achieving lower mean scores in all three skills. Now we focus on RQ3: How does the performance across all four skills compare between the 2014 experimental, control type 1 and control type 2 groups?

**Performance by skill and grouping**

*Performance by skill: Primary*

Performance by skill for each grouping is shown in Figures 7, 8 and 9. Figure 7 shows that for the experimental primary group the strongest skill was speaking with 53% of the students achieving a level of A2 or above, and the second strongest skill was listening (41% at A2 or above). The most difficult skill for this group was reading, where only 30% of students achieved a level of A2 or above. However in writing, 33% achieved a level of A2 and above and a significant number, 38%, were at below A1 (compared to 18% in reading and similar percentages in speaking and listening).

**Figure 7: Cambridge English test: Distribution of experimental primary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**

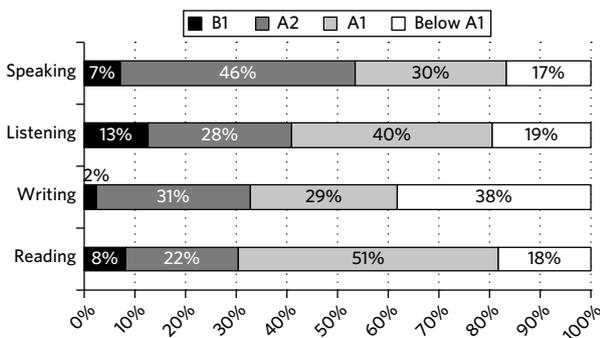
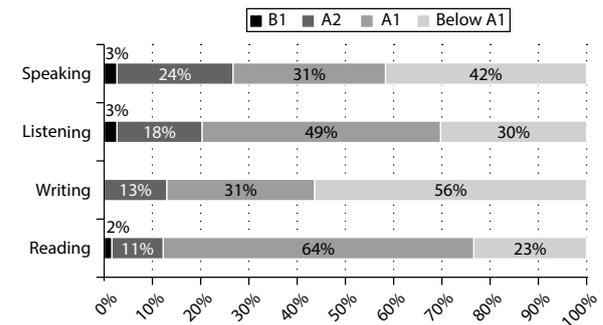


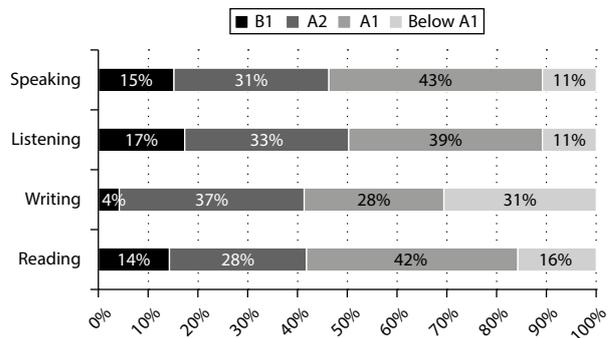
Figure 8 shows that for control group type 1 the strongest skill was speaking (27% at A2 or above) followed by listening (21% at A2 or above). In writing, 13% of students were at A2 level and in reading, 11% were at Level A2 and 2% at B1. The most difficult skill for control group type 1 students was writing as the majority (56%) were at below A1 level.

Figure 9 shows that for the control group type 2 primary students the strongest skill was listening with 50% of candidates achieving a level of A2 or above, closely followed by speaking (46% at A2 or above). As with the control group type 1, their weakest skill was writing with 41% of candidates achieving a level of A2 or above and 31% achieving A1 and below.

**Figure 8: Cambridge English test: Distribution of control group type 1 primary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**



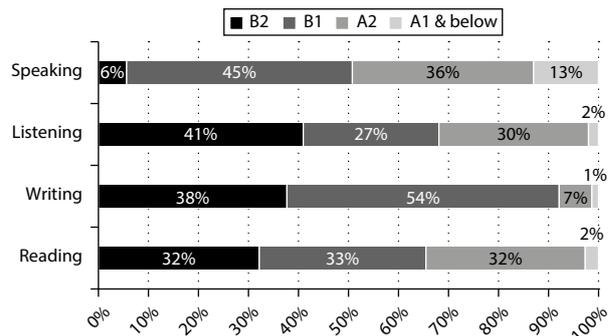
**Figure 9: Cambridge English test: Distribution of control group type 2 primary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**



*Performance by skill: Secondary*

Performance by skill for each category is shown in Figures 10, 11 and 12. In Figure 10 we can see that for the experimental secondary group the strongest skill was writing (92% at B1 and above), followed by listening (68% at B1 and above) and then reading (65% at B1 and above). The weakest skill in this group was speaking, with 51% at B1 or above and 13% at A1 and below.

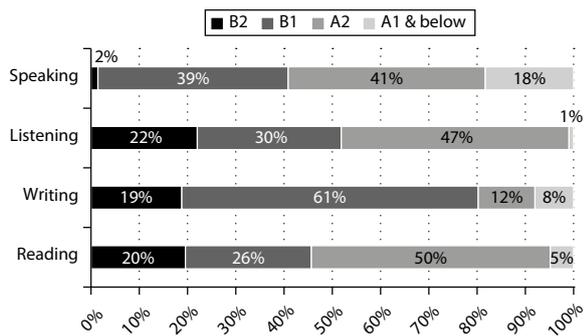
**Figure 10: Cambridge English test: Distribution of experimental secondary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**



In Figure 11 we can see that for the control group type 1 secondary group the strongest skill was also writing (80% at B1 or above), with listening the second strongest (52% at B1 or above). In this group the weakest skill was again speaking with 41% of candidates achieving a level of B1 or above and 18% at A1 and below.

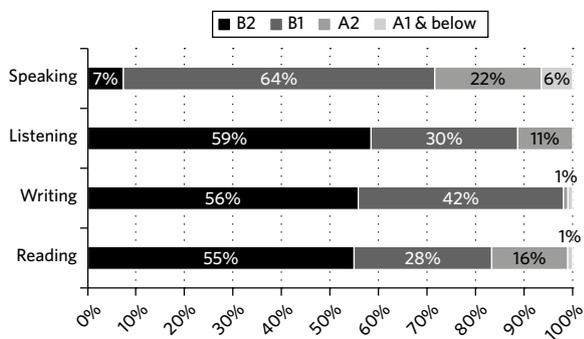
In Figure 12 we can see that for the control group type 2 secondary candidates the strongest skill was writing, with 98% achieving a Level B1 or above. Listening was their

**Figure 11: Cambridge English test: Distribution of control group type 1 secondary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**



second strongest skill, with 89% achieving B1 or above, and their weakest skill was speaking (71% at B1 or above).

**Figure 12: Cambridge English test: Distribution of control group type 2 secondary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**



When we compare the performance across the three groups in both primary and secondary in 2014 we see that the strongest group overall was control group type 2 and the weakest group was control group type 1. In primary, 34.69% of control group type 2 students are at Level A2, 27.55% of the experimental group are at Level A2 and 10.67% of the control group type 1 students are at Level A2. If we look at secondary, the situation is similar with again control group type 2 being the strongest of the three groups. In secondary, 53.60% of control type 2 students are achieving B2 compared to 33.04% of the experimental group and 14.17% of the control group type 1. Analysis of the characteristics of the control group type 2 suggests that in addition to the hours dedicated to language learning in school, the socioeconomic status of families, the increased exposure to the target language outside the classroom and the motivation and positive attitudes of teachers and students all contribute to positive results in second and third language learning. This may help explain the performance of control group type 2 especially in comparison to the experimental group.

In the following section we will summarise the students' strengths and weaknesses in their spoken and written performances in the 2014 MET II cohort, to answer RQ4: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the speaking and writing performances in the 2014 experimental, control type 1 and control type 2 groups?

## Student performance in productive skills

Our analysis of the productive test components highlighted the strengths and weaknesses in performance in writing and speaking among Basque primary and secondary students. In terms of the strengths and weaknesses in speaking, we found that whilst strong primary students were able to ask questions and respond confidently, sometimes initiating exchanges and developing their answers, weak students struggled with question forms and with maintaining basic conversation. Based on our observations, we made some recommendations which include practice with question forms, information gap activities and opportunities to improve confidence.

At secondary level we found that strong students were able to use a variety of lexis and grammatical forms and developed the interaction whilst weaker students lacked confidence, were unable to produce extended language and they also struggled at times with tenses and verb forms. For secondary students, we recommended that role play activities would work well alongside activities which involve obtaining information from a partner and reporting back to the group, along with developing attention to functional language to develop confidence. With practice, secondary students would be able to contribute to accurate and extended speech which is necessary for all students to achieve levels B1 and above in speaking.

In terms of strengths and weaknesses in writing, we found that strong primary candidates included all the content points and used basic structures correctly but weaker students struggled, sometimes writing only 1- or 2-word answers, and they lacked an awareness of basic phrases which would have helped them to get their message across. Based on our analysis we recommended some more exposure to written texts which could come before or after a speaking activity and practice in writing short emails or notes to focus on basic phrases on topics relevant to students' daily lives. If we turn to secondary level writing, we found that strong candidates organised their writing into paragraphs with some evidence of linking and cohesive devices. They were more adventurous in their use of language and included relevant content which showed that they were reading and processing the rubric and input material. Weaker candidates did not consider the target reader or check their work and used basic structures and lexis, sometimes incorrectly. We recommended that paying attention to the process of writing, planning and checking their own work and drawing attention to text cohesion and coherence during reading activities would help secondary students to improve their writing, which are necessary for students to achieve levels B1 and above in writing.

## Summary of results

In providing a summary of this study, we refer back to the key research questions which it aimed to investigate.

### **RQ1: What is the CEFR level of the MET II primary and secondary student populations who took part in the benchmarking study in 2014 and how do their results compare with their results from 2012?**

The benchmarking study showed that almost half of those students, who took part in the benchmarking study in 2014, were A1 (40.43%), while over a quarter (28.99%) were below A1 and 26.14% were A2. The results in 2014 show that the primary students in the experimental group were strongest in speaking, followed by listening, and then writing and reading. This is not unusual in primary students as there tends to be a focus on speaking at this level, and young learners in general tend to perform better in speaking. However, while control group 1 shows the same pattern, control group 2 actually did best, on average, in the Listening test.

In order to be able to provide a valid comparison between the results in 2012 and the results in 2014 we removed the Speaking and Writing tests as in 2012 the primary students only took a Reading and Listening test. It should be noted that in 2012 there were no control groups. The benchmarking shows that between 2012 and 2014 there has been a significant increase in the number of primary candidates at Level A2 and above. In 2012, 6.66% of students were A2 and above, while in 2014 this has increased to 33.20% and although a significant percentage continue to be A1 in 2014 (46.48%), far fewer (20.32%) are below A1. Based on these results, an attainment level of A1 was recommended as the most realistic target for primary students.

The benchmarking study showed that over a third have achieved Level B2 (34.76%) by the third year of secondary but that the majority (42.94%) are at Level B1. The results in 2014 show that secondary students in contrast to the primary students were strongest in writing followed by listening and reading, with speaking as, on average, the weakest skill.

The benchmarking shows that between 2012 and 2014 there has been a significant increase in the number of secondary candidates at Level B1 and above. In 2012, 32.79% of students were B1 and above, while in 2014 this has increased to 77.06%. Also, whereas in 2012 28.74% were A1 and below in the first year of secondary, by 2014, in a very positive development, only 0.81% of students remain at that level. The recommended future attainment level for secondary students was thus set at B1, with a view to increasing to B2.

### **RQ2: What is the CEFR level of the MET II primary and secondary populations in the 2014 control group split according to whether they are receiving the legal minimum of lessons in English or whether they receive additional lessons and how does it compare with the experimental group?**

The strongest group in primary in 2014 was the control group type 2 (34.69% at Level A2) followed by the experimental group (27.55% at Level A2) and finally the control group type 1 (10.67% at Level A2). While for these three groups we see that in the sixth year of primary the majority of students are A1, closer analysis shows that for

control group type 2 there is an almost equal number at Level A2 with 34.69% at A2 and only marginally more at A1 (38.04%). For the experimental group, the difference between A1 and A2 is more significant with 39.36% at A1 and 27.55% at A2.

If we compare the performance therefore between control group type 1 and control group type 2 we can see that, not surprisingly, increased exposure to English at school is having a noticeably positive effect on English performance. The fact that a higher percentage of control group type 2 students are achieving A2 by the end of primary than those in the trilingual group would suggest that there are particular characteristics of the control group type 2 which are contributing to their success. These might include the educational level of one or both of their parents which in turn would have an effect on the socioeconomic status of the family, the number of hours of English and the type of school attended i.e. state run versus private or subsidised.

If we look at the differences in performance between the three secondary groups who took part in the study in 2014 we see a similar pattern to the results from primary, with a higher percentage of students (53.60%) from control group type 2 achieving B2 compared with only 14.17% from control group type 1 and 33.04% from the experimental group. If we compare the performance therefore between control group type 1 and control group type 2 we can see that, not surprisingly, increased exposure to English at school is having a significantly positive effect on English language performance.

The fact that a higher percentage of control group type 2 students are achieving B2 by the third year than those in the trilingual group would suggest that there are particular characteristics of the control group type 2 which are contributing to their success.

In terms of skills, we see that for all three groups in 2014 the strongest skill in secondary is writing, the second highest performance is in listening followed by reading and finally speaking. As with primary, the control group type 2 achieved the highest score in all four skills.

Students following an increased exposure to an English curriculum where they are receiving up to 33% of the curriculum in English are four times more likely to achieve Level B2 in the third year of secondary, and we would reasonably expect that if the trend were to continue, by the end of compulsory secondary education (fourth year), perhaps 60% or even slightly more might achieve Level B2.

### **RQ3: How does the performance across all four skills compare between the 2014 experimental, control type 1 and control type 2 groups?**

Results for primary in 2014 show that for the experimental and control group type 1 groups speaking is clearly the strongest skill. As mentioned earlier, this is not unusual at this age where there tends to be a focus on speaking and primary school children in general tend to perform better in speaking. In the experimental group, 53% achieved A2 or above and in control group type 1, 27% achieved A2 or above. In the control group type 2 listening was slightly stronger than speaking:

50% achieved A2 or above in listening compared to 46% in speaking. The weakest skill for all three groups in primary was writing. In the experimental group, 38% were below A1. In control group type 1, 56% were below A1 and in control group type 2, 31% were below A1.

Results for secondary in 2014 show that across all three groups writing is clearly the strongest skill. In the experimental group, 92% achieved B1 or above. In control group type 1, 80% achieved B1 or above and in control group type 2, 98% achieved B1 or above. The weakest skill for all three groups in secondary was speaking. In the experimental group, 51% were at B1 or above and 13% at A1 and below. In control group type 1 41% were at B1 or above and 18% at A1 and below. In control group type 2 71% were at B1 or above and 6% were at A1 and below.

#### **RQ4: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the speaking and writing performances in the 2014 experimental, control type 1 and control type 2 groups?**

##### *Speaking*

A selection of primary and secondary candidates were observed throughout the 2-week speaking window. In the primary cohort, analysis of scores and observations showed that the strong candidates were able to produce grammatically correct and extended utterances. This meant they developed the conversation and strong and medium candidates in the experimental group were able to form questions. Weak candidates in the experimental group struggled with forming questions and struggled to maintain simple exchanges. When we compared control group type 1 and control group type 2, we noted that control group type 2 were generally stronger than control group type 1, scoring higher on Pronunciation and Interactive Communication. The observer's comments did not identify clear differences between control group type 2 and the experimental group, although overall control group type 2 did secure marginally higher ratings in three of four categories (Grammar and Vocabulary, Interactive Communication and Global Achievement (i.e. the mark reflecting the examiner's impression of the candidate's overall performance)). It is recommend that students practise speaking in class with a partner in activities which require exchanging or finding out information. Practice with question forms via games or mingling activities will not only help students develop towards A2, but will also increase motivation and especially confidence.

At secondary level, analysis of scores and observations shows that strong candidates demonstrated accuracy and a range of grammar and vocabulary. They were able to respond appropriately and develop the conversation. Weak candidates produced isolated words with little linking and were unable to extend the conversation. Analysis does show, however, that they tended to score consistently higher on Pronunciation than on the other criteria. If we concentrate on the control groups, we see that again control group type 2 were generally stronger overall and that the strong candidates in this group scored consistently high on all parts of the test. Weak candidates in both groups showed excessive hesitation and the use of short and disconnected utterances. Again, the observer's comments did not identify clear differences

between control group type 2 and the experimental group, although control group type 2 secured higher ratings in all analytic categories. In order to improve the performance of secondary students in speaking, we would recommend that a number of skills are integrated into the language classes so that students progress across all skills. Students at this age should be encouraged to take part in role play activities related to topics and issues relevant to their lives.

##### *Writing*

A selection of the writing scripts for primary and secondary were analysed in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in their performance. Scripts were split for each group into strong, medium and weak performances. At primary level, strong candidates structured their scripts well with appropriate opening and closing phrases. Strong candidates also remembered to include all content points and were therefore reading the instructions. Weak students did not read the instructions and did not organise their text in an email format.

If we look at the difference between the control groups we see that control group type 2 were clearly stronger. Weak candidates in control group type 2 were stronger than the weak candidates in control group type 1. However, some candidates in both groups struggled with using grammatical forms correctly and lacked the vocabulary to be able to communicate their points clearly. It is recommend that teachers move towards integrating two or all skills into each activity towards the end of primary and support the spoken form with written consolidation. If not used already, the classroom physical environment can be used to consolidate what is presented orally first. Students should be encouraged to read the instructions first and practise reading so that rubrics and tasks are clearly understood. Finally, we would recommend that students are encouraged to re-read and check their work so that some errors such as simple spelling mistakes can be avoided.

At secondary level, analysis of the writing scripts showed that strong candidates in the experimental groups included all relevant content points and that these were well communicated with the appropriate tone. Strong candidates organised their email well using cohesive devices to help guide the reader. They also used a range of vocabulary although there was some inconsistent use of tenses. Weak candidates showed a lack of awareness of the target reader and the genre. This meant that the email was not organised appropriately with little cohesion and linking. Some candidates did not use paragraphing or full stops and students in the weak groups may not have checked their work before submitting, as evidenced by the greater number of minor mistakes.

If we compare control group type 1 with control group type 2 we see a similar pattern to primary. Control group type 2 were stronger overall than control group type 1. Generally control group type 2 used a greater variety of grammar and vocabulary more accurately. Medium candidates in control group type 2 also avoided repetition and sentences were more effectively linked. Errors in control group type 1 tended to be a little more basic than those in control group type 2.

If we compare the control groups with the experimental groups we see that performance between control group type 2 and the experimental group was very similar except among the medium candidates. Students in the medium group in control group type 2 tended to achieve B2 level compared to B1 level among students in the experimental group. Control group type 1 were the weakest of the three groups. In order to improve the performance of all secondary candidates in writing and enable all students to acquire B1 or B2 level English, students should be exposed to more varied lexis and grammatical forms via reading texts and support should be given, in class, for organising and planning a piece of written text which can be consolidated at home. Attention to linking words and cohesive devices as well as exposure to fixed expressions and functional language will also raise awareness as well as improve confidence and motivation.

## Conclusions

The study findings point to the success of the MET trilingual programme in improving standards of English in the Basque Country. Over the course of the four years during which the study took place, students in the experimental programme in both MET I and MET II have made significant progress. Overall, 68.52% of secondary students in MET I in 2013 were at levels B1 and above (in 2011, this was 31.48%). For the MET II students in secondary the results were even more positive. In 2012, 32.79% of secondary students were B1 and above. In 2014, this has increased to a significant 77.06%. Based on these results, the attainment level for the fourth year of secondary school was recommended to be set at B1, with this being increased to B2 in future.

If we look at the results for primary, we can also see that the trilingual programme is having a positive effect on the

language level of students. 40.37% of primary students in MET I in 2013 were at levels A2 and above (in 2011, only 9.42%). For the MET II students the results in primary are equally positive, with 6.66% of primary students at A2 and above in 2012, rising to 33.20% in 2014. Based on these results, a realistic attainment level for the majority of students at the end of primary school was recommended to be set at A1 level, which was viewed as an interim target to be revised upwards in the future. Whilst setting A1 as a target exit level for primary students might seem low, we had to consider that the rate of progress for young learners who speak or are learning three or more languages will often in their primary years be slower than can be seen in secondary years.

In terms of future research we envisage further studies in order to evaluate the MET programme, monitoring progress over time, and ensuring its positive impact by identifying and fostering good practice. The trilingual context makes this especially interesting given ISEI-IVEL's exploration of not only the progress of the English language level but also progress in Spanish and Basque. The progress in English that we have observed over time has been encouraging and we hope to apply our experience of this trilingual programme to the challenges and opportunities of other bi- and trilingual learning environments.

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## Appendix 1: Writing tasks

### Primary writing task

Read the email from your English friend, Jacky.

<b>From:</b>	Jacky
<b>To:</b>	

I'm so happy you can come to my house for lunch. What time will you get here? What kind of food do you like? What shall we do after lunch?

Write an email to Jacky and answer the questions.

Write **25-35** words.

Write the email on your answer sheet.

### Secondary writing task 1

You went to a concert last night which you enjoyed.

Write an email to your British friend, Charlie. In your email, you should:

- tell Charlie who played at the concert last night
- explain why you enjoyed it
- invite Charlie to go to another concert with you.

Write **35-45 words** on your answer sheet.

### Secondary writing task 2

- This is part of a letter you receive from an English friend.

I really like sport. Which sports do you like to play and which ones do you prefer to watch? Do you think sport is important? Why?

- Now write a letter, answering your friend's questions.
- Write your **letter** in about 100 words on your answer sheet.

# Which factors affect English language attainment? A study of school students in Chile

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## Project background and aims

The Chilean Ministry of Education has made a commendable investment in improving English language learning outcomes for over a decade. In order to better understand the impact of the Ministry's initiatives and as part of a strategy to improve learner proficiency in English, the *Simce Inglés* exam was introduced in 2010 to provide an objective measure of the English ability of 3rd grade secondary school students in Chile on a biennial basis. Since 2012, Cambridge English has provided *Simce Inglés* (taking over from the Educational Testing Service), which reports on Reading and Listening performance from A1 to B1 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001). The findings in this article are based upon the data gathered from the 2012 and 2014 administrations of the *Simce Inglés* test, including candidate results and background socioeconomic, geographical and educational data from questionnaires administered to students, parents and teachers. The questionnaire data provides a profile of English language learning and teaching and when combined with the test data, the results can be used to identify factors which may be associated with different learning outcomes.

The aim of this research project was to investigate how these background factors affected achievement in the 2014 *Simce Inglés* test and also to compare levels of achievement between the test administrations in 2012 and 2014. The results reported here can be used by the Ministry, at a national level, to inform strategic decisions related to education policy and practice designed to support their objectives of raising standards in English language learning. The results can also facilitate data-driven decisions and recommendations to sustain conditions for success, and, crucially, help to identify any areas for improvement.

## Educational context

The educational system in Chile can be roughly divided into three sectors: public (municipal) schools, voucher-subsidised private schools and private schools. A unique feature of the Chilean education context is that the majority of pupils attend voucher-subsidised private schools rather than public

schools. English language education varies by provider across sectors; however, the public and voucher-subsidised schools are advised to deliver their curriculum as described below.

English language education in Chile begins in what is termed the 5th year of the basic cycle (5th year of primary school). The number of English language hours in the 5th and 6th year curricula was raised in 2011 from two to three per week to bring them into line with the rest of the compulsory education system. There are also long-term plans to extend English classes to the first four years of primary school and introduce English Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in maths and science subjects.

In 2013, the curriculum for English language teaching underwent a complete review and a new curriculum based on communicative language learning methodology was produced. However, research conducted by PIAP (Ministry of the General Secretariat of the President, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Economy, Promotion and Tourism 2014) found that 17% of state English teachers (public and voucher subsidised) had no teacher training. It is therefore likely that many English teachers do not have the methodological training to effectively implement this new curriculum. To combat this, there are now plans to standardise teacher training in higher education institutions.

PIAP also found (Ministry of the General Secretariat of the President, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Economy, Promotion and Tourism 2014) that a third of a representative sample of teachers tested had an English language level of B1 or below in the CEFR, which could indicate that these teachers may be limited in their ability to support learners in developing high levels of English proficiency. In a bid to rectify this, PIAP is currently offering language tuition to English teachers. Furthermore, PIAP offers various other programmes to students and teachers, such as English language summer camps and scholarships for study abroad.

In order to gauge the effectiveness of the above interventions designed to improve English teaching and learning, it is essential to have a standardised measurement of English proficiency, from which results-based decisions on educational policy and practice can be made. In this context, the biennial evaluation of students with the *Simce Inglés* test

is an important part of this general drive to raise English standards. It serves as a census of language ability by which the long-term effects of interventions can be measured.

As the *Simce Inglés* test is linked to the CEFR, part of the impact of the test should be that classroom practice is more focused on students achieving the skills described in this communicative language framework. This means that students are learning real-life language skills at an optimum level for improvement. Furthermore, as candidates who achieve a level of A2 or above in *Simce Inglés* receive an official Cambridge English certificate which has some recognition within Chile, another impact of the test is to provide a source of motivation for both teachers and students.

In 2012, 18% of students achieved A2 or above in the *Simce Inglés* test. This was an improvement on 2010, when only 11% achieved the same level. This would suggest that some of the interventions mentioned above have contributed to a positive effect on teaching and learning English, although it is difficult to say which factors specifically are responsible, and how those factors interact with the wider social context. In order to support the Ministry in investigating these factors, Cambridge English undertook this research project.

## Research questions

The research design combined test data, questionnaire data and contextual information in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How did 3rd grade secondary school students perform in the 2014 *Simce Inglés* test in terms of the CEFR?
2. How did performance of Chilean learners in the *Simce Inglés* test change from 2012 to 2014?
3. Which factors play a role in English language attainment and in particular in achieving a CEFR level of A2 or B1 as measured by the *Simce Inglés* test?

The first research question is answered by analysing the general profile of Chilean learners in terms of English language attainment against the CEFR and exploring how student performance compares across variables such as gender, school type, socioeconomic profile of the school, location (urban or rural) or geographic region.

Changes in performance between 2012 and 2014, the second research question, are investigated for all Chilean learners and across contextual variables identified above.

Finally, this article explores which factors affect the chances of Chilean learners achieving an A2 or B1 level in English, focusing on variables which have been identified in educational research as most likely to affect attainment and are most amenable to change through policy directives (e.g. onset of English language instruction). In addition, variables which are beyond the control of the Ministry but are of a particular concern in Chile (e.g. socioeconomic status) were also investigated. The variables selected for investigation fall under two broad categories as follows:

### Learner-related factors

Learner background and socioeconomic characteristics

Learner exposure to English at school

Motivation to learn English

Use of English language in free time

### School-related factors

School-specific factors such as school type and socioeconomic profile of the school

Geographic factors such as school location (urban vs rural) and region

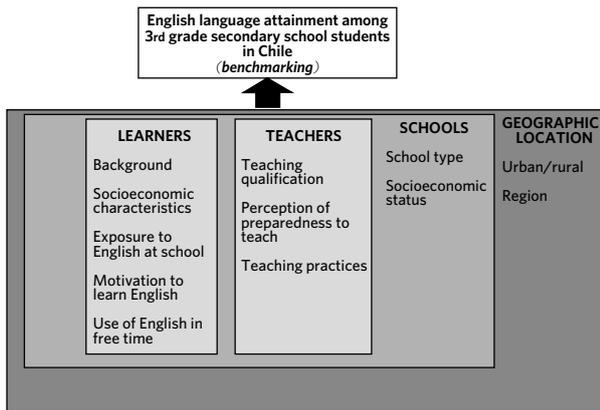
## Methodology

In order to address the research questions of this study we implemented a research design which combines information from a number of data sources. The first building block of this research design is information about the level of English language attainment among Chilean learners and how it changed over time using the *Simce Inglés* test results for 2012 and 2014. Although the tests for each year contained different items, the specifications and the level of difficulty, calibrated using Item Response Theory, were the same; therefore, the results for both the 2012 and 2014 cohorts can be considered comparable and used to provide insights into whether the level of English language proficiency achieved among 3rd grade secondary school students in Chile changed over time.

The second building block of this research design is information about possible factors that affect student attainment in English. As such, information was gathered from questionnaire data on a wide range of factors which may be affecting English language learning. In order to better understand why some learners in 3rd grade secondary schools in Chile have achieved an A2 or B1 level in English, it was important to consider factors from a wider context – those related to student background characteristics, exposure to English language, motivation to learn English and use of English in students' free time, teacher qualifications and teaching methods and practices, school characteristics and geographical differences in the country. Figure 1 shows the multi-layered factors that are brought together in this study to explain the differences in English language attainment among 3rd grade secondary school students in Chile.

## Data collection instruments

This study brought together a number of data sources in order to answer the research questions outlined above on current language levels of the 3rd grade cohort, changes in performance between 2012 and 2014 at this grade and factors associated with attainment. The following sections provide a brief description of the test and the questionnaires which formed the basis of this study.

**Figure 1: Research design**

### Simce Inglés test

The *Simce Inglés* test was developed by Cambridge English Language Assessment in collaboration with the Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura and the Agencia de Calidad de la Educación (the latter is referred to as the Agencia in this article).

The test was designed to measure Reading and Listening skills of 3rd grade secondary school students and can report on performance from Level A1 to B1 of the CEFR. All items in the *Simce Inglés* test were selected from the Cambridge English item bank, which contains calibrated items produced under strict guidelines and put through an extensive pretesting programme. This rigorous quality assurance and measurement process ensures the validity, reliability and fairness of all items used in this test.

The Reading section of the *Simce Inglés* tests in 2012 and 2014 contained seven parts with 50 items in total. The format of the tasks was matching, multiple choice and multiple-choice cloze with a time limit of 45 minutes. The Listening section of the tests consisted of five parts with a total of 30 items, with matching, multiple-choice and gap-fill task types and a time limit of 30 minutes. The tests were administered in November 2012 and in November–December 2014. After administration of the tests, papers were marked and each candidate's standardised score was calculated, giving equal weighting to the Reading and Listening components. Cut scores were then determined for A1, A2 and B1 levels. Candidates that achieved an overall CEFR level of A2 or B1 received certificates.

Although tests administered in each year contained different items, the specifications and the level of difficulty, calibrated using Item Response Theory, were the same. As such, the results for both the 2012 and 2014 cohorts can be considered comparable.

### Questionnaires and contextual data

In 2014, the Agencia surveyed 3rd grade secondary school students in Chile, and their parents and teachers. The parent and teacher questionnaires were distributed a week before the students sat the *Simce Inglés* test and collected on the day of the test while

students completed their questionnaires just after they completed the test. In addition, the Agencia compiled contextual data related to all schools; the structure and focus of both the questionnaires and contextual data is described below.

The student questionnaire contained 19 questions about reasons for learning English, exposure to English at school and outside of school, teaching practices in the classroom, learner attitude to English classes and English teachers, parents' level of English language knowledge, motivation to learn English and use of English in students' free time.

The parent questionnaire consisted of 17 questions about the learners' family (including socioeconomic status, income and educational level), practices at home regarding learning and exposure to English, and parents' perceptions regarding the motivation of their children for learning English, whether they thought this learning was important, and what learning practices their children used.

The teacher questionnaire contained 22 questions about teaching qualifications that teachers have, their teaching experience, teaching practices (including resources used in classroom, providing feedback in class, use of English in class), self-assessment in terms of preparedness to teach, and attitudes of the school towards English teaching.

The contextual dataset contained information, among others, on the type of school attended by learners, the socioeconomic profile of schools and their location (region or a broader rural or urban area). Selected questionnaire responses were used to explore the factors affecting performance on the *Simce Inglés* test, as described in the next section.

## Constructs

In order to explain why some Chilean learners obtained an A2 or B1 level of English, while others did not, we chose a number of constructs to explore. The selection of constructs was informed by the literature on English language acquisition and insights from previous studies conducted by Cambridge English Language Assessment. In addition, constructs which were within the control of the Ministry and could be modified through policy were prioritised over those beyond the control of the Ministry. The main exception to this is the selection of background variables which could provide information on issues of equity within the education system, as this has been identified as an area of concern.

- Background and socioeconomic characteristics of learners:** This construct is measured with three variables – gender of the learner, father's and mother's educational level, father's and mother's ability to speak, read and write English, and income of the household in which a learner lives<sup>1</sup>; these variables are

<sup>1</sup> Household income was a self-reported variable.

operationalised using questions from the student and parent questionnaires.

- **Learner exposure to English at school:** This construct is measured by a number of variables – starting age of English instruction, number of English lessons per week that candidates have at school, language spoken in class; these variables are operationalised using questions from the student questionnaire.
- **Learner motivation to learn English:** This construct spans students' attitude to learning English and attitude to the *Simce Inglés* test; this construct is operationalised using questions from the student questionnaire.
- **Use of English language in free time:** This construct is measured with a number of questions tapping into everyday practices of using English language such as watching TV or movies in English, reading books, magazines or comics in English, browsing English webpages, speaking English with other people and using online chat in English; this construct is operationalised with questions from the student questionnaire.
- **School type and socioeconomic profile of the school:** These factors have been chosen here as they tap into the educational structure and socioeconomic status of schools in Chile; the contextual dataset provides information on both.
- **Location of the school in terms of urban/rural area or geographic region:** Information on these is contained in the contextual dataset.
- **Teacher qualifications:** This construct is measured with teaching qualifications, both general and related to English language; it is operationalised using questions from the teacher questionnaire.
- **Teacher perception of preparedness to teach:** This construct is measured with a number of questions on the perception of teachers of how well they are prepared to teach various aspects related to English; the questions here come from the teacher questionnaire.
- **Teaching practices:** This construct is measured with variables tapping into the variety of resources teachers use in classroom, the frequency and sort of feedback they provide in classroom and the language they speak during class and during individual meetings with students; this construct is operationalised with questions from the teacher questionnaire.

## Data analysis

### Test data analysis

All items included in the *Simce Inglés* tests in 2012 and 2014 had been previously calibrated using a typical CEFR A2 level population as a sample. A post-live calibration (conducted after the test administration based on live response data) was conducted to take into account

the features of *Simce Inglés*' specific candidature, and to improve grading accuracy. In both tests, candidate results for the individual components of Reading and Listening were reported in standardised scores. The use of standardised scores enables direct comparison of the results from different versions of each component.

### Questionnaire data analysis

Three analytical techniques were employed in this article to answer the research questions. Firstly, descriptive statistics were used to compare language proficiency of learners across school types, socioeconomic status of schools, urban and rural locations and across regions. In addition, descriptive statistics are used to compare performance of Chilean learners in the *Simce Inglés* in 2012 and 2014. Secondly, multilevel modelling was conducted to understand the role that various factors play in affecting the chances of Chilean learners obtaining an A2 or B1 certificate in the *Simce Inglés* test conducted in 2014. Multilevel (or hierarchical) modelling is a statistical technique which is appropriate when the structure of the data is hierarchical or nested (e.g. students nested within schools, schools nested in geographic regions). This study deals with information that pertains to various analytical levels. Factors such as learner background characteristics, exposure to English language, income of the households in which the learners live and educational level of parents are individual-level factors pertaining to learners. There are also factors that are specific to schools, such as the type of school or the socioeconomic status of the school. Moreover, there are factors pertaining to schools' geographic locations. Those geographic locations analysed in this article are urban/rural areas and regions. As a result, we have information on three levels of data – individual, school and geographic level – and the data will be analysed accordingly using multilevel modelling techniques. The dependent variable in these models is binary – learners that obtained an A2 or B1 certificate in *Simce Inglés* were coded with 1, while learners that achieved A1 level or below were coded with 0. Therefore, multilevel modelling with a logit link function was employed to account for the binary dependent variable and the multilevel data structure. The modelling was conducted in the *R* statistical package using *glmer*. The estimation procedure in *glmer* optimises a function of the log likelihood using penalised iteratively re-weighted least squares, and the log likelihood is evaluated using the Laplacian approximation (Steele 2009).

Regression analysis was conducted to understand how factors such as teacher qualification, teacher perception of preparedness to teach, teaching practices such as use of complementary material at school, the kind and frequency of feedback provided in class or use of English in class are related to performance of Chilean learners on the test.

In this project we conducted statistical analysis on big data – the number of respondents is close to the total population of 3rd grade secondary school students in Chile. Learners in Chile can be seen as a sample of a wider population of learners. This allows us to draw conclusions

on certain factors that may be generalisable beyond the national context of Chile such as to other Latin American countries.

## Learner profile

In Chile, there were 225,685 3rd grade secondary school students enrolled in 2014. In both 2012 and 2014 learners whose native language was English, learners with a disability or those not participating in classes based on medical reasons were exempted from the *Simce Inglés* test. As a result, in 2014 a total of 154,097 students took the test.

The information on candidate score and CEFR levels was linked with data from student, teacher and parent questionnaires as well as contextual data about the school (such as region, urban/rural area). The linking of this information was possible because there were common variables included in all datasets such as student and school identification number. The linking was undertaken by the Agencia.

After linking student score, questionnaire and contextual data, a dataset with N=151,515 candidates for whom the score and CEFR level was reported remained. This amounts to 98% of the candidates who sat the test. Approximately 50% of learners in this dataset are male and another 50% are female. The descriptive statistics provided in this article are based on the number of candidates with a reported CEFR score as opposed to those who answered individual questions.

The majority of learners in our dataset come from voucher-subsidised private schools (65%); 26% of learners attend public (municipal) schools and 9% of learners attend private schools.

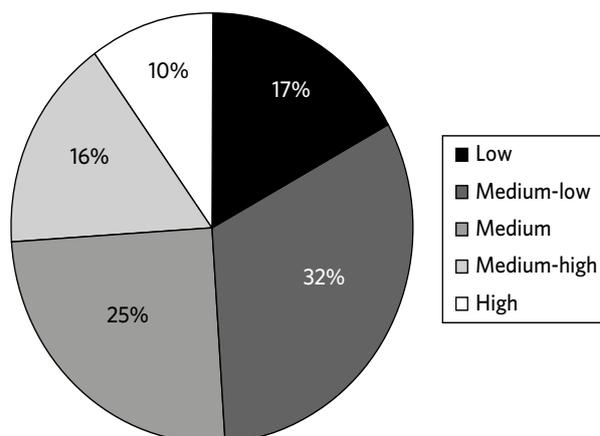
The majority of learners (32%) in our dataset come from schools with a medium-low socioeconomic profile, 25% come from schools with a medium socioeconomic profile and 17% from a school with a low socioeconomic profile (see Figure 2). A much smaller percentage of learners come from schools with a higher socioeconomic profile – 16% of learners come from schools with a medium-high profile, while 10% attend schools with a high socioeconomic profile.

When considering the distribution of respondents by location, 97% attend schools in urban locations, while 3% of respondents attend schools in rural areas. Although only 3% of respondents come from a rural area, the number of respondents in this category is substantial and amounts to 4,709 respondents.

## Main findings

The main findings of the analysis are presented with a description of the overall performance of the 2014 cohort, which is followed by a comparison between the 2012 and 2014 cohort. We then turn to the factors which affect

**Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by school socioeconomic group (2014)**



English language attainment on the 2014 *Simce Inglés* test, focusing first on learner-related factors, then school-level and geographical variables. It is important, however, to address some of the limitations.

Firstly, the analyses in this study have been conducted for candidates for whom we have information on the total score and the corresponding CEFR level from the *Simce Inglés* test which accounted for 82% of candidates in 2012 and 98% in 2014. Given that information on a number of candidates is missing, analyses were conducted for candidates for whom scores and grades in the *Simce Inglés* test are available, treating information about other candidates as missing at random.

Secondly, ideally we would like to have included the school-level variables related to teacher qualifications, teacher perception of preparedness to teach and teaching practices in class in the multilevel models with a binary dependent variable. This would allow us to tease out the effects of those variables controlling for individual characteristics of learners (such as background and exposure to English language instruction) and higher level variables such as location of schools in an urban/rural area or region. Instead, we decided to split the analysis into:

1. Multilevel models with a binary dependent variable (achievement of A2 or B1 level in *Simce Inglés* vs achievement of pre-A1 or A1 level) including individual-level factors, two school-level variables (school type and socioeconomic profile of the school) and geographic factors (location and region).
2. Regression analyses expressing the dependent variable as the proportion of learners in a school that obtained A2 or B1 in *Simce Inglés* and expressing the explanatory variables as a proportion of respondents in a school who gave a certain response.

The reason for this approach is two-fold. Firstly we wanted to avoid a 'kitchen-sink' model, where all possible explanatory variables are introduced, thus making it difficult to decipher which variables are of importance in explaining learner performance in the test. We chose a parsimonious

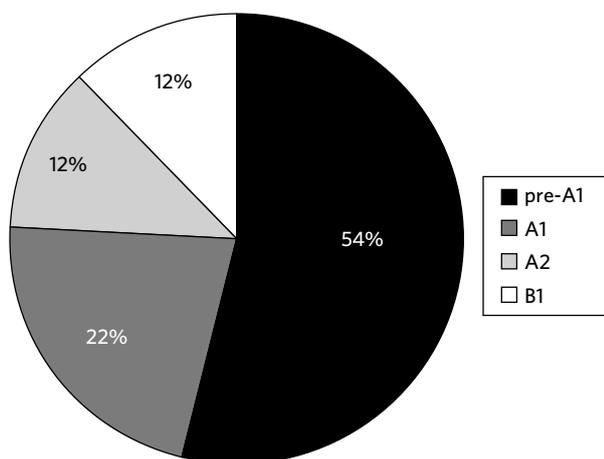
model with two school-level variables and two geographic factors which we considered most important to control for. As a result, our modelling approach on the multilevel data starts with investigating the influence of individual-level, then school-level variables are added to the analysis, and finally geographic factors are included in the final model. The second reason for our approach is that we would have reached the limits of computer memory running a three-level multilevel model with a binary dependant variable with approximately 150,000 observations with around two dozen explanatory variables, many of them categorical. Although there are both theoretical and practical reasons for splitting the analysis the way we did, we do recognise that in order to have a full insight into the role of school-level variables related to teacher qualifications, teachers' perception of preparedness to teach and teaching practices, it would be advisable to control for characteristics of learners and geographical factors.

## Overall performance

### National profile in 2014

The results of the 2014 *Simce Inglés* test show that a considerable number of learners in 3rd grade of secondary school are below A1 level (54%), while 22% of learners demonstrated the A1 level. A much smaller number of learners achieved a higher level of English – 12% of learners are at the A2 level and 12% of learners are at (or above) the B1 level.<sup>2</sup> Figure 3 shows the distribution of CEFR levels for the 2014 cohort.

Figure 3: Distribution of CEFR levels (2014)

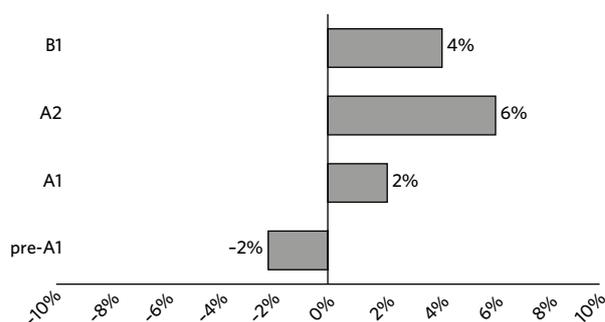


### Change in national profile 2012-14

We now compare performance on the *Simce Inglés* test of the 2012 and 2014 cohorts.<sup>3</sup> Here, calculations of

percentage difference for A1, A2 and B1 are based on reverse cumulative percentages – for each year (2012 and 2014), the percentage of candidates at a CEFR level is expressed as the percentage of candidates at this level and above. The difference for below A1 is calculated as the absolute percentage.<sup>4</sup> Percentages are calculated this way to enable comparison with 2012 data. Figure 4 presents the comparison of test results between 2012 and 2014. A positive difference means that a higher percentage of candidates from the 2014 cohort obtained a CEFR level, while a negative difference means that a lower percentage of candidates from the 2014 cohort obtained a CEFR level.

Figure 4: Difference in distribution of CEFR levels between 2012 and 2014



As can be seen in Figure 4, a slightly higher percentage of learners in the 2014 cohort achieved A1 (2%), A2 (6%) and B1 (4%) when compared to the 2012 cohort, while fewer learners scored below A1 (the difference amounting to 2%). This small, positive trend may be a by-product of recent changes to English language contact hours and the curriculum. As mentioned previously, there has been an increase in the number of hours given to English language instruction in Chile and in 2013 a new curriculum was introduced which emphasised a communicative language teaching methodology. These changes, along with teachers' increased familiarity with the *Simce Inglés* test, which has been administered twice before (in 2010 and 2012 with its current specifications), may have had a positive impact on learner performance. This suggests that continued use of the *Simce Inglés* test would be useful in order to determine if this trend is maintained and improved upon over time.

## Factors affecting English language attainment

This section explores the factors which affect learner outcomes as measured by the *Simce Inglés* test. Learner-related factors such as learner background and socioeconomic status (parents' education, household

<sup>2</sup> Note that as the test measured up to B1, some candidates may be above this level. The descriptive statistics presented here are based on N=151,515 candidates for whom we have information on the CEFR level obtained in the *Simce Inglés* test.

<sup>3</sup> For comparison of CEFR level distribution between 2012 and 2014, percentages were calculated based on the total number of respondents who obtained a score and a CEFR level in the *Simce Inglés* test (candidates with missing information were excluded). Similarly, for the comparison of CEFR level distribution across categories, percentages are based on the total number of candidates in each category who obtained a CEFR level.

<sup>4</sup> The cumulative percentage for A1 indicates the percentage of candidates who achieved A1 plus the percentage of candidates who achieved above A1. Similarly, the cumulative percentage for A2 indicates the percentage of candidates who achieved A2 and above A2. For pre-A1, the absolute percentage is reported – percentage of candidates who did not achieve A1 or above.

income and parents' ability to speak English), learner exposure to English at school, motivation to learn English and use of English in learners' free time are investigated first. Then, the effect of school-related variables such as school type, socioeconomic profile of the school and school location (urban/rural and geographic region) are explored. Finally, factors associated with teachers within schools such as their qualifications, preparedness to teach and classroom practices are investigated. In exploring the influence of various factors on English language proficiency, information from different types of analyses is presented:

1. Descriptive statistics of CEFR grade data from the *Simce Inglés* test.
2. Descriptive statistics of questionnaire responses.
3. Multilevel and regression analyses findings.

Results from the multilevel analyses are expressed as odds ratios and are interpreted accordingly. An odds ratio is a way to quantify how strongly the presence of a certain factor or trait is associated with a certain result (in our context, scoring A2 or B1 in the *Simce Inglés* test). If the odds of achieving A2 or B1 on the *Simce Inglés* test for learners with a certain trait (e.g. those who receive 5 hours of English instruction per week) are higher than the odds of learners who do not have this trait (e.g. those who have 2 hours of English instruction per week), then this means that the former are more likely to achieve A2 or B1 on the test than the latter. In the context of this article, we will use 'odds' and 'chances' interchangeably. We will also express the increase of odds for one group versus another in percentages.

It is important to point out that significant findings reported below should not be interpreted as evidence of causation but rather that the two things are positively correlated. For example, if using the internet in English is positively associated with language learning outcomes, it is not appropriate to conclude that using the internet more will lead to improved outcomes because it may be that only those learners who have reached a higher language level are able or willing to use the internet in English.

## Learner-related factors

### *Background and socioeconomic factors*

Language learning is a complex phenomenon which is influenced by many factors. Learner motivation and parental attitude to language learning are two factors which can influence a learner's willingness to engage with language learning and persist with learning when it becomes challenging (Bartram 2006, Csisér and Dörnyei 2005). Additionally, the socioeconomic status of the household and education level attained by parents has also been shown to be associated with non-language-related learning outcomes on international tests such as PISA (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2011). Therefore, in this section, we investigate variables related to learners' family background to determine the extent to which they predict language learning outcomes. As equity

within the education system is important in this context, we also look into performance on the test by gender.

Among the background and socioeconomic factors investigated here, two stand out as important predictors of achievement.

Firstly, household income emerges as a very strong predictor of English language achievement. The higher the household income of a learner's family, the higher the chances of the learner obtaining an A2/B1 level in the *Simce Inglés* test. Statistical analysis shows that the odds of achieving an A2 or B1 certificate for learners from households with a medium-low income are approximately 6% higher than the odds of candidates who come from a low-income household. The odds of success increase as the household income increases. The odds for learners from households with medium-high income are around 13% higher than the odds of a low-income household, while the odds for learners from a high-income household are approximately 50% higher. This effect is statistically significant, controlling for all background and socioeconomic factors and variables related to English language instruction.

Secondly, if the father or mother of a learner can speak English, the learner has a significantly higher chance of attaining an A2/B1 level of English language proficiency, but we did not see a similar effect for the variables linked to whether the father or mother can read and write English. A potential explanation for this pattern could be that the ability of parents to communicate in English may lead to increased exposure to the language outside school through travel or interactions with English-speaking people. Additionally, parents are important role models and their ability to speak English may influence learners' willingness to use English when given the opportunity, which has been found to be linked to increased proficiency (Jones 2013).

For the learners who stated their fathers speak English 'quite a lot', the chances of achieving a A2/B1 level in the *Simce Inglés* test are approximately 12% higher than the chances of a learner whose father does not speak English at all. Similarly, if the learner's father speaks English a lot, the chances of this learner obtaining an A2/B1 level of English are 30% higher when compared to learners whose fathers cannot speak English at all. Similarly, when the learner's mother speaks English a lot, the learner has an approximately 20% higher chance of obtaining an A2/B1 level in *Simce Inglés* than a learner whose mother does not speak English at all.

Parents' educational level is also related to their child's English language attainment in our analysis. The analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between a mother's and father's educational level and English language attainment of their child, but the effect is not statistically significant. The higher the educational level of the father or the mother, the higher the chances of the learner obtaining an A2/B1 level in the *Simce Inglés* test. For example, learners whose fathers attended institutions of higher education have approximately an 18% higher chance of obtaining A2/B1 in *Simce Inglés* than learners

whose fathers did not. Similarly, for learners whose mothers attended higher education the odds of achieving an A2/B1 level of English language are approximately 30% higher.

For gender, the analysis shows that male learners seem to have slightly higher chances of obtaining an A2/B1 level of English proficiency – and this positive relationship persists after controlling for individual and school-level factors. When we control for all individual-level characteristics of learners and school-level variables, the effect of gender emerges as statistically significant – taking all explanatory variables into account, the chances of male learners obtaining an A2/B1 level in English language are approximately 12% higher than the chances of female learners.

The association between the socioeconomic status of learners and their parents' educational level with student English language learning outcomes is not unexpected as these factors have been identified as contributing to differences in results for other skills in Chile (Ministry of Education 2015, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2010). Much of the explanation for this situation relates to the structure of the education system which has resulted in higher variation in learner performance between schools than within schools (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2010). Therefore, the school a learner attends in Chile makes a big difference in their learning outcomes. The impact of school choice on learning outcomes will be investigated further in the section on school-related factors; however, continued monitoring of the influence of socioeconomic status on achievement would be a useful activity in order to determine whether the gap between the economic strata in society is shrinking over time.

The difference in learning outcomes between male and female learners is an area in need of further exploration. Cambridge English has not found a consistent trend concerning language attainment of males and females throughout the world (Walczak and Geranpayeh 2015). Variation in English language attainment for each gender by country is the norm; however, as a strategic objective of the Ministry is to reduce learning gaps, this is an area that may require further monitoring and investigation to ensure that there are no systemic issues which may be influencing the chances of female learners to attain high levels of English.

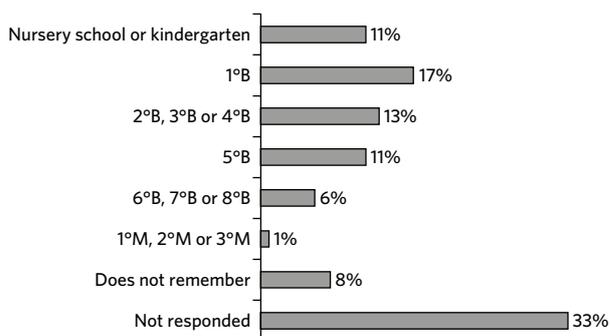
### Exposure to English in school

A characteristic of the Chilean educational context is that the grade in which English is first introduced, the number of hours of instruction on offer and the amount of instruction that takes place in English (rather than in Spanish) can vary by school and/or school type. As these variables, unlike socioeconomic and parental background variables, are most amenable to change it is important to investigate whether they affect attainment in the *Simce Inglés* test. Therefore, we will look at each factor in turn below.

### Onset and frequency of English language learning

Figure 5 shows the percentage of learners who started learning English in different grades at school.<sup>5</sup> Although English is officially introduced as a subject in the 5th year of primary school (5°B) in public schools, 41% reported learning English before this grade suggesting there is variation both within and across school types. It should, however, be kept in mind that approximately a third of learners did not respond to this question.

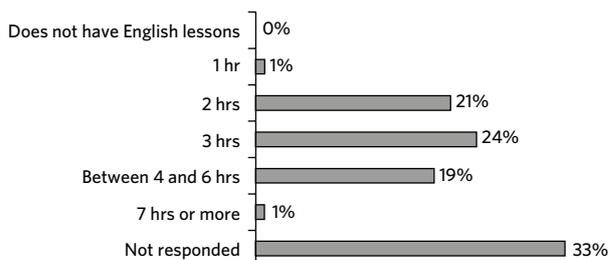
Figure 5: In what grade did you receive your first English lessons?



The results show that the onset of English instruction is a significant predictor of achievement of English language proficiency. Learners who started learning English in nursery school or kindergarten have a considerable advantage over learners who started English language instruction later. The odds of achieving a *Simce Inglés* certificate for learners that started English instruction in 1°B are approximately 15% lower than for learners that started English instruction in nursery school or kindergarten. The same effects can be observed for learners who started English instruction in the 2°B, 3°B and 4°B and 5°B grades. Learners who started learning English in 6°B, 7°B or 8°B have a 17% lower chance of achieving A2/B1 in the *Simce Inglés* test, while the odds of learners who started English instruction in 1°M, 2°M or 3°M are 13% lower when compared to learners who started English instruction much sooner.

Turning now to the number of English language contact hours, Figure 6 shows the breakdown of how many English classes learners in Chile have in school. Almost half of the learners (45%) have between 2 and 3 hours of instruction per week, while 20% have more than 4 hours.

Figure 6: How many English classes do you have a week?\*



\* Percentages may not sum due to rounding

<sup>5</sup> The descriptive statistics in this chapter show percentages which are calculated based on the total number of learners in the 2014 dataset. Please note °B=primary school, °M = secondary school.

The number of English classes per week that students have in school is also positively correlated with performance in English. The higher the number of English classes per week, the higher the chances are that learners obtain an A2/B1 level in English. Learners that have 7 or more hours of English classes per week have an approximately 15% higher chance of obtaining a *Simce Inglés* certificate than learners with just 1 hour of classes per week. Learners who have between 4 and 6 hours of English classes per week have an approximately 7% higher chance to obtain an A2/B1 level in English language. The analysis shows a positive correlation, but the effect does not emerge as statistically significant given all the other individual-level explanatory variables.

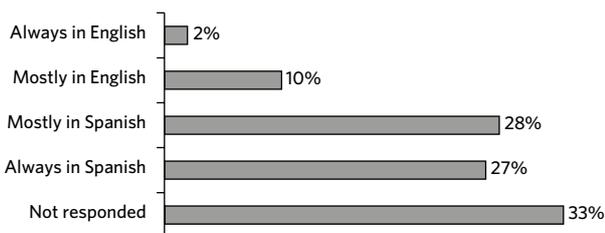
One way of improving performance in the public sector would be to bring the introduction of English and the number of contact hours per week into line with that of voucher-subsidised and private schools, in the instances where there is a difference. This may help in reducing the achievement gap seen between the sectors and ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn English.

### Use of English in the classroom

In the European Survey on Language Competences (European Commission 2012), exposure to a foreign language within the learning environment and greater use of it in the classroom was found to be positively associated with higher levels of proficiency (Jones 2013). As such, the English language use of learners and teachers in Chilean schools was investigated to determine whether this relationship holds in this context.

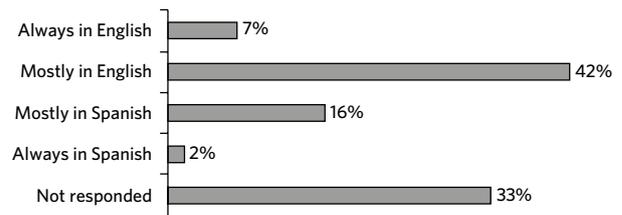
Questionnaire results indicate that a minority of students in Chile speak English to their teachers during English lessons. As seen in Figure 7, only 2% of students in Chile speak English to their teachers throughout the class. The vast majority of students speak Spanish or mostly Spanish during their English classes (27% and 28% respectively) which in itself should be a cause for concern if the aim of English language learning is to develop communicative competence. Although the majority of teachers in Chile speak English during English classes according to learners (see Figure 8), a considerable number of teachers (around one in five) speak mostly in Spanish.

**Figure 7: What language do you speak to your teacher during English lessons?**



Not surprisingly, the analysis indicates that the use of English by teachers and learners is an important factor when considering learner achievement. Learners who speak to teachers in English during their classes achieve better

**Figure 8: What language does your teacher speak during English lessons?**



results than learners who speak their native language or alternate between their native language and English. The odds of obtaining the *Simce Inglés* certificate for learners who always speak Spanish in class are approximately 18% lower than for learners who always speak English in class. For learners who speak mostly Spanish in class the chances are approximately 23% lower. Interestingly, the chances of attaining an A2/B1 level of English are lower even for students who speak a bit of English in class – when compared to those learners who report that they always speak English in class. These effects are statistically significant. Thus, there is strong evidence that speaking English throughout the class has an important impact on learning. When looking at the role of English language use by the teacher there seems to be a positive relationship between the language a teacher speaks in class and learner performance in English, but our analysis does not show a statistical significance for this variable. A potential explanation for this might be that the variable ‘language which learners use during English classes’ might have a predominant effect which overshadows the effect of the other variable. It may be that classes in which learners spend the majority of their time speaking are more learner centred and the language used by the teacher is of less significance because learners are the ones speaking during class time. Therefore, developing teachers’ skills in designing tasks which require learners to engage in purposeful communication in English may help improve learning outcomes.

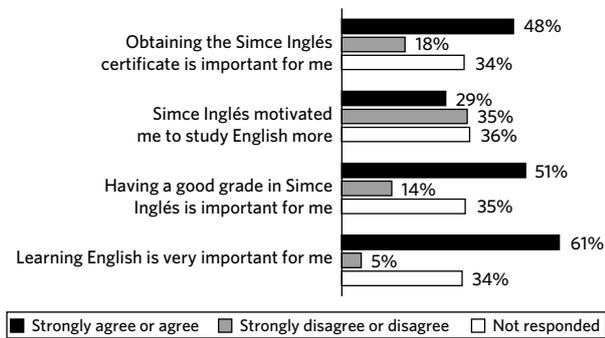
### Motivation to learn English

Learners’ attitudes towards language learning and the extent to which they perceive the language to be useful can influence their behaviour, both in terms of the amount of effort exerted on learning and their willingness to continue learning when faced with challenges (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005, Dörnyei 2003). Similarly, the introduction of tests can also influence learner motivation as well as approaches to teaching and learning, depending on how stakeholders perceive the assessment and its use within a particular context (Saville 2012). Learner motivation to learn English and attitudes towards the *Simce Inglés* test, therefore, are investigated below to determine whether these factors are related to learner outcomes.

As seen in Figure 9, the vast majority of learners in Chile are motivated to study English and value receiving the *Simce Inglés* certificate. For many Chilean learners, achieving a good grade in the *Simce Inglés* test is also very important. The opinions were split, however, over whether the *Simce*

*Inglés* test motivated learners to study English more – 29% of learners agreed that the test motivated them to study English more, while 35% disagreed.

**Figure 9: Motivation to learn English**



The statistical analysis shows that the motivational aspects do not explain why some learners achieved an A2/B1 level while the others did not. The estimates for these measures of motivation are inconsistent and they are not statistically significant. One possible reason for this is that in our analysis we controlled for a number of background and socioeconomic variables, exposure to English in school and outside school. The economic and educational factors – household income and parents' ability to speak English – and the onset of English language instruction are the prevailing predictors of learner performance and they may overshadow the motivational aspects.

### Use of English outside school

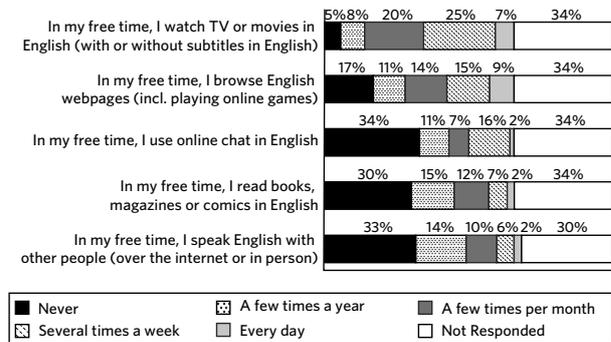
Just as the use of English in the school environment has been found to be positively associated with language learning outcomes, so too has learners' exposure to and willingness to use English in their daily lives (Jones 2013). This section reports on the extent to which learners use English in their free time and whether this factor is associated with attainment.

The results show that a third of Chilean learners watch TV or movies in English on a daily or weekly basis (see Figure 10), whereas only one tenth of them responded that they read books, magazines or comics in English daily or weekly. Even fewer (8%) speak English with other people (either over the internet or in person) on a daily or weekly basis. It is important to note that this finding may be more strongly associated with the extent to which they have opportunities to speak English with other people rather than their willingness to do so. Interestingly, 18% of learners do report using online chat in English either daily or weekly and 24% of them browse English websites. The results shown in Figure 10 suggest that Chilean learners are willing to engage with English in their free time when given the opportunity, which could be harnessed to improve language learning at school.

Statistical results give some indication that use of English in free time is related to the attainment of English language proficiency. Learners who watch TV or movies, read books, magazines or comics in English or who browse English language webpages several times a week or every

day have slightly higher chances of achieving the A2/B1 *Simce Inglés* certificate than learners who never do it. However, the effects for these variables are not statistically significant, most probably because our statistical model contains a number of control variables, among them the highly statistically significant effects of learner background variables and starting age of English language instruction, which might be overshadowing the effect of other variables.

**Figure 10: Use of English language in free time**



### School-related factors

Having considered learner-related variables, we now turn to the effect of school-level factors on attainment. In this section, performance by school type, the socioeconomic profile of the school and the location of the school are investigated.

There is evidence that the type of school a learner attends is a major predictor of learner attainment in non-language-related subjects (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2010). As mentioned previously, this has been attributed to differences in quality between the school sectors and the extent to which schools are academically and socially segregated (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013a). Consequently, to understand the effect of school choice on language learning, this section investigates these factors. The results in this section can shed light on the degree of equality within the education system in terms of English language provision.

### School type

In Chile, learners in private schools performed very well in the *Simce Inglés* test, while performance of learners in public schools and voucher-subsidised private schools was weaker.

As Table 1 shows, the vast majority of learners in private schools (63%) achieved a B1 CEFR level. In contrast, the majority of learners in public schools and voucher-subsidised private schools are at the lower end of the CEFR scale in terms of English language proficiency. In public schools, as many as 71% of learners are at a pre-A1 level while 54% of learners in voucher-subsidised private schools are at a pre-A1 level and 26% are at an A1 level. The majority of learners at private schools, however, are at a B1 level.

When we compare performance of two cohorts of Chilean students (2012 and 2014) across different school types, the following picture emerges (see Figure 11). For all three

**Table 1 Distribution of CEFR levels by school type profile (2014)**

Level	Public	Voucher-subsidised private	Private
pre-A1	71%	54%	4%
A1	17%	26%	12%
A2	7%	13%	20%
B1	4%	8%	63%

school types, the percentage of candidates who obtained A2 or B1 was higher in 2014 when compared to 2012.

For B1, private schools showed the largest change (7% higher), followed by voucher-subsidised private schools (4% higher) and public schools had the smallest increase (2% higher). However, when looking at changes at the A2 level, voucher-subsidised private schools had the largest increase (6% higher), followed by public schools (5% higher) and private schools (2% higher). For Levels A1 and below A1 there is either no change or the change is minimal.

The descriptive statistics show a marked difference in learner attainment depending on the type of school. In order to explore the effect of school type on chances to obtain an A2/B1 level of English language proficiency, we included this variable in a hierarchical model, alongside individual-level information on Chilean candidates. If the school type variables come out as significant then it would mean that it is an important predictor of achievement in English language on top of the individual factors.

Our results show a considerable difference in performance of learners across different types of schools, controlling for all individual factors related to student background and motivation. Learners who attend voucher-subsidised private schools are approximately three times more likely to achieve an A2/B1 level in *Simce Inglés* than learners from public schools. Interestingly, learners from private schools are much more likely to achieve a higher level of English – around 145 times more likely. This shows that private schools achieve much better results than other school types in Chile.

Interestingly, when we introduced the school type variable into the model, the statistical significance of important individual level predictors disappeared – this is the case for variables such as household income, starting age of English

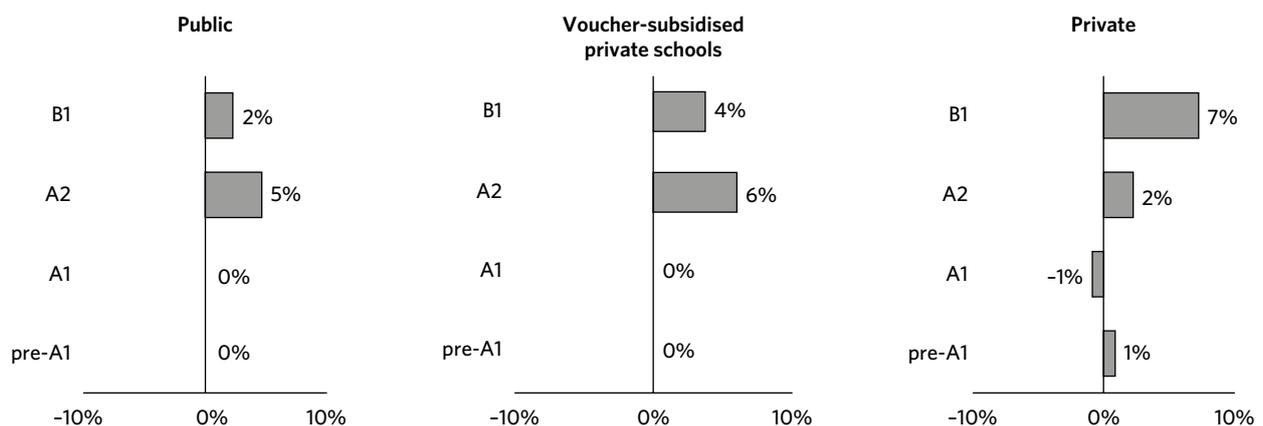
instruction in school, and whether a mother or a father of the learner can speak English. The positive correlation of these variables and performance of learners in English language stays, which means that they are positively related to learner performance in English language. However, the effect of school type becomes predominant once this variable is introduced in the statistical analysis.

### *Socioeconomic profile of the school*

As we have seen, the household income of learners is a strong predictor of attainment; therefore, we also investigated the impact of the socioeconomic profile of the school on language learning. Schools with a low socioeconomic profile have been found to perform worse on international tests than those with a higher socioeconomic profile (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015). This finding is attributed to differences in a variety of factors such as resources available, teacher quality and parental support for learning. That is, schools classified as lower on the socioeconomic range face more challenges in these areas which can negatively impact learning. This variable consists of a number of indicators, namely: the educational and income level of parents whose children attend the school as well as the degree of vulnerability of the school i.e. whether children in these schools come from impoverished families needing assistance from governmental or nongovernmental organisations.

Performance of learners in the *Simce Inglés* test varies considerably according to the socioeconomic profile of the school the learners attend. The best performers in the *Simce Inglés* test come from schools with a high socioeconomic profile: 62% of learners from schools with a high socioeconomic profile achieved a B1 level in *Simce Inglés*, while only 4% are at the pre-A1 level. Learners from schools with a medium-high socioeconomic profile performed well in *Simce Inglés* but visibly worse than learners from schools with a high socioeconomic profile (see Figure 12).

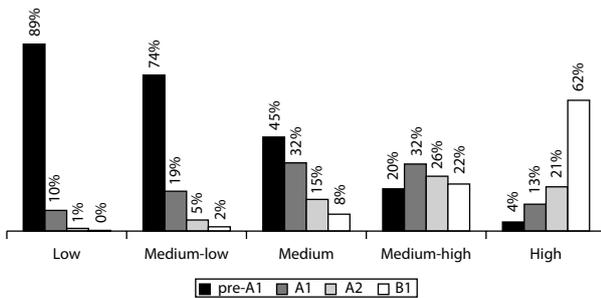
The lower the socioeconomic status of the school, the worse the learners performed in *Simce Inglés*. In schools with a medium socioeconomic profile, 45% of learners are below A1 level and 32% are at A1 level, while in schools with medium-low socioeconomic status, 74% of learners

**Figure 11: Difference in distribution of CEFR levels 2012–2014 by school type**

scored pre-A1 and 19% achieved A1 level. Learners in schools with a low socioeconomic profile performed the worst in the *Simce Inglés* test. The vast majority of learners in these schools (89%) are below A1 in terms of English language proficiency. The discrepancies in performance of learners across schools with different socioeconomic profile are visualised in Figure 12.

Overall the picture is consistent with findings from previous

**Figure 12: Distribution of CEFR levels by school socioeconomic group profiles (2014)**

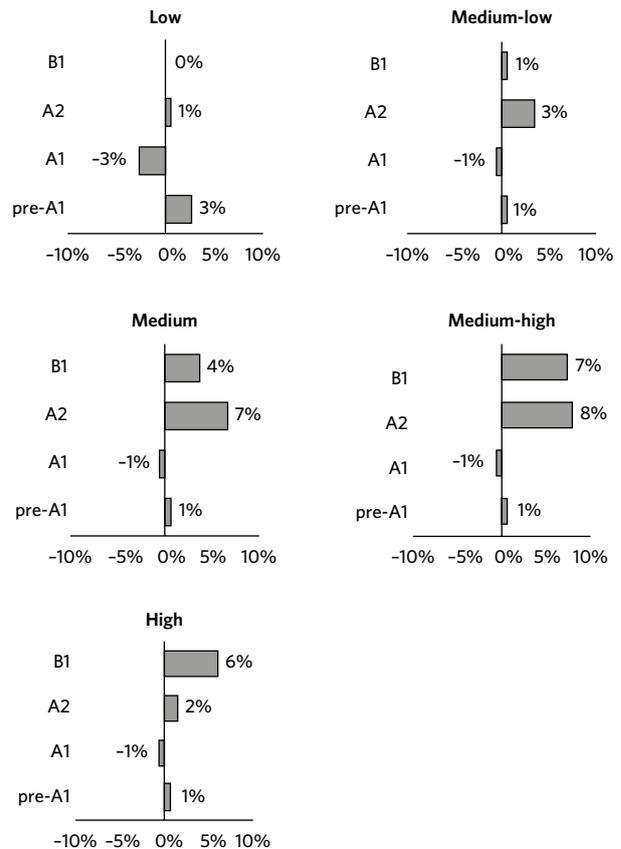


research (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2010, 2013a) – fewer learners attending schools with a low or medium-low socioeconomic profile are achieving A2 or B1 level. These differences highlight variations in the quality of education by school type.

Having looked at overall performance in 2014, we now investigate changes in performance between 2012 and 2014 across the socioeconomic status of the school. The comparison shows that the percentage of learners who achieved B1 or A2 across the medium-low, medium, medium-high and high socioeconomic profiles of schools has risen slightly, but there is no uniform pattern for other CEFR levels. An area of concern relates to the small increase in the percentage of learners achieving pre-A1 and an equally small decrease in the percentage achieving A1 for schools which fall into the low socioeconomic profile. Although it is important to note that these changes are very small, it is important to monitor future performance to ensure that this is not a trend which would result in a widening gap between schools with different socioeconomic profiles. The changes are presented in Figure 13.

Subsequently, we investigated what impact the socioeconomic status of the school has on attainment of English language proficiency. Statistical analysis shows that this variable is a very important predictor of attainment. The higher the socioeconomic status of the school, the better learners performed in the *Simce Inglés* test, thus the better their attainment of English language proficiency is. Learners from schools with medium-high socioeconomic status are over 90 times more likely to obtain A2/B1 level in English, while learners from schools with a high socioeconomic status are over 300 times more likely to achieve a higher level of English language proficiency. Learners from schools with a medium-low socioeconomic status are approximately five times more likely to achieve

**Figure 13: Difference in distribution of CEFR levels 2012-2014 by socioeconomic profile of school**



an A2/B1 level in English than learners from schools with a low socioeconomic status.

The effect of the socioeconomic status of a school is huge and points to the fact that the status of the school matters a lot in determining student performance. Once this variable is entered in statistical models, the statistical significance of individual-level variables (household income, whether father or mother of the learner speak English, starting age of English language instruction) and of the school type variable disappears. The effect of school type loses statistical significance as school type is strongly positively correlated with socioeconomic status of the school – private schools tend to have a much higher socioeconomic status. This means that the effect of the school socioeconomic status overshadows the effects of other variables and is crucial in explaining learner outcomes. This finding is not surprising considering the challenges faced by Chile's education system which tends to be highly stratified by socioeconomic status (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2011).

#### *School location: Urban or rural*

The next variable that we investigate is school location in terms of being located in either an urban or rural area. In many countries, schools in rural areas tend not to have the same access to resources or the ability to attract and retain good teachers. As a result, learning outcomes can be negatively affected by this situation (Monk 2007).

Chile faces shortages in qualified teachers in rural areas even though it has introduced several initiatives over the last two decades to support rural schools (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013b, 2015). Therefore, an area of interest is the extent to which there is an urban-rural gap in English language learning outcomes as these findings can be used to evaluate the success of these projects and shed light on equity issues in terms of pupil access to quality education regardless of location.

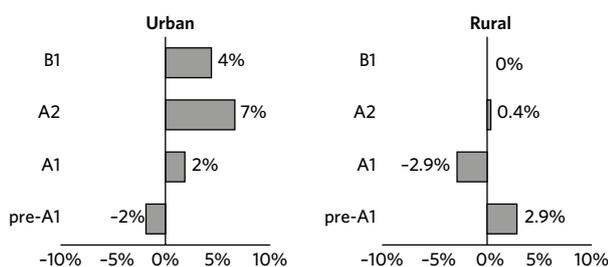
When we look at performance of Chilean learners in the 2014 *Simce Inglés* test, we see that there is a difference in performance between learners coming from urban and rural areas. As Table 2 shows, in urban areas learners received slightly better results in *Simce Inglés* than learners in rural areas. In urban areas, 25% of learners are either at A2 or B1 level (12% and 13% respectively) compared to 5% of learners in rural areas (with 3% at A2 and 2% at B1 level).

**Table 2 Distribution of CEFR levels by location (2014)**

	Urban	Rural
pre-A1	53%	82%
A1	22%	12%
A2	12%	3%
B1	13%	2%

Comparison of performance of the 2012 and 2014 cohorts across urban/rural school location shows that for schools located in urban areas the percentage of learners with higher levels of English language proficiency increased between 2012 and 2014. In turn, in the rural areas the percentage of learners who are below A1 is higher in the 2014 cohort when compared to the 2012 cohort. Figure 14 below shows these changes.

**Figure 14: Difference in distribution of CEFR levels 2012-2014 by location**



## Recommendations

A premise recognised in educational reform is that 'a key characteristic of the educational process is that student learning is influenced by many small factors rather than a few large ones' (Chapman, Weidman, Cohen and Mercer 2005:526). Additionally, as research has indicated that

teaching and learning practices are much more amenable to change through policy interventions than systemic factors are (Hattie 2009), the focus here is on those areas that are likely to have the greatest impact on learning outcomes in a relatively short period of time. Finally, the areas covered in this article are inevitably linked in a common 'ecological system', where changes to one affect the others; therefore, the following recommendations should be viewed holistically rather than as discrete recommendations.

### Increasing learner exposure to English

There was a positive correlation found between onset of English instruction and hours of instruction; therefore, the Ministry could consider the feasibility of introducing English at an earlier grade in primary school and/or increasing the number of hours of instruction. Differences in attainment began to be noticed at 4 hours a week of instruction.

### Improve teachers' language proficiency and pedagogy skills

As teacher quality has been identified as an important factor for learning outcomes generally (Schleicher 2011) and our findings indicated that teachers' English proficiency, qualifications and confidence in teaching are associated with learning outcomes, it is important to identify ways of improving in-service teacher quality. An integrated solution that addresses both proficiency and pedagogy is essential. Courses that focus specifically on improving the English of teachers may be particularly useful to help large numbers of teachers to quickly improve their language levels whilst allowing the Ministry to engage in longer term, more systemic changes.

Similarly, flexible training programmes specifically designed for primary and secondary language teachers to improve their teaching methodology are recommended. Again, an example of a Cambridge English course offering is the *Certificate in English Language Teaching - Primary (CELT-P)* and *Certificate in English Language Teaching - Secondary (CELT-S)*; such courses can provide targeted help in improving teacher confidence and effectiveness. Again, these courses can be offered fully online or as blended learning.<sup>6</sup>

### Encourage teacher reflection

In addition to the points above, we recommended an expansion of the teacher network already in place in Chile to allow for wider sharing of expertise, peer mentoring and critical reflection, all of which would be beneficial for teachers. This could include access to self-access materials such as the webinars, teaching tips, resources and forums available on Cambridge English Teacher which support instructional improvement.<sup>7</sup> A tool such as the Cambridge English Teaching Framework, a profiling grid describing teacher competencies, could also be used to promote teacher self-reflection which could lead to better awareness of areas that are in need of further training.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications

<sup>7</sup> www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/cambridge-english-teacher

<sup>8</sup> www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/cambridge-english-teaching-framework

Upskilling activities like those described above will benefit teachers and learners by improving teacher quality and confidence and increasing English use in the classroom. Courses could be targeted at public and rural schools in the first instance to try to support the teachers in these locations in order to try to reduce the learning gap identified in this article.

### Improving quality of pre-service English language teacher education

Identifying ways of ensuring that teachers who enter the profession have the qualifications and training necessary to be effective teachers is important. This can be done by establishing realistic English language targets for teachers and providing them with teaching qualifications that address methodological considerations in a standardised format. For example, the *Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)* is a modular English language teaching qualification which provides teachers with the teaching knowledge necessary to be an effective English teacher, and has a practical component which can be used to ensure teachers have the classroom skills necessary to be effective teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Incorporating external assessment of both teacher language proficiency and pedagogic competence could provide an element of standardisation across providers which may lead to more consistent educational input and instructional practices across school sectors.

### Improving access to and quality of resources

As there are currently a number of teachers in the system who have low levels of English proficiency and limited confidence in their ability to prepare effective lessons, it is important that teachers have access to quality resources and are trained on effective use of these resources. A range of appropriate resources can support teachers in providing learners with the input they need to progress in English. However, the provision of these resources needs to be coupled with training on their effective use otherwise their impact will be limited.

### Monitoring equity of English language provision through *Simce Inglés*

The *Simce Inglés* results show that school choice can determine a learner's chances of reaching the national English language targets, which suggests that some students are being disadvantaged. It is important that the Ministry continues to monitor this situation and identify opportunities to reduce this achievement gap. The *Simce Inglés* test provides a systematic method of monitoring equity and fairness within the system and the effect of Ministry interventions. The results reported here suggest that the test can play an important role in supporting education policy decisions and it is hoped that the Ministry continues this testing programme.

<sup>9</sup> [www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications/tkt](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications/tkt)

## Conclusion

*Simce Inglés* is a unique, and in many respects, unparalleled project that demonstrates the Government's desire to improve learning outcomes in Chile. The combined testing and collection of questionnaire data has provided the Agencia with a wealth of data to support evidence-based policy decisions and monitor the effects of these decisions. The findings from the data analyses also can help inform language education reform beyond Chile due to its comprehensiveness and quality.

Controlling for a number of individual and school-level factors, we investigated whether the urban/rural location of the school affects attainment of English language proficiency. Statistical analysis shows that learners from rural areas are less likely to score A2/B1 on the *Simce Inglés* test than learners from urban areas (the odds are 45% lower for the former than for the latter). This difference is statistically significant. Interestingly, when the urban/rural location of a school is included in the statistical analysis, the effect of the socioeconomic status of schools remains statistically significant. This again points to the latter variable as being a strong predictor of English language attainment.

These findings suggest that learners in rural areas are disadvantaged when it comes to English language learning. As equity within the education system is a strategic goal for the Ministry, identifying additional ways to support language learning in rural areas is important. The Ministry already offers financial incentives for teachers in rural areas, so it may be useful to review the current policy and consider other complementary initiatives that may improve the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers in rural areas. For example, expanding the teacher network already in place to include peer mentoring and wider sharing of expertise, and incorporating other value-added activities for English language teachers in rural and disadvantaged schools such as the opportunity to receive international qualifications may improve not only instructional quality in these areas but also teacher job satisfaction.

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## The impact of the Antioquia ‘English in the Park’ initiative on language teaching and practice

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### Introduction

The province of Antioquia, Colombia has a strategic objective to strengthen and improve English language teaching and learning in the province. As such the Education Secretariat of Antioquia established the ‘English in the Park’ initiative in July 2015 which aims to create a ‘language-friendly environment’ in the Education Parks in Antioquia and to provide opportunities for practising communicative language skills in state schools. There are 80 parks (or ‘parques’) in the province. Their main purpose is to improve the quality of education in order to

enhance economic, social and cultural development and opportunities in Antioquia.

The initiative includes two types of sessions: language lessons for primary and secondary school teachers and pupils, and methodological sessions for English language teachers. Other components are a teacher and student web portal containing self-access English language learning material, teacher professional development supported by the Open University, and a media campaign. The introduction of these five strands is aimed to:

1. Motivate the educational community (teachers and students), in both urban and rural environments to take

an interest in learning English, recognising it as a useful tool for accessing individual work/study opportunities and, in a broader sense, for regional development.

2. Enable teachers to develop their classroom teaching skills in order to improve students' level of English, and promote a broader understanding and the practical use of English among learners.
3. Improve English language competency in young people by increasing their motivation, and making communication skills relevant to their interests, local contexts and work/study opportunities.

This project was implemented in collaboration with the British Council, who is providing the training and academic support by means of the design and implementation of language sessions for students and teachers in five targeted municipalities, and Cambridge English Language Assessment who is developing self-access web portals and providing a language placement test in English for pupils and teachers to support the above-mentioned goals. The material in the portals will be provided by the British Council, Cambridge English Language Assessment and other providers. Cambridge English Language Assessment was commissioned to provide an evaluation of the language and methodology lessons in the five targeted municipalities where they have been offered. The evaluation focused on investigating teacher and learner perceptions of the 'English in the Park' initiative, including an evaluation of their English language levels. This article gives an overview of the initiative and the attitudes and perceptions of the pupils and teachers so far, and the performance of a sample of the target population in the Cambridge English Placement Test.

## 'English in the Park' initiative

### Language sessions

English language sessions for members of the education community were delivered in five target municipalities (La Unión, El Carmen de Viboral, Guarne, Tâmesis and Santa Rosa de Osos) by English language trainers called 'Champions'. These language Champions are native English speakers who hold the Cambridge *CELTA* qualification (*Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*). This qualification ensures that trainers have an understanding of the principles of effective, communicative language teaching, including a range of practical skills for teaching English to young learners and adults. There are two Champions assigned to each municipality. Language lessons are available not only to teachers and pupils, but also the wider education community, such as headmasters, head teachers, directors, academic co-ordinators, and parents of students. The aims of the training are to introduce communicative teaching techniques and digital training, and to improve competence and confidence in speaking and listening. The sessions are flexible in format, and are a mix of drop-in, regular, and scheduled sessions for specific groups of students of different ages and in-service

teachers. All linguistic sessions are 90-minute sessions, delivered by the English Champions.

All state school pupils and teachers in the target municipalities were offered English language training. This included English teachers and teachers of other subjects in both primary and secondary schools. Classes for pupils are on specific topics and areas of the English language, within the framework of the activities of the standard school day, the extended school day and the school holidays in each targeted municipality. The sessions also include a formative assessment of English language competence to teachers and students by means of self-access resources which promote strategies for improving English.

### Methodology sessions

Methodology sessions are offered to teachers of English in order to increase the use of communicative approaches to teaching and improve student language learning in their schools. At this point in the initiative, methodology sessions have been carried out in three municipalities (El Carmen de Viboral, Santa Rosa de Osos, Tâmesis). So far, 42 teachers (19 in El Carmen, 21 in Santa Rosa de Osos and two in Tâmesis) have received methodology training. Methodology sessions for English teachers are being scheduled in the other municipalities, provided there are enough teachers interested and available.

Methodology sessions are presented in three or four blocks of 5 hours, and cover some of the following topics: teaching approaches; teaching vocabulary; classroom management and interaction patterns; games for children and teenagers; using songs; using videos; and activities and strategies to learn and improve (a) pronunciation, (b) vocabulary and (c) fluency.

## Evaluation aims

This evaluation has three aims. Firstly, for pupils, we want to investigate the effect or impact of this initiative on their attitude towards English or their interest in learning English. For teachers who do not teach English, the aim is to determine whether the project has increased their interest in learning English. Finally, for teachers of English, the evaluation is focused on the impact of this initiative on teaching practices and language development.

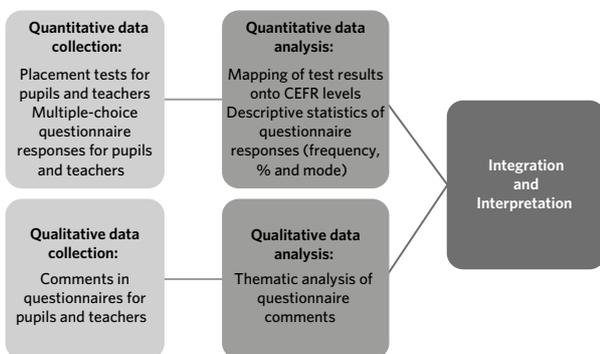
## Research questions

1. What impact has the initiative had on pupils' attitudes towards and motivation to learn English?
2. Are teachers of other subjects more interested in learning English as a result of this initiative?
3. What has been the impact of the initiative on the teaching practices and language development of English teachers?

## Methodology

In addition to measuring English language levels of students and teachers, the evaluation also investigated the context of learning, and both pupil and teacher attitudes and motivation. A primarily quantitative approach was taken due to the limited timeframe available for data collection. Questionnaires and the Cambridge English Placement Test (CEPT) were the instruments used to collect the main data for analysis. However, within the questionnaires, open-ended comment boxes were included to allow respondents an opportunity to provide additional information. This data formed a smaller qualitative data strand which was analysed separately and the findings were then used to inform the findings from the quantitative data strands, thus allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the effect of the project on participants. In this respect, the research design incorporated a mixed method approach as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Research design (based on Creswell 2009)**



## Areas under investigation

The constructs in Table 1 formed part of the conceptual framework for the research, and fed into the design of the questionnaires.

The key areas under investigation for student participants are: general attitudes towards English, their motivation to learn and their learning preferences rather than specific aspects of the initiative. For teachers, the focus is primarily

on the impact of the sessions on teaching practices and language development.

## Data collection

The CEPT was used in order to have a snapshot of English language proficiency levels in the selected municipalities. CEPT is an online adaptive test of General English, testing the skills of reading, use of English and listening. It has been designed to be short and flexible, and to meet the needs of users who want to place English language learners at all levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001), from pre-A1 to C2. Each test taken is virtually unique. As the candidate progresses through the test, each item is chosen on the basis of the candidate's response to the previous item. The test becomes progressively easier or more difficult until a consistent level of ability is achieved, and the candidate's level of English can be identified. CEPT features a variety of accents and texts sourced from a range of English-speaking countries. The test is secure and fast, taking on average 30 minutes to complete.

## Attitudinal and demographic data

Pupils' and teachers' perceptions of the project were collected via an online questionnaire. For pupils the questionnaire was administered in Spanish, and the questionnaire for teachers was administered in English and Spanish. It consisted of multiple-choice questions asking participants demographic and attitudinal information. For example, participants were asked to indicate where they lived, and what training they had attended, and whether they agreed with statements such as 'I feel it is important for me to learn English' and how often they engaged in various activities, like speaking to pupils in English. The attitudinal section of the questionnaire was developed by selecting validated statements from the Cambridge English Questionnaire Item Bank. The statements included Likert scale items consisting of a 5-point scale requiring a single response. The most typical response options were: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree' and

**Table 1: Constructs**

Area of investigation	Construct	Data type	Instrument
Exposure to English	Use of English in the classroom Parental/family members' ability in English	Quantitative	Questionnaire to pupils
Attitude towards English	Motivation/attitudes Confidence/perceptions Enjoyment of English	Quantitative and Qualitative	Questionnaires to pupils and teachers
Learning approach	Use of English in the classroom Use of technology in the classroom Learning or teaching preferences	Quantitative	Questionnaires to pupils and teachers
Learning oriented assessment	Teacher collaboration School culture Assessment literacy	Quantitative	Questionnaire to teachers
Perception of the English lessons at the Park	Motivation/attitudes	Quantitative and Qualitative	Questionnaires to pupils and teachers
Attitude towards the initiative	Motivation/attitudes Interest in future training Value of current training	Quantitative and Qualitative	Questionnaires to pupils and teachers
Language progression	English ability/proficiency	Quantitative	Test scores

'not sure'. Additional project-specific statements were developed, where necessary, by a team of researchers, and in consultation with the British Council.

The pupil and teacher questionnaires went through an internal review before being submitted to the British Council and project team for feedback and final approval. The Spanish translation for the teacher questionnaire was provided by a native Spanish speaker with a translation and teaching background. The Spanish translation for the pupil questionnaire was provided by a native Spanish speaker who is a Colombian national. Both the individuals reviewed each other's work. The Spanish versions of both questionnaires were reviewed and edited where necessary by the British Council. A final consultation between the research team and the British Council and project team took place to check the content and language of both questionnaires before distribution.

### Collation of the data

The data was collected between 9 and 17 November 2015. The British Council organised and administered the questionnaires and CEPT in each Education Park. The initial intention was to select a representative sample of 100 teachers, and a sample of 100 pupils with equal numbers from each municipality to take CEPT, and for all participants to complete the questionnaire. However, the CEPT was administered to additional pupils because it was not possible to reach the desired sample of teachers due to availability issues as the testing period coincided with the end of the academic year. Champions administered the test and questionnaires to participants. Administration was therefore based on who was present during the collection time frame for questionnaire and test completion, and the participants in the questionnaires and the test were thus selected through convenience sampling.

There is widespread consensus that questionnaires are not generally given to children under the age of 8 because they are still at an early stage of their linguistic and cognitive development, which can make it difficult to ensure the validity and reliability of their responses (Borgers, Leeuw and Hox 2000); therefore, the questionnaires were not distributed to learners below Grade 4 in primary.

### Study participants

A total of 188 primary pupils and secondary pupils and teachers took the Cambridge English Placement Test. Details of individual test performance were provided in a separate confidential summary document, and as individual performance reports for distribution to test takers.

A total of 242 pupils and 69 teachers completed the pupil and teacher questionnaires. The largest group of pupils are in Grade 4 of primary school, but all school grades are represented. Pupils and teachers from all five municipalities answered the questionnaire. Two thirds of the pupil respondents are female, and the rest male, with a similar gender split in the teacher respondent numbers.

## Teacher profile

Teachers who completed the questionnaire all have higher education qualifications. The highest level qualifications they have are either a Bachelor's degree (68.1%) a postgraduate diploma (21.7%) or a Master's degree (10.1%). Of the 69 teachers who completed the questionnaire, 25 (36.2%) are English teachers and 44 (63.8%) teach other subjects. The majority teach English for 5 hours or less per week, and the two largest groups have taught English from 1-3 to 5-10 years.

## Pupil profile

As parental knowledge of English can positively influence English language learning outcomes for their children (Jones 2013), pupils were asked firstly, how well their primary caregiver (i.e. mother/father/grandmother, nanny, etc.) is able to speak English and secondly, how well other members of their family are able to speak English. As can be seen in Table 2, there is a reasonable level of English within the family, but a lower level of English in terms of parents or grandparents. This may be a reflection of the higher proficiency of other family members such as brothers and sisters still in the education system.

**Table 2: Perceived ability to speak English**

Perceived English ability	Primary caregiver	Other family members
<b>He/She can't speak English</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>
... not very well	33.3%	30.0%
... moderately well	7.1%	17.1%
... very well	7.5%	29.6%
<b>Not sure/Not applicable</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>

## Findings and discussion

This section reports on the key findings. As this study is a *post hoc* investigation into the effects of the initiative, findings must be interpreted cautiously as they are derived from participants' perceptions of the project and its impact. However, the information reported here provides a snapshot of the current situation with regard to language education in Antioquia, which can be used to monitor the progress of the project into the future.

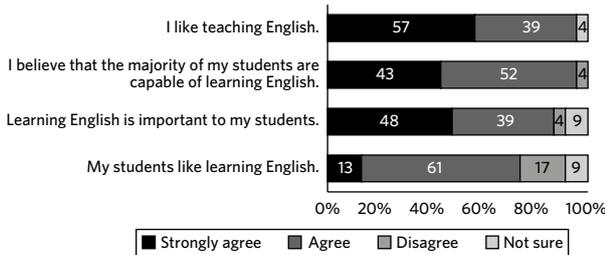
The findings are presented according to the key areas the initiative was designed to affect. First, attitudes towards English are discussed, followed by an overview of the learning approach used in school, perceptions of learning oriented assessment, the perception of the English lessons taking place at the respective 'parques', the general attitude towards the initiative and finally, perceptions of language progression and an overview of the CEPT results.

### Attitude towards English

As a key objective of the project is to improve interest and confidence in language learning, English teachers were asked to respond to a series of statements about English.

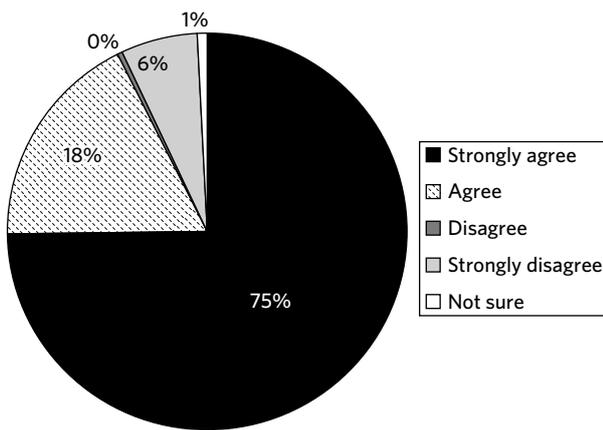
These were 'I like teaching English' and whether or not their pupils were capable of learning it, whether it was important to their pupils to learn it, and whether their pupils enjoyed learning it. These statements provide an indication of the value placed on language learning, which is most strongly associated with the willingness to engage in it and persist with it even when it becomes difficult (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005). Their responses are shown in Figure 2 (note: none of the teachers selected 'strongly disagree' for any of the statements).

**Figure 2: English teachers' attitude to English language learning**



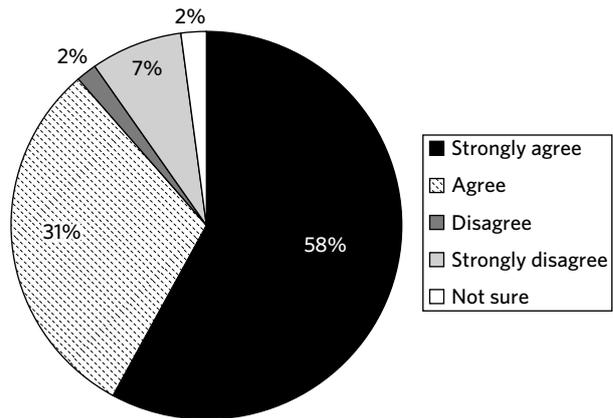
Teacher responses show a very positive attitude to English. None of the teachers disagreed with the statement 'I like teaching English.' Pupils were also asked to what extent they agreed with the statement 'I feel it is important for me to learn English'. Figure 3 summarises the responses. Three quarters of the pupils (75%) strongly agreed, and a further 18% agreed, which is a slightly higher positive response rate than teacher expectations. Less than 8% disagreed or were unsure whether it is important to learn English. The large number suggests that English is important to pupils regardless of age, gender or which municipality they come from.

**Figure 3: Pupil responses to 'I feel it is important for me to learn English'**



Pupils' self-confidence in learning English was also investigated. As Figure 4 shows, the majority of pupils (89%) agreed, or strongly agreed that they were confident they could learn English. Although teachers appear to be more confident in their pupils' ability to learn English than the pupils themselves (93% versus 89% respectively), almost two thirds of the pupils (58%) strongly agreed with this statement, indicating they are very confident in their capacity to learn English.

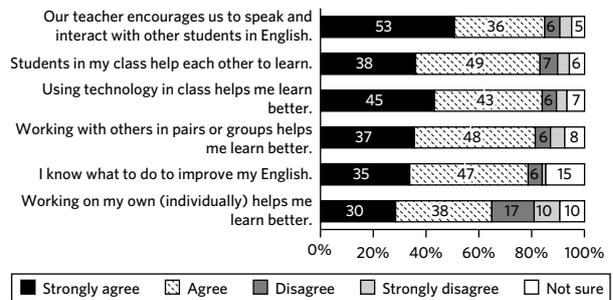
**Figure 4: Responses to 'I am confident that I can learn English'**



**Learning approach**

In order to investigate learners' attitude towards communicative and self-directed approaches to learning, they were asked a series of statements about classroom interactions and learning preferences.

**Figure 5: Learning approach**



As can be seen in Figure 5, around 80% of the pupils agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what to do to improve their English, that they spoke and interacted with other pupils in English, and that pupils helped each other to learn. More than 80% of pupils also agreed that technology helped them to learn.

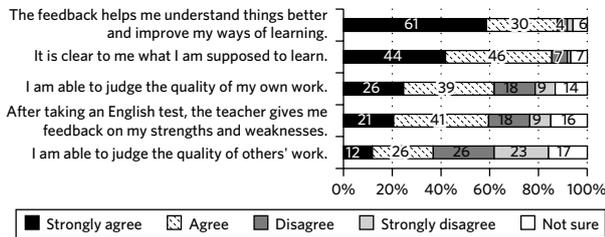
In terms of learning preferences, over 80% of pupils felt that working in pairs or groups helped them to learn. Over 60% of pupils also felt that working on their own was also beneficial. These responses suggest that learners recognise their role in the learning process and are willing to engage in learning actively. Although it is not possible to determine whether the project has positively affected these attitudes, the learning approaches and preferences reported by pupils here may support subsequent phases of the project which include self-directed learning activities.

**Learning oriented assessment**

Assessment has multiple functions in education, including the measurement of achievement and the provision of feedback to learners on their strengths and weaknesses. When assessment practices are linked closely with learning goals, it has the ability to both motivate learners and improve learning (Carless 2009). Therefore, pupils were asked about the feedback they receive from their teacher, and whether it helps them to learn better. They were also

asked if they were able to judge the quality of their own work and that of other pupils, and finally if it was clear to them what they were supposed to learn. Their responses are summarised in Figure 6.

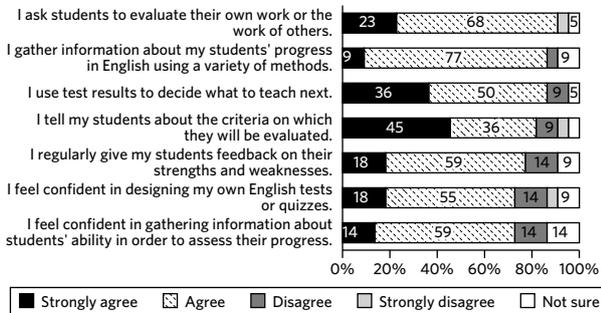
**Figure 6: Feedback and assessment: Pupil attitudes**



Over 90% of pupils reported that they receive feedback from the teacher which helps them to understand things better and that it is clear what they are supposed to learn, although a lower percentage (62%) reported they received feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. Over 60% report they are able to judge the quality of their own work, but a lower number (38%) feel they can judge the quality of their classmates' work.

Teachers were also asked to respond to a series of statements on assessment and feedback in order to determine the extent to which they are engaging in *assessment for learning* practices. Their responses are summarised in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Feedback and assessment: Teacher attitudes**



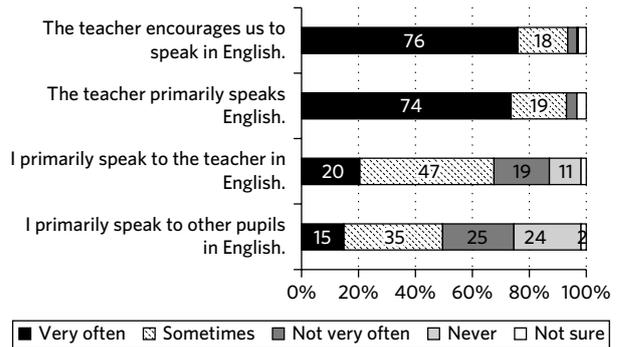
The teacher responses indicate that teachers feel they are engaging in a variety of assessment practices and also involve their pupils in these processes. The statement with the most agreement was 'I ask students to evaluate their own work or the work of others' which 91% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with. The three statements with a lower rate of agreement than the others, which are all above 85%, were two about confidence, such as 'I feel confident in gathering information about students' ability in English in order to assess their progress' and 'I feel confident in designing my own English tests or quizzes' which both have 73% agreement, and a third where 77% of teachers agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I regularly give my students feedback on their strengths and weaknesses'. This is a higher rate of agreement than the pupil perception; however, it does indicate that teachers may value additional training in assessment for learning practices.

**Perception of the English lessons at the Park**

Having looked at general attitudes to learning English, we will now look at the perception of what was happening during the English lessons, before moving on to look at attitudes to the initiative.

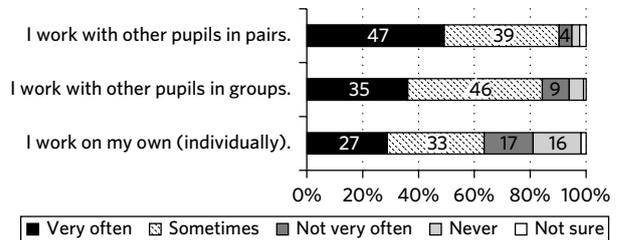
As a main objective of the project was to improve listening and speaking skills, pupils were asked to comment on the use of English in their lessons and the opportunities to interact with others in class. The responses for pupil perception of use of English are summarised in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Use of English during the 'English in the Park' lessons**



The results show frequent use of English by the teacher, with 74% of pupils reporting the teacher speaks in English very often, and a similar percentage (76%) report that their teacher encourages them to speak in English very often. Although the frequency of speaking in English is also lower for pupil interaction, with the highest percentage (35%) reporting they sometimes speak in English to other pupils, the percentage of pupils speaking English to their teacher is reasonably high, with 20% reporting they do this very often, and a further 47% reporting they do this some of the time. Pupils were also asked to indicate how often they worked in pairs, groups and individually as this can also indicate the extent to which a communicative approach to learning is being encouraged. The responses are summarised in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Class dynamics during the 'English in the Park' lessons**

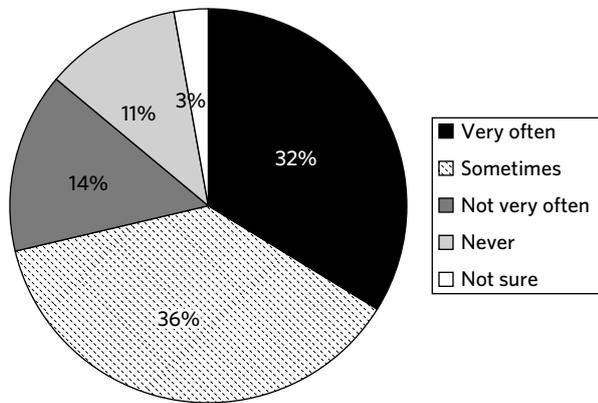


Comparing working individually, in pairs or in groups, the most common dynamic in the classes is pair work, with 90% of pupils reporting they work in pairs very often or from time to time. Although the use of pair work is positive as pupils are potentially being given an opportunity to communicate with others, the fact that only 47% of pupils report speaking to classmates in English suggests that more work needs to be done either to ensure the pair work activities encourage English use

or that learners are pushed to use English with classmates more frequently.

As one aspect of the project is to encourage the use of technology in learning, pupils were asked to indicate how often they used technology in the 'English in the Park' lessons. The responses are summarised in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Frequency of use of technology in class\***

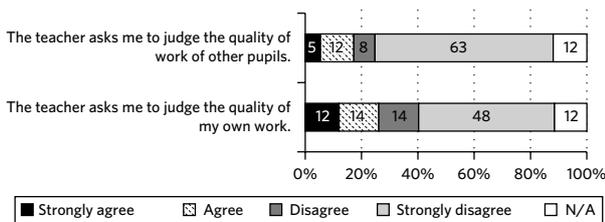


\* Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Use of technology in the lessons is quite frequent with over 70% of pupils reporting they use technology very often or from time to time.

In order to investigate the extent to which pupils were encouraged to develop self-directed learning strategies, pupils were asked how often they were asked by the teacher to judge the quality of their own work and the work of their classmates during the 'English in the Park' lessons. The pupil responses are summarised in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Assessment during the 'English in the Park' lessons**

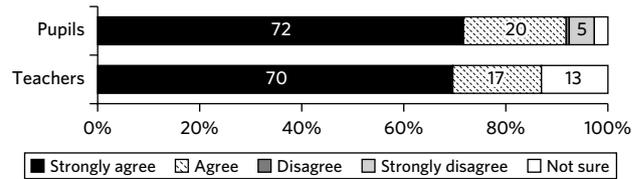


The figures show that the majority of pupils are asked to assess their work or the work of their classmates during the lessons. Only 26% of pupils are asked to judge the quality of their work with any frequency, and only 17% are asked to judge the quality of the work of their peers.

**Attitude to the initiative**

Having looked at general attitudes to learning English, and learner perceptions of what was happening in the English lessons, we will now focus on participant perceptions of the initiative and the impact of it on learning English. Although attendance levels varied, the attitude to the initiative was very positive, with the majority of pupils (92%) indicating they were pleased to participate, as can be seen in Figure 12. Teachers were also positive about being able to participate.

**Figure 12: Responses to 'I am pleased that I was given the opportunity to participate in the 'English in the Park' initiative'**



The generally positive attitude to the project was also evident in the additional comments received in the questionnaire, such as this comment from a Grade 11 pupil in Tamesis:

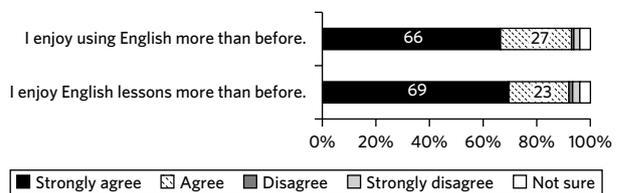
*I thank you for this great opportunity to learn English in the educational park, I congratulate the teacher for the methodology and the excellent management of the systems, this makes us learn and enjoy the lessons. I hope to be able to continue with this process next year and that such an interesting and productive process does not stop. Thousands and thousands of thanks for bringing to Tamesis such an excellent programme and teachers.*

Similarly, comments made by teachers also indicated a positive attitude to the project; for example, a non-English teacher from El Carmen de Viboral made this comment:

*After these classes in the Park, I feel more confident when I have to express myself in English.*

The majority of pupils agreed that they enjoyed using English more, and enjoyed English lessons more as a result of the initiative, as can be seen in Figure 13.

**Figure 13: Positive impact of the 'English in the Park' initiative**



This positive attitude was also evident in the comments in the questionnaire, such as this one from another Grade 11 pupil from Tamesis:

*I thank you for this opportunity that we are given to learn English, I find that the methodology used by the teacher is extraordinary and what I want the most is that this process continues next year because I can see progress and I do not want to waste everything I have achieved until now. Thousands and thousands of thanks for bringing to this region this opportunity.*

This pupil from Santa Rosa de Osos commented:

*I think the lessons of 'English in the Park' have made my learning faster.*

There were, however, less positive views such as this one on the level of teacher expertise, made by a pupil in Guarne, but these were in the minority:

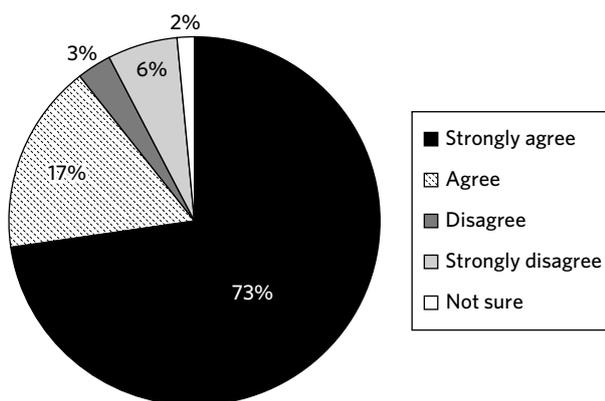
*I would like teachers to be better trained, but in general the lessons are good and I appreciate that English is having a greater presence in educational centres.*

Of the 114 comments left by pupils, 86 (75%) were positive, 7 (6%) were mixed, 12 (11%) were negative, and 6 (5%) were about their school and not the initiative. The positive view such as this one from a pupil in La Unión is typical of the comments received, which praise the initiative and hope it will continue:

*I think the teaching is excellent, I hope they will keep it like this.*

Teachers were asked if they would like to attend language training in the future, and as can be seen in Figure 14, the response was very positive.

**Figure 14: Responses to 'I would like to attend English language training in the future'**\*



\* Percentages may not sum due to rounding

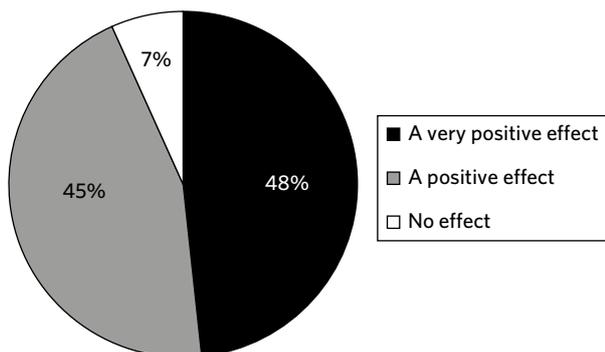
Teachers also commented on the importance of this initiative and the need to increase the length of the training programme, as can be seen in the selection of comments below:

*It's very important and good that these opportunities are provided as not everyone has the opportunity to learn as English classes are very expensive and not everyone can afford them.*

*These classes should have begun at the beginning of the year and should have been for more time – at least a year and according to progress, students can move level.*

Teachers were also very positive about the effect the initiative had on their teaching, as can be seen in Figure 15. The majority of teachers reported that the initiative had a very positive or positive effect. Although a small percentage indicated it had no effect (7%), no teachers indicated it had a negative effect even though this was one of the options.

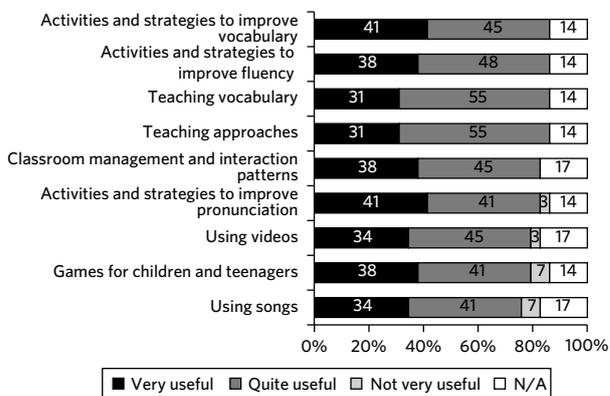
**Figure 15: Effect of teaching of the 'English in the Park' initiative**



### Methodology sessions

'English in the Park' also included sessions for teachers focusing on improving their teaching practices. Teachers were asked to comment on the usefulness of the methodology sessions and how interested they would be in workshops in the future. Their responses are summarised in Figure 16.

**Figure 16: Usefulness of the methodology sessions**



The first four workshops, on teaching vocabulary, teaching approaches, and those on strategies to improve fluency and vocabulary were rated most highly, although all the workshops were rated as useful by the majority of teachers. No workshops were rated as 'not at all useful', although this was one of the options. The N/A option was selected by those who had not attended that particular workshop. The quality of the training was commented on by teachers:

*It's very important to continue with native teachers to improve and strengthen the process of teaching and learning, and share experiences with peers.*

*For me, it's necessary to continue with training in new methodology for English teaching. Particularly for the teachers, since we are the people in charge of passing on knowledge to students. Please, continue with the teachers Lee, Selina and Tom in Parque Neurona del Municipio de Santa Rosa de Osos. It's really important.*

Although the majority of the teachers were positive, there were some recommendations made in the comments related to the planning and scheduling of lessons:

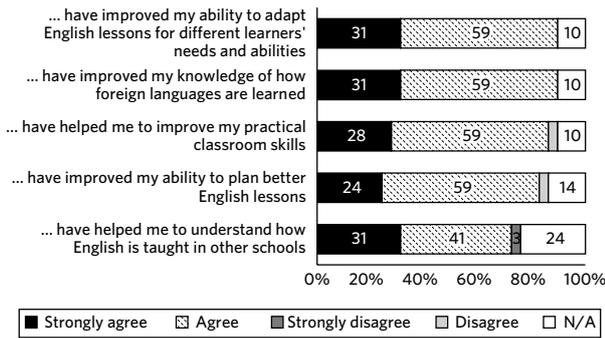
*It's a good opportunity. It's difficult to find the time due to the working day and the location. It would be easier for me if it were closer. Thanks.*

*I would like the rural teachers to have a full English course from beginners' level in order to learn and be able to teach this language in the classroom. Bear in mind that many of us travel to the municipal headquarters on Fridays.*

*It would be good if the number of classes during the week was increased and other methodological strategies used.*

English teachers were then asked about the impact of the 'English in the Park' sessions on their teaching practices, and knowledge of and confidence in English language teaching. Figure 17 summarises responses to those statements relating to knowledge, understanding and abilities.

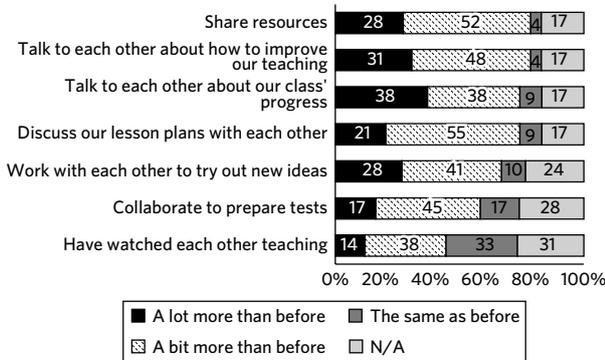
**Figure 17: Teacher improvement in abilities and knowledge**



The responses show that teachers feel their ability to adapt and plan lessons have both improved. They also feel their practical classroom skills and their theoretical knowledge in terms of how languages are learned have improved. Over 80% of teachers agreed with the statements about these areas of improvement. In fact, all teachers who indicated they had attended the workshops indicated they had improved in their ability to adapt lessons and their knowledge of language learning. 72% of teachers agreed that the sessions helped them to understand how English is taught in other schools.

Teachers were also asked about the extent to which sharing and collaboration within their schools had improved as a result of the 'English in the Park' initiative. The responses are summarised in Figure 18.

**Figure 18: Teacher collaboration at school as a result of the initiative**



None of the teachers selected 'less than before'. For the teachers who selected 'N/A', it is assumed they are either unsure, or do not carry out these activities in their school. The three areas where the highest number of teachers indicated they collaborated more than before were sharing resources, talking about how to improve teaching, and discussing class progress. None of the teachers indicated that the level of collaboration and sharing had decreased. Use of English in class by pupils and the teacher, and use of technology were felt to have increased more than before by 93% of the respondents. Working in pairs and groups was felt to have increased by 90% of teachers. None of the teachers felt that any of the activities were occurring less often than before, with the exception of asking students to work individually, where 7% reported they were doing this less often, and for 14% there was no change.

## Language progression

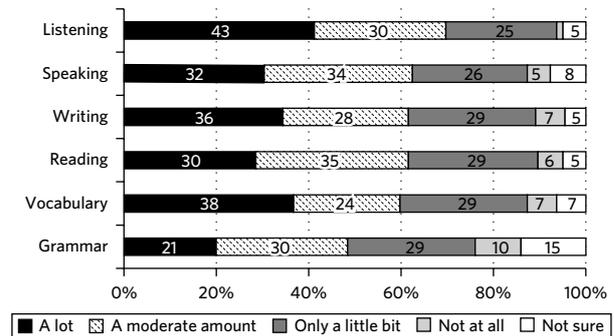
The most common levels for primary pupils were pre-A1 and A1 depending on the region. Overall the most common CEFR level for primary pupils was A1. For secondary pupils, the most common levels were A1 and A2 depending on the region, and overall A1 was the most common.

Looking at teacher performance, because of the small numbers, English and non-English teachers were counted together. For teachers, the most common scores were A1 and A2 depending on the region. The most common level overall was A1.

Overall the range in pupil and teacher scores shows the variety in performance in each region. Pupils who took the test ranged in age from 9 to 18, and only a limited number of teachers were available to participate in the test. This limits the conclusions which can be drawn from the results. Nevertheless the results help to build a picture of the context at this point in the initiative.

Pupils were also asked in the questionnaires how much they felt their English had improved since the beginning of the academic year. Overall pupils felt that they have improved most in listening over the academic year, followed by speaking, and least in grammar (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Pupil perceptions of improvement in different areas of English**



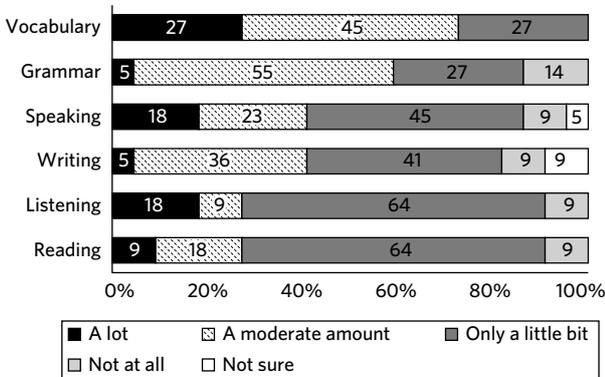
This comment, from a pupil in Guarne, illustrates that pupils are aware of changes in their English proficiency as a result of attending the lessons:

*In these months that I have been attending the lessons in the programme 'English in the Park' in Guarne I have been very happy because it was very useful, as support for my school lessons, and it was a great opportunity to learn and improve my knowledge. I know that if I make an effort and practise, I am going to be able to progress more in the language. On the other hand, I would like to have this course next year too. Congratulations! This was of great help to me. Thank you very much.*

However, the improvement cannot be solely attributed to the 'English in the Park' lessons alone, as we asked how much they had improved over the year. Therefore English classes at school are also a factor. Nevertheless, pupil comments indicate that they feel the 'English in the Park' lessons have contributed to their improvement.

Teachers were also asked to comment on the areas where pupils had improved. Vocabulary and grammar were the two areas where the greatest amount of improvement was noted by teachers, as can be seen in Figure 20.

**Figure 20: Teacher perceptions of improvement in different areas of English secondary student scores by CEFR level for each skill**



Questionnaire responses also show that teachers feel they have improved in all areas, and the most popular response was in the area of vocabulary, followed by listening. Teachers commented on the motivational aspects of the training:

*The teacher is excellent, brilliant, but my skills are poor. I love learning.*

*The programme has encouraged our enthusiasm for second language teaching and our desire to learn more and master it.*

*I would quite like this initiative to continue with the foreign teachers as their way of teaching is different and you learn a lot more with them. I really appreciate the opportunity to learn English.*

## Conclusions

The first question the evaluation seeks to answer is what impact the initiative has had on pupils' attitudes towards and motivation to learn English, and secondly whether teachers of other subjects are more interested in learning English as a result of taking part. The findings are that all three stakeholder groups, namely pupils, teachers of other subjects and teachers of English, are pleased to be given the opportunity to participate in the initiative. Learners and teachers enjoyed the English lessons and found them useful in improving their speaking and listening skills, and commented positively on the variety of interactional patterns, such as interacting with the teacher and with other learners, and the predominant use of English in lessons. The lessons appeared to motivate learners to use English more than before and improved their enjoyment of learning English. In fact, learners appear to be engaging in self-directed learning, which is a positive sign.

The other area of investigation is the impact of the initiative on the teaching practices and language development of English teachers. The feedback from English teachers has shown that all workshops have been considered useful to teachers. In the near future,

the workshops teachers are most interested in are firstly, games for children and teenagers, and secondly, how to improve pronunciation. The methodology training has had a positive impact on teaching practices, with teachers reporting that they are engaging in more communicative approaches to teaching English in their classrooms than before, for example using more group and pair work, and increased use of English in the classroom. They also report they are better able to adapt lessons for learner needs. These improvements are also evident in their attitude to their work, with teachers reporting that the training has also improved their motivation and confidence when teaching English. Training benefits are also evident at the school level, with teachers reporting that they are collaborating more often with their colleagues by talking about their classes, sharing resources and working with each other to try out new ideas.

Test data shows a range in performance across the regions with the majority of participants at a basic level of English. The pupils who took the CEPT test ranged in age from 9 to 18. We would recommend testing the English skills of a cohort of pupils from one age group, or one school year, so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn.

## Recommendations

Simply put, everyone would like to continue studying English and English teachers would like to continue taking methodology sessions. As one teacher commented: 'An excellent initiative which should be continued for a longer period.'

We recommend continuation of the project, and expansion of the training programme in terms of running more methodology and language sessions in all municipalities, and possibly expanding the range of workshops in response to teacher feedback. For example, we would recommend considering workshops that focus on assessment for learning (i.e. learning oriented assessment) in order to build teacher confidence and their ability to engage in a range of assessment activities, such as planning and collaborating on test production, and making use of assessment data to drive forward the learning. We would also recommend the investigation of further course planning, particularly looking at how course planning could be used to help teachers integrate use of the methodologies demonstrated in the sessions.

Classroom observations could be incorporated in future phases as an additional professional development opportunity which may improve teaching and collaboration within and across schools. Finally, as the initiative continues, introducing English teaching qualifications may be beneficial such as *Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT)* or qualifications targeting English teachers of primary, *Certificate in English Language Teaching - Primary (CELT-P)*, and secondary, *Certificate in English Language Teaching - Secondary (CELT-S)*, which could be seen as added value for those teachers who have demonstrated high achievement and engagement.

## Limitations

The pupils who took the CEPT test ranged in age from 9 to 18. We would recommend testing the English skills of a cohort of pupils from one age group, or one school year, so that meaningful conclusions can be drawn.

The *post hoc* nature of this investigation, looking retrospectively at changes, and reliance on a teacher and pupil willingness to participate, means that the perceptions may not reflect actual changes, since no baseline data was available. Findings, therefore, should be interpreted cautiously; however, these findings can be used to monitor programme effectiveness as it progresses.

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# Improving student learning through upskilling teachers: The case of Lebanon

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## Project background

The Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools and Teachers Improvement (D-RASATI) programme was a 5-year USAID-funded project to support the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in improving the performance of the public school system. One of the objectives of the programme was to improve English language levels of public school teachers of English and those who teach through the medium of English.

The D-RASATI project consisted of two phases. In the first phase, D-RASATI 1, Cambridge English Language Assessment in partnership with ALLC International House Beirut (ALLC-IH) assessed over 4,000 primary and secondary Lebanese teachers in reading, listening, speaking and writing skills, using *BULATS* (*Business Language Testing Service*), a multi-level English exam aligned to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) and measuring from CEFR Level A1 to C2. This benchmarking activity was designed to support the MEHE, and the teachers'

in-service professional development, by providing the Ministry with a national profile of English language levels of teachers in order to target training for those who teach English as a first or second language or use English as the medium of instruction for science and mathematics. The benchmarking activity identified that approximately 95% of teachers needed to improve their English language levels in order to achieve the language targets recommended by D-RASATI of CEFR Level C1 for English language teachers and B2 for teachers who teach content through the medium of English (American University of Beirut 2012).

In the second phase, D-RASATI 2, ALLC-IH was commissioned to provide approximately 2,500 teachers with English language courses between January 2014 and February 2016 as part of the *English Language Training for Public School Teachers Activity*. These courses ranged from basic to advanced and targeted all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. A critical aspect of the D-RASATI 2 project and this activity was to ensure that teachers throughout the country had easy access to a language course appropriate for their needs. An additional

feature of these courses was that those teachers who were enrolled in the B2 level course were eligible to sit the *Cambridge English: First* exam, providing them with the opportunity to attain international certification and indicate they have achieved operational proficiency in English.

In order to determine the extent to which these language courses met the needs of teachers and contributed to the aim of the D-RASATI 2 programme to improve the English language standards of Lebanese teachers, Cambridge English, in collaboration with D-RASATI 2, undertook an evaluation of the project, which we report in this article.

## D-RASATI 2 English Language Training

### Course offerings

D-RASATI 2 offered public school teachers seven courses covering CEFR Levels A1 to C1 in 17 locations across Lebanon. The courses were designed based on a communicative approach to language instruction, and they were learner centred with learners expected to fully participate and be 100% involved in their language development. An inductive approach was used, requiring learners to work out meaning for themselves rather than having language explained to them. A major focus was on communication, thus building the teachers' confidence and ability to run their own classes in English. In addition, the teacher trainers provided a sound model of communicative methodology including a range of different lesson shapes such as text-based presentations, test-teach-test and task-based learning. The teachers could then take these models and use them in their own classrooms.

Each course was scheduled for a 3-hour period, two days per week, except for the courses which ran over summer 2015 which were 3 hours per day, four days per week. Enrolment varied by location based on the number of public schools in each region which use English as a language of instruction as opposed to French, but approximately 2,500 teachers were enrolled in courses over the duration of the project, with around 25% of teachers taking more than one course.

Teachers were placed into courses based on their *BULATS* score and availability of classes in their region. That is, a class would be set up in a region if there were at least seven teachers at the same language level.

### English language trainers

A total of 49 trainers were recruited to deliver the English language courses across all sites. All trainers were university graduates and the majority held the Cambridge English *CELTA* (*Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*). This qualification ensures that trainers have an understanding of the principles of effective communicative language teaching, including a range of practical skills for teaching English to adult learners. Those who did not hold the *CELTA* had considerable English language teaching experience and underwent training

with the ALLC-IH Academic Management Team before they started the courses and throughout the duration of the project.

### Cambridge English: First

A key indicator of this project was for 245 teachers to be prepared to sit the *Cambridge English: First* (also known as *FCE*) exam and be given the opportunity to achieve a B2 level certificate in English. The *Cambridge English: First* exam is a standard high-volume global Cambridge English exam, calibrated at B2 level of the CEFR, but reports on performance from B1 to C1. It tests learners in all four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The *Cambridge English: First* exam was selected for this project as it represents the first target proficiency set for teachers who use English as an instructional language. Teachers who were enrolled in the Pre-FCE course were selected to take the *Cambridge English: First* exam based on their overall progress in their language course, their performance in a series of mock tests and recommendation by their English language trainer.

## Evaluation aims

This evaluation study covers the period between January 2014 and August 2015 and aims to answer the following research question: What are stakeholders' (decision makers, teachers, English language trainers) attitudes to and perceptions of the language courses offered by D-RASATI 2 as part of the *English Language Training for Public School Teachers Activity* and the use of internationally recognised assessment tools?

This study was designed to provide USAID and MEHE with a comprehensive profile of the Lebanese teachers who participated in the courses as part of this activity. This profile can be used to inform future developments aimed at supporting MEHE's long-term objective of raising standards in English language teaching and learning. It can facilitate data-driven decisions and recommendations to sustain conditions for success, and help to identify any areas for improvement.

## Methodology

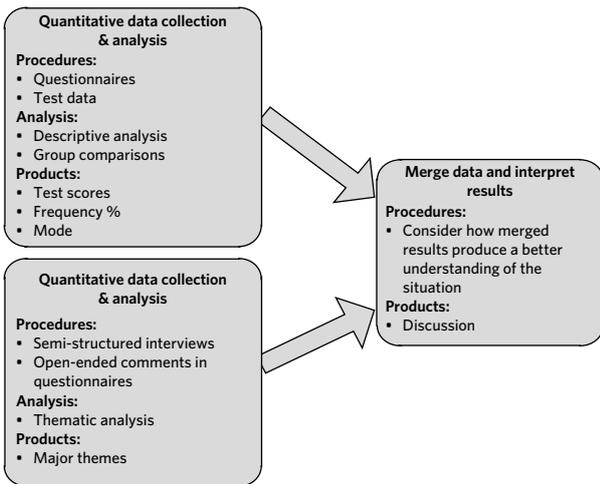
### Research design

A mixed methods approach was used due to its value in providing a richer understanding of a situation through the collection and integration of complementary qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). A convergent parallel design was chosen, which is characterised by the collection of the two data strands in parallel (see Figure 1).

### Areas under investigation

The key areas listed in Table 1 formed part of the conceptual framework for the research, and fed into the design of the parallel questions for the questionnaires and interviews.

**Figure 1: Example of convergent parallel design procedural diagram (Adapted from Creswell and Plano Clark 2011:69)**



**Quantitative data: Questionnaires and test data**

The quantitative data consisted of:

- responses to questionnaires completed by teachers and the English language trainers
- candidate test scores.

Attitudinal questionnaires were designed in order to elicit participant perceptions of the D-RASATI 2 project in general and the English language courses in particular. Two questionnaires were developed, one for the teachers enrolled in the language courses and the other for the English language trainers. Validated statements were selected from the Cambridge English Questionnaire Item Bank. Additional questions, specific to this context and project, were developed in collaboration with ALLC-IH. The statements included a variety of response options with the most common being Likert scale items consisting of a 4-point scale requiring a single response. The most typical response options were: ‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly disagree’. A key feature of the questionnaires was that they contained parallel statements in order to compare the responses of teachers to those of

their trainers. Online and paper-based versions were made available to teachers at the end of each English language course between January 2014 and August 2015. English language trainers completed the online version of the questionnaire in July 2015.

The analysis of the questionnaires consisted of two steps. First, frequencies were calculated for each statement using IBM SPSS Statistics 20 and then response patterns of different groups within and across questionnaires were compared by performing a chi-square test. Variables such as gender, subject specialism, grade taught and English course attended were used to define groups within the data and compare responses. For the chi-square analysis, the critical value to determine whether there were any statistically significant responses was  $p < .005$ ; a standardised residual of +2.0 or -2.0 was used to determine whether any particular response was showing a meaningful difference between groups. *Cambridge English: First* exam data was also collected and analysed by CEFR level and by skill for the December 2014, June 2015 and August 2015 exam sessions.

**Qualitative data: Interviews and questionnaire comments**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key focal persons in order to identify the intended impacts and purposes of the initiative at the micro (learning and teaching) and macro levels (schools and society). The interviewees were asked to consider the programme goals and the extent to which they had been achieved, reasons for why this was the case, any unintended impacts of the project, and lessons learned. The one-to-one interviews were conducted in English with a representative of D-RASATI and a key focal person from the MEHE on this project.

The teacher and English language trainer questionnaires included open-ended fields to allow respondents to include information that was not captured in the selected response statements. There was an open-ended field at the end of each section (i.e. on course scheduling; effectiveness of

**Table 1: Key investigation areas**

Area of investigation	Sub-areas	Data type	Instrument
Attitude towards English	Importance of English language learning Confidence in learning English Attitude towards the D-RASATI 2 project	Qualitative	Interviews with decision makers Open fields in questionnaires
		Quantitative	Questionnaire to teachers and English language trainers
Course implementation	Course placement, scheduling and delivery	Qualitative	Interviews with decision makers Open fields in questionnaires
		Quantitative	Questionnaire to teachers and English language trainers
Lesson effectiveness and teacher engagement	Teacher engagement Effectiveness of ELTs' teaching practices Effectiveness of assessment	Qualitative	Interviews with decision makers Open fields in questionnaires
		Quantitative	Questionnaire to teachers and English language trainers
Impact of courses	English language improvement Teacher confidence Teacher adoption of new pedagogical practices	Qualitative	Interviews with decision makers Open fields in questionnaires
		Quantitative	Questionnaire to teachers and English language trainers Exam data

classroom activities; assessment practices; impact of the course). The qualitative data was analysed using theme analysis, which involved the identification of patterns in the data sets and then determining the themes based on these patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006).

## Study participants

The number of participants between January 2014 and August 2015 and the response rates for the questionnaires can be found in Table 2. It is important to note that the figures for teachers do not represent unique individuals because, in some cases, teachers took more than one course or repeated the same course thus filling out the questionnaire more than once.

**Table 2: Questionnaire returns**

Stakeholder	Questionnaire returns	Total number of participants	Response rate
Teachers	1,666*	2,330	72%
English language trainers	44	49	90%

\*Duplicate responses and responses with fewer than 12 questions answered were removed from the data. In some cases respondents did not answer all questions, and calculations in the section 'Findings and discussion', are based on total responses for individual questions.

## Participant profiles

As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of the teachers and English language trainers who participated in this project were female (76% and 66% respectively).

**Table 3: Teacher and English Language Trainer (ELTs) demographic profile\***

Gender	Teachers	ELTs
Male	24%	34%
Female	76%	66%
Age	Teachers	ELTs
Under 30	6%	34%
31-40	44%	39%
41-50	32%	25%
51 and over	17%	2%

\*Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

The teachers were also asked in the questionnaire about their teaching experience, the subjects and grades they teach, as well as the location of their school (see Table 4). These variables were used to investigate whether particular characteristics affected perceptions of the project. As Table 4 shows, over half of the teachers who responded have more than 15 years of teaching experience (55%). Although most teachers teach more than one subject and

in more than one grade, English is the most commonly taught subject (36%) and more teachers work in the primary educational stage than the others (37%). The vast majority of respondents work in villages with fewer than 5,000 people (41%). Further analysis of the data revealed significant differences in teacher profiles related to gender ( $p < .001$ ). Male respondents indicated they were educated to a higher level than female respondents, and that they are also less likely to teach English and to teach at primary level than their female counterparts.

The background information collected via the questionnaires indicates that the course participants were made up of experienced teachers, from all educational stages and representing the three main subject areas targeted for training: English, mathematics and science. However, gender-based differences were identified in the teacher profiles. English language and primary school teachers tended to be female in the dataset and mathematics and science teachers tended to be male. Secondary school teachers also were typically male. The male teachers who responded to this survey tended to be educated at a higher level than the female teachers. These differences suggest that the English language teaching population may benefit from increased recruitment of male teachers, as research suggests that language learning outcomes of male students can benefit from having male role models (Loulidi 1990). Similarly, increasing the presence of female teachers in mathematics and science education, particularly those who already are proficient in English, may also benefit learners by providing female role models for those subjects.

Another important aspect of the programme is to provide equal access to quality education for all teachers regardless of location. The majority of questionnaire respondents worked in villages or small towns, which suggests that the project organisers were effective in targeting a teaching population which may not have the same access to teacher training opportunities because of their location.

## Findings and discussion

This section reports on the findings from all data strands by construct. First, attitudes towards learning English and the importance of it to the participating teachers is presented, followed by participant perceptions of the English language courses, teachers' level of engagement in the courses and the perceived effect of the courses on teachers' language development and their pedagogical practices.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the analyses included group comparisons with gender, subject specialism, grade taught and English course attended (only the level of significance is reported below). It should also be noted that several of the variables of interest were confounded in the dataset as the majority of female respondents were English teachers in primary school whereas the majority of male respondents were

<sup>1</sup> Please note that this article contains unedited quotes and comments and therefore linguistic errors may occur.

**Table 4: Teaching profile and teacher experience\***

How many years have you been teaching?***	Male teachers	Female teachers	Total
Less than 1 year	<1%	<1%	<1%
1–3 years	<1%	<1%	<1%
4–10 years	14%	19%	18%
11–15 years	29%	25%	26%
More than 15 years	55%	55%	55%
Location of the school you teach in	Male teachers	Female teachers	Total
Rural area (fewer than 1,000 people)	5%	6%	6%
Village (1,001 to 5,000 people)	30%	45%	41%
Small town (5,001 to 15,000 people)	28%	20%	22%
Town (15,001 to 100,000 people)	20%	10%	13%
Small city (100,001 to 500,000 people)	9%	10%	9%
Large city (more than 500,001 people)	8%	9%	9%
Highest teaching qualification	Male teachers	Female teachers	Total
Certificate/diploma	18%	26%	24%
Bachelor's degree	24%	38%	34%
Postgraduate certificate/diploma (including teaching certificate)	29%	22%	25%
Master's degree	28%	13%	17%
PhD	1%	<1%	1%
What do you teach?	Male teachers	Female teachers	Total
English only	10%	44%	36%
Mathematics only	52%	16%	25%
Science only	31%	18%	21%
Mathematics and science	4%	5%	5%
English + mathematics and/or science	2%	13%	10%
Other	1%	3%	2%
Which grades do you normally teach?	Male teachers	Female teachers	Total
Primary – Cycle 1 and 2 (Grades 1–6)	8%	47%	37%
Intermediate level – Cycle 3 (Grades 7–9)	21%	19%	19%
Secondary level – Cycle 4 (Grades 10–12)	47%	15%	23%
Primary and intermediate (Cycle 1 and/or 2 and Cycle 3)	4%	11%	9%
Intermediate and secondary (Cycle 3 and 4)	19%	8%	10%
All (Cycle 1 and/or 2, Cycle 3 and 4)	1%	1%	1%

\*Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

\*\*For all questions, more than one response was possible but data was recoded into the most common combinations.

secondary school teachers of either maths or science (see Table 4). Therefore, any significant findings must be interpreted cautiously as it is unclear whether one variable or a combination of variables is contributing to these differences. Comments left by teachers in the questionnaire were used to help identify which variable was likely contributing to differences. Unless otherwise stated, the use of 'agree' includes responses to 'strongly agree', and 'disagree' includes 'strongly disagree'.

### Attitude towards English

Attitudes towards a language can influence learner behaviour in terms of effort expended on learning and learner success (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005, Dörnyei

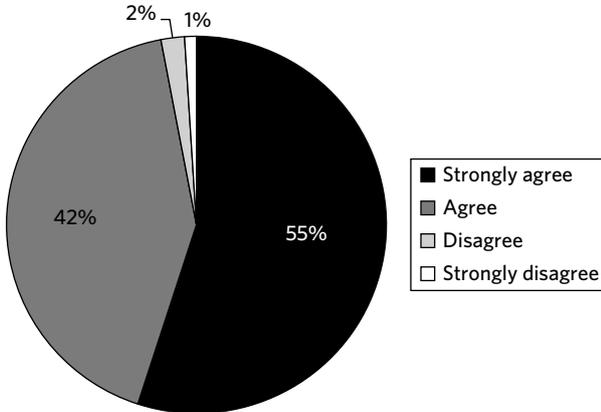
2003, Horwitz 2001). Learner self-efficacy and teacher beliefs in learners' capacity to learn can also influence or reinforce learner attitudes towards a language (Bandura 1977, Mills, Pajares and Herron 2006, Multon, Brown and Lent 1991). Therefore, the value placed on learning English by the teachers and attitudes towards learning English is an important construct to evaluate. We look in turn at teachers' perceptions of the need to learn English in general and for their work, their confidence in learning English and their attitude towards the D-RASATI 2 project.

### *The importance of studying English*

The value placed on an activity such as language learning is most strongly associated with the willingness to engage

in an activity and persist with it even when it becomes difficult (Csizér and Dörnyei 2005, Wigfield and Eccles 2000). The vast majority of teachers strongly agreed that it is important to learn English (see Figure 2), with only 3% disagreeing with this statement.

**Figure 2: Teachers: 'Learning English is important to me'**



In the questionnaires, several teachers left comments about the value of learning English for themselves and for their students, for example: 'Since the main common language in the world is English, and nowadays we are interacting with multinationalities so it is a must that we should improve English language.'

As a key aspect of the programme is to improve English language levels of teachers in order to improve student learning outcomes, we were interested in determining the extent to which teachers felt the need to improve their English for their job. Over 90% of respondents agreed with this statement, with responses evenly split between 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. Teachers' comments in the questionnaire reinforce this viewpoint:

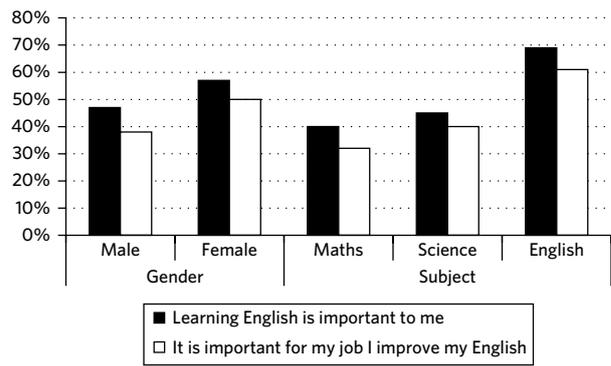
Teaching in English is necessary especially for those who teach subjects in English or the English language since students are going to have their certificate in the official exams in English in these subjects not in Arabic.

Teaching in English is a must in the official schools. Students should use the English language not only in the English periods.

Further analysis of responses to both statements above by subject specialism and gender resulted in statistically significant differences. English teachers and females were more likely to strongly agree that learning English is important to them and that it is important to their job, than teachers of maths and science, and males ( $p < .001$ ) (see Figure 3).

Although these variables are confounded in the data, it is not surprising that English teachers are more likely to recognise the importance of the language for their job than teachers of other subjects. However, some of the comments left by mathematics teachers suggest that they do not recognise the role of language in maths education, which may be a cause for concern:

**Figure 3: The importance of English learning by gender and subject specialism (strongly agree)**



As a math teacher, I don't need all these English hours.

For Mathematics, English is not so important because there are few words to use.

I don't need high level in English language because I'm teaching mathematics and chemistry that don't need so much English skills.

A common misconception is that maths is the domain of numbers and not language but language is crucial in the development of new knowledge, whether that is mathematical knowledge or other knowledge, because language is the tool learners use to think about a subject and talk about their thinking (Barwell no date). Without strong English language skills, learners learning mathematics through the medium of English will be limited to the lower-level cognitive processes of memorising rules and processes rather than engaging in higher-level processing such as mathematical thinking which encourages learners to pose and solve mathematical problems (Devlin 2012). It should be noted that several of the maths teachers did make this exact point but it may be that they are in the minority:

Mathematics contains complex problems especially in probability that need to know English very well. So I insist in teaching my students in English.

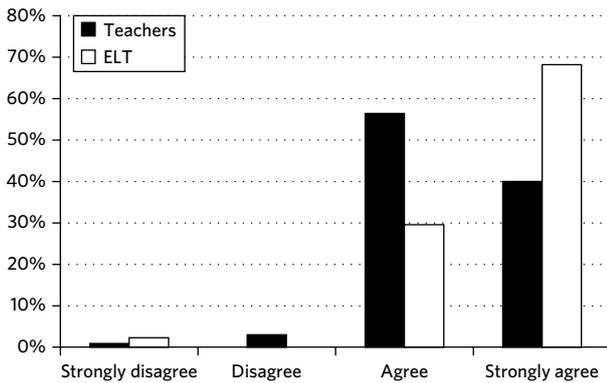
It's essential to learn English well, especially for problem solving in math.

It is important for the MEHE to combat the view that language does not play a role in maths and science instruction. The teachers who already recognise the importance of language in these subject areas may be a useful resource in changing the minds of their colleagues.

### Confidence in English language learning

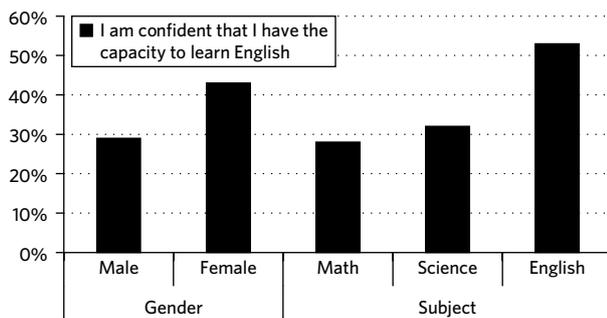
Teachers' confidence in their ability to learn English was also investigated in the questionnaires as this can influence their level of engagement and learning outcomes (Horwitz 2001, Mills et al 2006, Multon et al 1991). Figure 4 shows that teachers agreed that they are confident in their capacity to learn English (96%); however, the ELTs were more likely to strongly agree (68%) than the teachers (40%) ( $p < .001$ ).

**Figure 4: Confidence in teachers' capacity to learn English according to teachers and ELTs**



Again, significant differences were found when comparing responses by gender and subject specialism, with females and English teachers more likely to strongly agree that they are confident in their English language learning ability compared to males or teachers of maths or science ( $p < .001$ ) (see Figure 5).

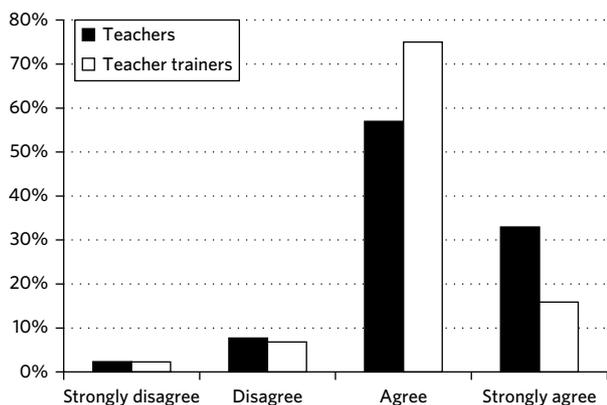
**Figure 5: Confidence in ability to learn English by gender and subject specialism (strongly agree)**



**Attitude towards the D-RASATI 2 project**

Both teachers (90%) and ELTs (91%) agreed that course participants were pleased to be able to study English as part of this project (see Figure 6). However, maths and science teachers and males were less likely to strongly agree with this statement ( $p < .001$ ), which is likely linked to the point raised above; the male teachers are predominantly maths teachers, who do not necessarily see the relevance of English for their work.

**Figure 6: Teachers are pleased to be able to study English as part of the D-RASATI 2 project**



Comments left by ELTs support the view that teachers were pleased with the project:

The teachers have shown willingness and enthusiasm to learn.

My teachers were eager to learn and improve their English skills.

The majority of the teachers I taught seemed to be pleased about learning.

However, in contrast to these positive responses, ELTs did also note that some participants had conflicting attitudes about learning English that arose from the fact that the courses were mandatory. The following quote from an ELT is an example of this:

... after they started the training course they became more motivated. But the major problem is that they felt obliged to take the training.

During the interviews with key focal persons, the issue of the mandatory nature of the courses and teachers' reaction to this was discussed. It was noted that although there were no serious penalties for not attending or not doing well on the language courses, some teachers were concerned at the beginning about potentially negative consequences. However, these views seemed to abate as the courses progressed. In some cases, there was very little time between when teachers were invited to attend the English courses and the start of them, which may not have given teachers enough time to digest and come to terms with the MEHE request.

**General notes on teacher attitudes**

Teachers generally reported positive attitudes towards English learning and recognised that English is important to their job and belief in their own capacity to learn English, which was also evidenced by the ELTs. However, the data suggests that teachers of maths and science, who also tended to be male, were less positive about learning English and did not see the relevance of English to maths instruction in particular. There is a common misconception that maths instruction does not require language skills because of the focus on numbers but research suggests that language ability does play an important part in learning maths (Linneweber-Lammerskitten 2012). Indeed, one of the key focal persons pointed out that the underperformance of Lebanese learners on international maths benchmarking tests was attributed to language ability rather than maths ability. Therefore, maths teachers who are teaching through the medium of English may need further information on the importance of language in learning maths in order to change their attitudes towards English language learning.

Although there was general consensus that teachers were pleased to be studying English as part of the D-RASATI 2 project, concerns were raised about the mandatory nature of the courses. Some of the ambivalence which was expressed towards the courses may have arisen from a lack of timely information about them which, in some cases, involved

teachers being invited to attend with very little notice. In addition, teachers may have had fears about possible negative consequences if they did not do well. As with any large-scale reform initiative, there will always be some unease generated because of uncertainty or feelings that control over their work-life balance is being lost. However, the success of such an initiative will depend greatly on teachers' willingness and ability to implement or mediate change (Fullan 2001). It is important, therefore, that teachers understand why they are being asked to improve their English language skills (particularly for maths and science teachers), what, if any, consequences there are if they are unable to do so, and the benefits of making these changes.

### Course implementation

A key aspect of the project was to provide training to teachers across Lebanon ensuring equal access to quality English language instruction. D-RASATI 2, thus, had the challenge of meeting the needs of over 2,500 teachers located throughout the country. In response to this, D-RASATI 2 offered 3-hour courses held twice a week and during the summer these courses were four days per week in 17 locations. A major logistical challenge was the scheduling of these courses. Because the courses were mandatory, it was important to offer lessons at convenient times and locations which were accessible for most teachers. Therefore, teachers were asked about their views on the course placement, scheduling and attendance.

### Course placement

As mentioned previously, over 4,000 permanent and contractual public sector teachers were assessed using *BULATS* in order to determine training needs for teachers teaching English as a first or second language or using English as the medium of instruction for science and maths. The test data was then used to place teachers in the English language courses. Teachers and ELTs were asked about the extent to which they felt they were placed into the appropriate level and 87% of teachers and 93% of ELTs felt that placement was accurate.

### Course scheduling

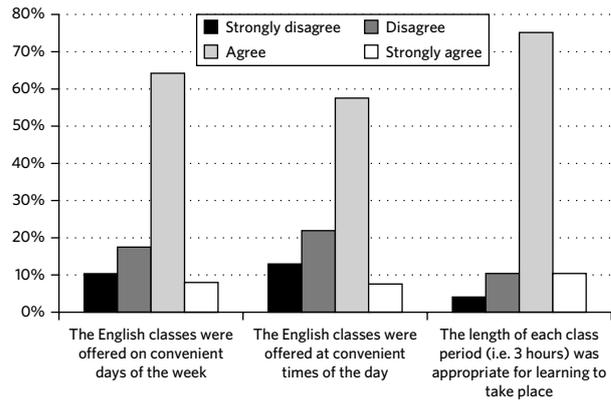
As can be seen from Figure 7, the majority of teachers generally agreed that the language courses were offered on convenient days of the week, times of the day and that the length of each class period was appropriate.

Course scheduling, however, elicited the largest number of negative comments from teachers, particularly the question concerning the timing of the course with 35% of teachers disagreeing that it was convenient. The main complaints were related to issues of childcare, having to study after a long day of teaching and courses taking place during non-work hours. The following comments are reflective of the vast majority of comments left:

Because we have teaching hours in the morning and we come tired to class. Also, we have other responsibilities in life.

The government didn't reduce our teaching hours.

Figure 7: Teacher attitudes to course scheduling



The session hours should be part of my employment hours (not extra hours).

Trainers also noted that the scheduling of the courses may have affected teachers' ability to fully engage in the content. They commented that teachers:

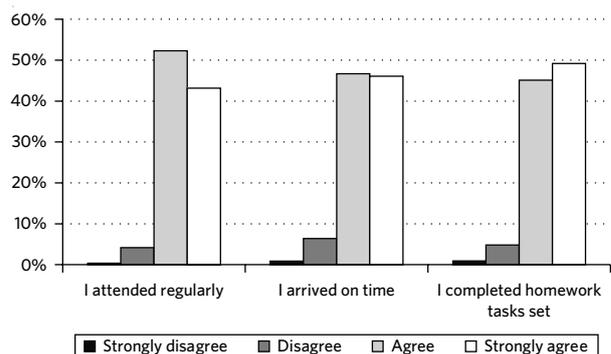
- would like to study but are often overwhelmed by work and personal responsibilities
- found that their numerous responsibilities prevented them from taking advantage of the course to the full.

The key focal persons were aware of this issue and noted that D-RASATI 2, under the guidance of MEHE, changed course times in some cases so that only 50% of the course was outside school hours. Although teachers seemed to indicate a preference for morning lessons, it may have been difficult for school principals to find replacements to cover lessons while the teachers were taking the language courses. As the majority of teachers in this project were female, course scheduling is an important consideration because females still tend to have primary responsibility for childcare in Lebanon and there are limited public facilities or subsidies to assist in finding alternative childcare (World Economic Forum 2013).

### Course attendance and homework

Despite the fact that teachers commented that they were unhappy with the courses being scheduled during non-work hours, the majority of teachers agreed that they attended their courses regularly, arrived on time and completed their homework (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Attendance and homework completion according to teachers



However, some teachers did comment that it was a challenge to complete homework and practise what they learned, which again was related to course scheduling taking place partially during non-work hours:

... to improve my language skills, I needed time to review the tasks and the information given during the course, but unfortunately I did not have time to do that, which stood as an obstacle.

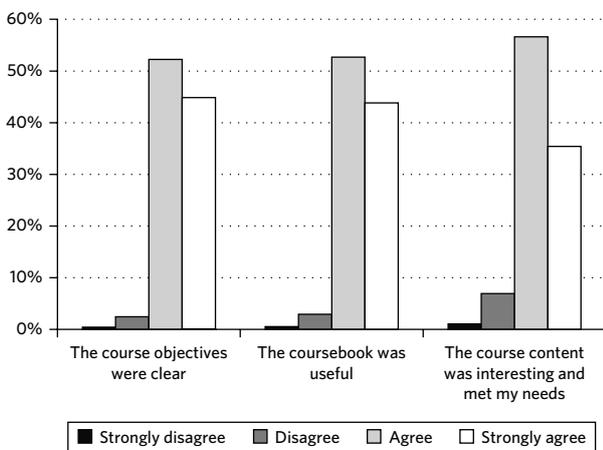
The ministry of education should give less teaching hours for all the teachers who are attending these courses. We enjoyed the course a lot but there was not enough time to study and practice.

Male teachers and science teachers were more likely to disagree that they attended regularly ( $p < .005$ ) and arrived on time ( $p < .001$ ) than female teachers and English teachers. This is not particularly surprising considering they had previously indicated that they did not understand the relevance of the course to their work and were more likely to indicate that they were less pleased about studying English as part of this project.

**Course objectives and learning materials**

Teachers agreed that they understood the course objectives, the coursebook was useful and the course content was interesting (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Clarity of course objectives and perceptions of learning materials**



Male teachers and those who teach maths and science were more likely to disagree with these statements ( $p < .001$ ). Comments left in the questionnaire indicate that this may be related to their interest in receiving subject-specific instruction on teaching through the medium of English rather than lessons which focus on language development:

I think for me, as a math teacher, I should take some English course about mathematics and about teaching Mathematic.

The grammar and vocabulary I studied in this course do not help me in the teaching science in fact, they are not related to the topics, we teach in class.

**General notes on attitudes towards the course**

Teachers generally agreed that they were placed into the appropriate level and the course content and learning

materials were appropriate. They were less positive about the scheduling of the courses, in particular the timing of the courses during the day. Many teachers left comments indicating that having English classes outside of work hours disrupted their personal lives; in particular it caused problems for childcare and conflicted with other work obligations. Some teachers and ELTs suggested that teachers were not able to fully engage in the lessons because they were tired from working all day and had little time to do any self-study at home.

With a large female teaching population, the issue of course scheduling is an important consideration as this segment of the population often has increased home responsibilities. Any future courses should ensure that the target population is consulted as far in advance as possible so that there are opportunities to address any concerns raised and there is enough time for participants to make alternative arrangements for childcare. Also, giving teachers some element of choice might reduce negative perceptions of the course caused by its mandatory nature.

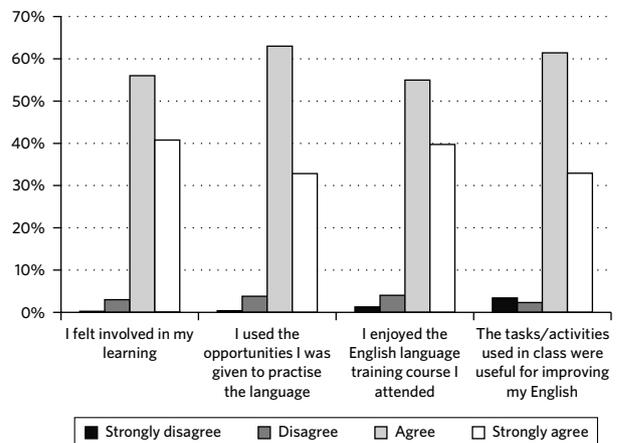
**Lesson effectiveness and teacher engagement**

This section investigates the extent to which teachers were engaged in their lessons and their perceptions of the effectiveness of their lessons. We will start by looking at indicators related to engagement such as attendance, completion of homework and participation in lessons. Then, we will report on teachers' perceptions of the quality of lessons and effectiveness of their ELTs.

**Engagement in lessons**

In order to determine teachers' level of engagement, they were asked about how involved they were in their learning, the extent to which they took advantage of learning opportunities, enjoyed their lessons and found the lesson activities useful. Figure 10 provides an overview of their responses. Although teachers tended to agree with the statements in Figure 10, male teachers and maths teachers were more likely to disagree with them than female teachers and English teachers ( $p < .001$ ).

**Figure 10: Teachers' level of engagement in lessons**



The profile of teachers within the courses was raised by a small number of participants in the questionnaire open

fields. Some teachers felt that having a mixed group in terms of subject specialism within a course may have limited learning or demotivated some teachers, as the following comments indicate:

It would be useful whenever teachers are classified with regard to their certificates and diplomas, as well as the cycles they are teaching.

Some activities were very easy and didn't add anything to me. It was targeting teachers of other subjects like Math . . .

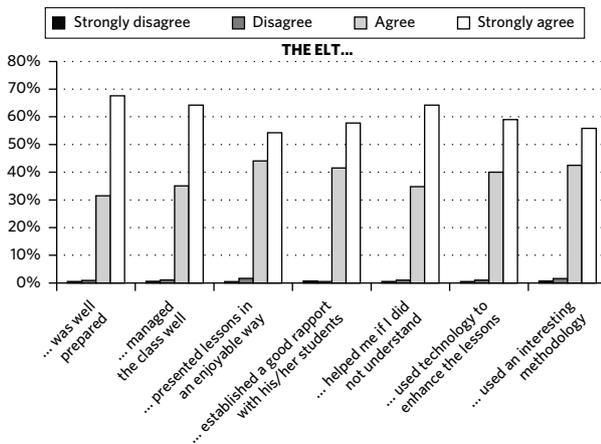
It could be improved if English teachers were placed alone in the training session. English teachers got bored waiting for the other Science teachers to catch up.

Comments left by trainers, however, both supported and refuted this point of view making it difficult to draw any concrete conclusions. In future projects of this nature, consideration of the participant profile within classes may need to be explored further.

**Course delivery: Teaching practices**

Teachers were given a series of statements about the ELTs' teaching practices. These statements were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the course delivery and the quality of teaching. Figure 11 provides an overview of teacher responses.

**Figure 11: Teachers' perception of course delivery**



There was general consensus that course delivery was effective and teachers agreed that their ELTs were skilled teachers. Teacher comments about their ELTs reinforce this perspective:

The trainer was talented as he used a diversity of teaching techniques and he was very patient with us.

The preparation for the workshop was perfect by the trainer, and the explanation was clearly done.

[The course was] enriching, motivating, presented with high professionalism.

You made me love English.

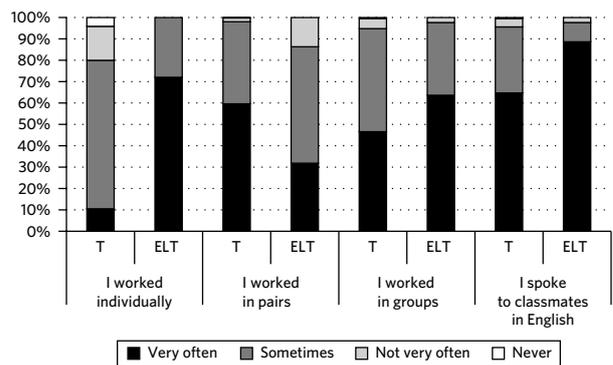
Negative comments about ELTs tended to be very disparate in nature in that they focused on individual course-specific

features such as type of homework or assessments given, the grading of assignments or the focus of the lesson. They were not easily grouped into general categories.

**Course delivery: Interactional patterns**

The language courses were based on a communicative approach to language learning because it is a widely accepted premise both in the theoretical and practical language learning domains that exposure to a foreign language within the learning environment plays a positive role in learning outcomes. The European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) found that greater use of English, by both students and teachers, in the classroom was positively related to language ability (Jones 2013). Therefore, a number of statements were included in the questionnaires to investigate the extent to which learners had opportunities to use English with others and were willing to take advantage of these opportunities. Figure 12 shows teacher (T) and ELT responses to statements about the frequency of different interactional patterns in the classroom and teachers' willingness to speak to others in English.

**Figure 12: How often did the following happen during English lessons?**



As can be seen in Figure 12, teachers reported working in pairs more often than their ELTs whereas ELTs reported that teachers spoke to others in English more often than they reported for themselves ( $p < .001$ ). ELTs indicated that teachers primarily worked individually or in groups. Comments left by teachers were split between those who felt that they had opportunities to speak both to colleagues and native speakers (i.e. the ELTs) and others who felt that there needed to be more opportunities to speak with others:

I was encouraged to speak English since my teacher is foreigner as well as my class mates liked to communicate in English.

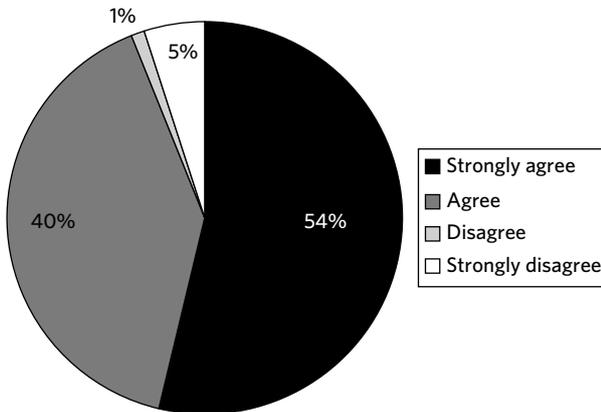
I used English communicate with my friends and have the opportunity to listen to a native speaker.

I think the main problem in learning English is interaction and speaking English. I think this course or maybe this level need more time to improve our speaking.

Turning now to whether teachers enjoyed working with others in their lessons, it is clear from Figure 13 that they did. One of the key focal persons pointed out that an

unintended positive outcome of this project was the fact that teachers from different schools who may not normally come in contact with each other were in the same class, which allowed them to share their teaching experiences. This interaction can create informal opportunities to learn new ideas or methods of teaching as well as build a supportive collegial network.

**Figure 13: Teachers: 'I enjoyed working with other people in my class'**

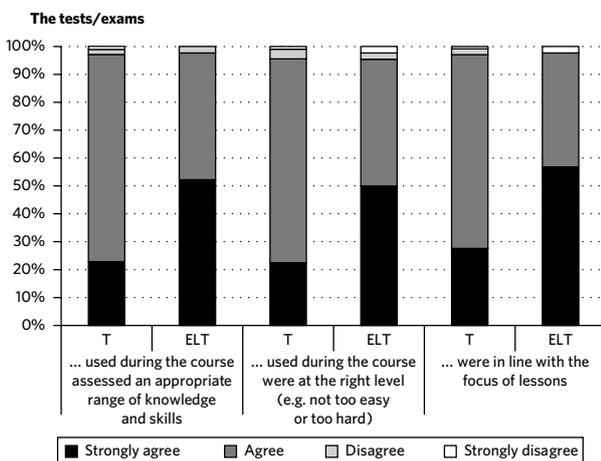


**Course delivery: Assessment**

Assessment has multiple functions in education, including the measurement of achievement and the provision of feedback to learners on their strengths and weaknesses. When assessment practices are linked closely with learning goals, it has the ability to both motivate learners and improve learning (Carless 2007). In general, teachers agreed that the assessment activities used were appropriate, at the right level and in line with lesson aims (see Figure 14). However, they agreed less strongly with these statements than their ELTs ( $p < .001$ ). This is perhaps not surprising because the ELTs were likely involved in the development of some of the assessment tools used within their courses. In the questionnaires, some teachers stated that they were not happy with the grades they received or the number of tests given:

The teacher was very stingy in putting marks.  
I think there were too much Exams more then needed.

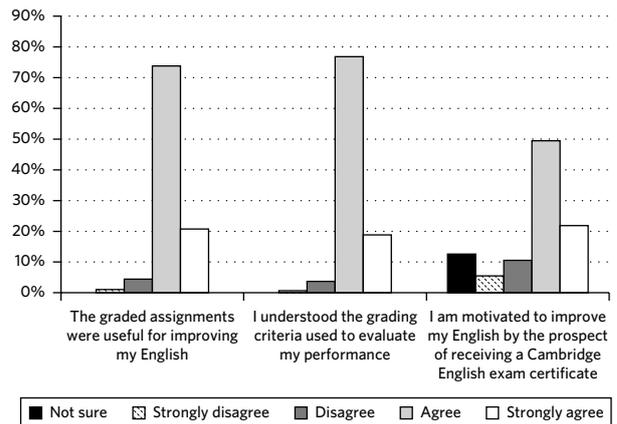
**Figure 14: Appropriacy of assessment**



The majority of teachers agreed that the graded assignments they were given were useful (95%) and that they understood the criteria used to assess them (96%) (see Figure 15). There were mixed views on whether they were motivated to improve by the prospect of receiving a Cambridge English certificate, with English language teachers and those at higher CEFR levels being more interested in receiving a certificate:

It would be so sorrowful if we will not have the opportunity to sit for the CAE exam.

**Figure 15: Impact of assessment**



**General notes on lesson effectiveness and teacher engagement**

Teachers appeared to be engaged in their lessons by attending regularly, completing homework tasks and participating in lessons; however, they did indicate that had the courses been during work hours, they may have been able to take more advantage of the lessons because they would have had more time to study. Teachers reported that the lesson activities were useful and that the ELTs utilised effective teaching practices. Teachers were given opportunities to use English in the class with others and seemed to make use of these opportunities. An important outcome of the communicative approach taken in lessons is that teachers were given opportunities to interact with teachers from other areas, which allowed them to share teaching experiences and understand how teaching is structured in other schools.

Teachers agreed that the assessment practices were effective in that they were useful in helping them improve their English. Teachers of English and teachers with a higher level of English were motivated by the prospect of receiving a Cambridge English certificate.

**Impact of courses**

A main aim of the D-RASATI 2 project is to improve English language levels of both teachers and learners. This section will focus on the extent to which teachers felt their language levels improved and the effect of the course on their pedagogical practice.

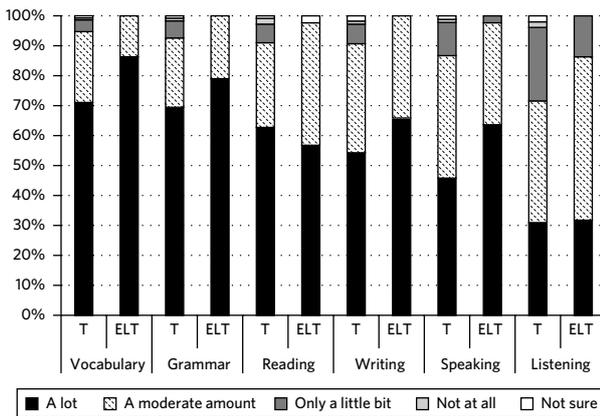
### Skill development in English

Teachers and ELTs were asked whether they thought teachers' English had improved during the course. Figure 16 provides an overview of teacher and ELT responses. As can be seen, both teachers and ELTs reported that the vocabulary and grammar of teachers improved the most while their listening ability improved the least compared to the other skills and systems. Listening was the skill which was identified as the weakest for those teachers who took the *Cambridge English: First* exam, while speaking was the strongest. In the comments left by teachers, they indicated that listening was an area in need of further development, and some teachers mentioned problems with the acoustics of the room and difficulty with the different accents on recordings, which teachers felt limited their ability to improve their listening. The following comments reflect these views:

We need more listening exercise and to listen to English accent.

The course is a great aid concerning reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary where my skills have improved a lot in all these domains. But in listening I still need much more practice.

**Figure 16: Perceived improvement as a result of taking the course (teachers and ELTs)**



### Impact of course on teaching practices

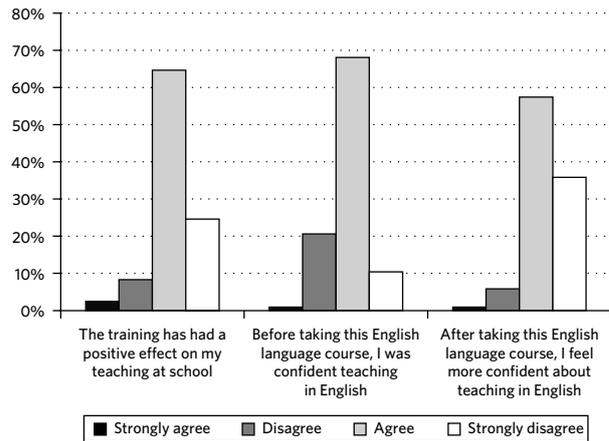
A significant impact of the language training courses was the extent to which they positively influenced teachers' own pedagogical practices in their classrooms. As Figure 17 shows, the teachers agreed that the courses have had a positive effect on their teaching (90%) with English teachers more likely to strongly agree (30%) than all other groups (20% for maths and 21% for science) ( $p < .005$ ).

Teachers themselves commented about the positive influence their ELTs have had on their own teaching as the following comments illustrate:

It [the course] was useful and it improved my English language and provided us with some new technique to apply with our students.

This course has helped me a lot to apply new methods of teaching in my class. What I would like is to get the

**Figure 17: Impact of course on teaching practices and confidence**



chance to observe professional teachers so that we can gain a lot of ways of teaching.

Teachers also agreed that they feel more confident teaching in English as a result of taking this course (93%). Finally, 72%<sup>2</sup> of teachers reported that they would like to continue taking more English language training courses. This is a positive outcome of the project and an indication that despite the scheduling issues and some views that the lessons were not relevant for particular teaching domains, a large number of teachers would like to continue studying.

### General notes on the impact of courses

The language courses appear to have had a positive impact on both teachers' language skills and their pedagogical practices. Although slightly fewer teachers achieved the *Cambridge English: First* certificate than targeted, teachers reported feeling the courses helped them improve their English, in particular their vocabulary and grammar. Teachers felt the courses had the least effect on their listening skills and the exam data suggests this is an area in need of increased focus in any future courses.

One clear impact of the initiative is that the pedagogical practices of the ELTs were adopted by many of the teachers, thus potentially improving the language learning experiences of their pupils. Teachers report that their confidence in teaching English has improved and that they would like to continue studying English, which are also positive outcomes.

### Lessons learned

The D-RASATI 2 project was an ambitious large-scale project aimed at improving teaching and learning in Lebanon. As with any large-scale reform initiative, it can take time for all stakeholder groups to become enthusiastic about engaging in change and for any impact on learner outcomes to become visible. The following section summarises the successes of this project and recommendations for the future.

<sup>2</sup> This question was added to the questionnaire during the last cycle of classes so it was only responded to by 435 teachers.

## Success stories

- Over 2,000 teachers were given English language lessons – over half of all those identified as in need of English language upskilling.
- Many teachers were pleased to be involved in this project and would like to continue studying English.
- Teachers reported that the courses were well designed and the ELTs were effective and skilled teachers.
- Teachers in rural or remote locations throughout the country were given access to English lessons, which was an important aim of this project.
- Teachers reported adopting the teaching practices of their ELTs, which were based on a communicative methodology, which may improve their own instructional quality.
- Teachers reported feeling more confident teaching in English as a result of these language courses.
- The courses provided an opportunity for teachers from different schools to work together and learn from each other.

## Recommendations

- Communicate with stakeholders as early as possible about an initiative and its benefits in order to allow all those involved time to understand the purpose of the project and make any necessary preparations in advance.
- Consider offering some alternative course delivery methods (e.g. blended learning, online delivery) which may reduce issues around scheduling courses outside work hours; however, this may reduce the contact between teachers which was a positive feature of this project.
- Prioritise listening in future courses aimed at a similar cohort as this was identified as a weaker skill.
- Actively combat misconceptions about the role of language in maths and science education to ensure that these teachers recognise the usefulness of language courses.
- Consider adding a methodological component to future courses particularly for maths and science teachers, which may strengthen the link between these courses and teachers' own classes.

Overall, for English teachers, the courses were relevant for both their lesson content and teaching methods. The comments left by maths and science teachers suggest that they did not necessarily see the relevance of either the content or methods but they did seem to indicate that they would like to take courses which focused on teaching maths or sciences through the medium of English. Perhaps by explicitly adding a methodological component to the courses, both groups may benefit even more; for example,

two lessons a week on English language learning and one lesson a week on methods to teach in English. It is clear that greater promotion and understanding of methodology amongst teachers is required.

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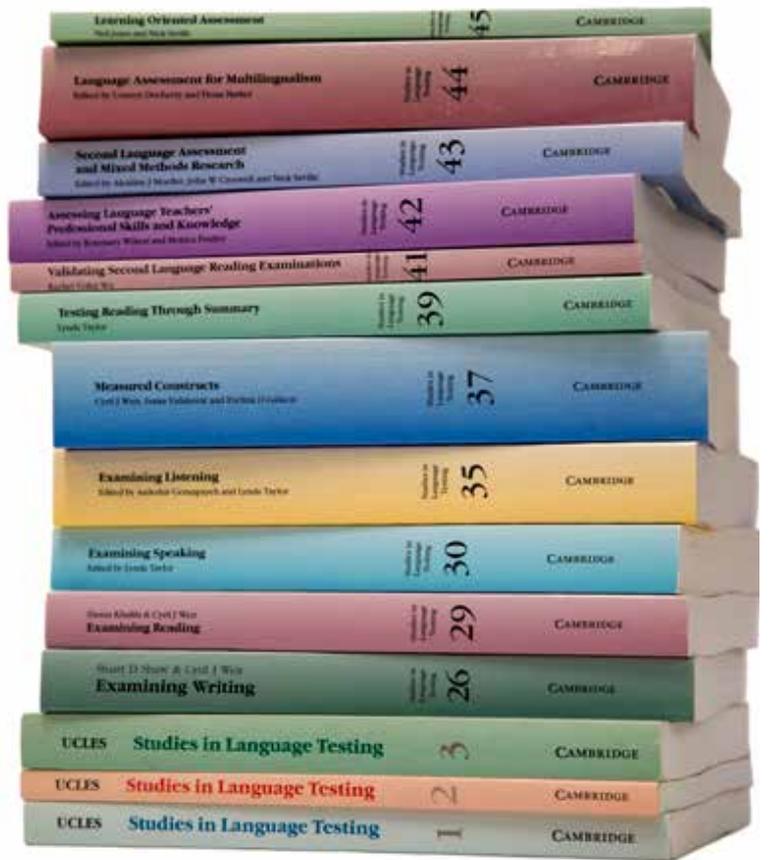
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