

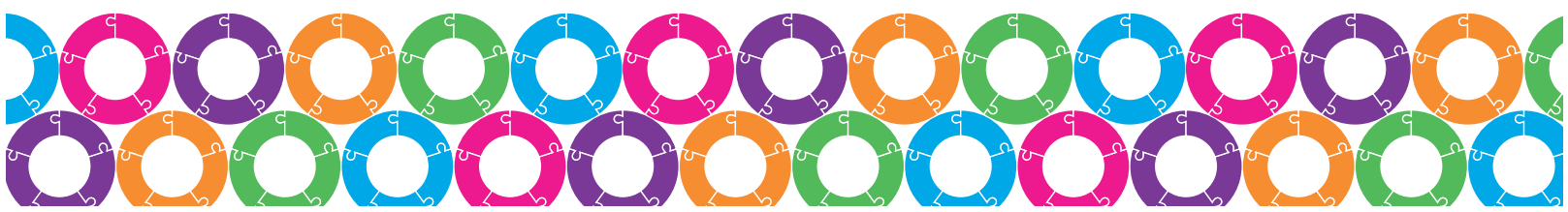


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ENGLISH IMPACT

An Evaluation of English Language Capability
Sri Lanka.
February 2018





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Elizabeth Shepherd and Victoria Ainsworth

British Council



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FOREWORD

Gill Caldicott

Country Director, British Council, Sri Lanka

The English Impact Survey, which evaluates English language capability at the secondary school level, makes a significant contribution to the current debate on the state of English proficiency in Sri Lanka. The Government is rightly concerned about the levels of English of students leaving the school system, whether to enter further and higher education or to join the workforce. This research has shown that the sampled students, aged just over 15 years, are performing in English at the relatively low levels of A1 and A2 CEFR, reinforcing the findings of the Government's own research and analysis. In the medium to longer term, if not addressed, this could adversely affect Sri Lanka's success in developing the economy, and its ability to respond to international trade and tourism opportunities.

Fortunately, the time is right and the opportunities for reform and improvement at a systemic level are forthcoming. To be effective, this should include: the development of the teaching of English, of curriculum, methodology and examining of English; providing opportunities for teachers to improve their own English as well as use relevant and up-to-date methodology; the engagement of Sri Lankan industry and commerce in determining the level and nature of language proficiency that is needed; and, not least, the ability to tap into the innate motivation that students have shown for learning English – a very positive outcome of the research.

Sri Lanka is not alone in facing these challenges. In the global context, issues like these are becoming increasingly important as English as a lingua franca continues to grow across the world. The British Council remains committed to supporting the growth of English as a medium for international communication and a route to better life opportunities, respecting always the local culture and traditions, and the role of local languages. Responding to our Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka, we are working through the National Colleges of Education to set up a cadre of skilled master trainers who will work with teachers across the country to improve their pedagogical approaches. In addition, I am pleased to note both private and corporate funding for improving the language level and the methodology of English teachers. It is through such initiatives, and a sustained effort over the medium term on the part of the education community in Sri Lanka, that significant change can be achieved.

Barry O'Sullivan

Head of Assessment Research and Development, British Council

English Impact, perhaps the British Council's most ambitious language-related research undertaking to date, has the capacity to offer ministries of education an accurate and objective diagnostic of the language capability of their country, region or city. This methodology is particularly powerful as it is based on expert statistical design and analysis combined with contextually appropriate interpretation of data that is a precise representation of the general population for the age-group examined.

We have learned so much in the process of designing and delivering this project that it is clearly impossible to highlight all. The sampling work undertaken with Martin Murphy and his team from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is the single exception. Their professionalism helped to take our vision to a new and elevated level. Their clear and thoughtful consideration of how comparison units should be defined and how to ensure that the final test population was truly representative brought significant challenges, but also significant improvement to our understanding of the processes involved in complex sampling. The results described in this report are testament to the impact that Martin's thinking has had on our work.

The reality of delivering English Impact was a challenge that would stretch the project team to its limits. In fact, without the key players who undertook the research design and delivery, it is highly unlikely that I would be writing this forward.

We were incredibly lucky to work with exceptional local British Council and Ministry teams in Sri Lanka who did a great deal to ensure the success of the data collection. The determination of these two teams to deliver the project to the highest possible level of quality was critical to its eventual success.

I must confess to feeling great pride in the completion of the English Impact project in Sri Lanka. This report demonstrates the highest level of professionalism and will come to be recognised as a major achievement both within the British Council and in the world of English language education and policy. I expect that it will help the Ministry to continue to conceive and pursue successful policies for many years to come.

Martin Murphy

Senior Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research

At the heart of all good educational policy and practice are teachers, schools, and school systems working to improve the learning outcomes of students. Every day educators and policymakers globally are striving to achieve this goal in very different circumstances.

Learning from experience is an established method of improving performance. I believe all good teachers learn from their colleagues as all good schools share their experiences with other schools within their system. The same can be said for developing policies and practice at the system level. This is where English Impact aims to contribute high quality international comparative outcomes data on English language learning for this purpose.

Education systems are complex. They are shaped by many factors such as geographic location and social and economic background. By mapping the British Council's Aptis assessment outcomes onto a common population framework and by quantifying national and regional variations against that international framework, English Impact aims to identify educational policies and practices associated with the successful teaching and learning of English.

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) has thoroughly enjoyed its collaboration with the British Council in this endeavour, helping to bring to English Impact the same methodologies underlying major international surveys, such as the Trends in International

Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), in the development of this population framework, sampling, weighting and variance estimation.

ACER congratulates the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka and the British Council team for their very successful implementation of English Impact. The quality of the survey implementation – evidenced by the very high rates of participation and coverage, and levels of precision that meet or exceed the standards of TIMSS or PISA – should give every confidence to readers of this report, and those keen to learn from Sri Lanka's experiences in the increasingly important field of English language teaching and learning.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Dan Elsworth	Jermaine Prince
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

English Impact aims to provide robust policy-relevant data evidencing English language capability in Sri Lanka

English Impact aims to assess capability by measuring the current ability of a targeted sample of the school population from the Sri Lanka government sector using an English language assessment. It also aims to assess future potential of learners through an in-depth analysis of students' language learning opportunities in and outside the classroom, language learning motivations and socio-economic background.

To ensure that the data collected by English Impact Sri Lanka can be used to inform and support education system and policy development, the British Council worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Education tailoring the research to meet local needs.

This research is underpinned by the British Council's Royal Charter and charitable objective to develop a wider knowledge of the English language and it looks to build upon the organisation's rich heritage of global English language research.

A pioneer of the study of English language, the British Council has significant experience contributing analysis and insight, while advancing knowledge across the field. While previous research has explored and expanded existing understanding of how growth in the use of the English language could shape the world economy, English Impact creates new baseline data to measure levels of English language capability.

The research was carried out by the British Council, with contributions from the Australian

Council for Educational Research and the University of Bath. In 2016-17, it was delivered/implemented within four regional and national level education systems: Sri Lanka; Bangladesh; the Community of Madrid in Spain; and the Metropolitan District of Bogotá in Colombia.

English Impact in Sri Lanka

- English Impact employs a two-stage cluster sample design used by other recognised large-scale international surveys, sampling schools at the first stage and students at the second stage.
- 150 government-funded schools and 1,734 students were sampled for English Impact 2016–17, with 148 schools and 1,437 students participating following exclusions, student withdrawal from school or absence.
- Students were sampled from Grade 11 in compulsory secondary education. This grade represents 10 years of schooling, counting from the first year of International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Level 1, with a mean age at the time of testing of at least 15 years and six months.
- Students sampled were studying English as part of their studies at this grade level. A minimum of 90 minutes of formal English study per week as part of the school program was required for eligibility in the target population.
- Students completed the British Council's Aptis for Teens English Language assessment, testing reading, writing, speaking, listening, and grammar and vocabulary.

- A questionnaire comprising 53 items, delivered in Tamil and Sinhalese, gathered opinions and information from students on their school and language learning backgrounds, their language learning motivations and socio-economic status.

Key findings

- Overall school and student participation in Sri Lanka met the English Impact international participation standard of at least 85 per cent of sampled students in 85 per cent of sampled schools.
- Of the participating students, 49 per cent started learning English in pre-school or first grade.
- In their current grade, 52 per cent of participating students chose to study English at school, while it was a compulsory school subject for 41 per cent. More than half of participating students, 51 per cent, spent at least three hours a week studying English.
- Of the students who interact with the Internet and computer games, around 87 per cent reported this to be primarily using an English-language medium.
- Over half of the participating population, 58 per cent, achieved A1 CEFR level in the English language assessment, with almost 30 per cent achieving A2 level.
- The skill of listening achieved the highest mean scale score of 23.6. Almost 40 per cent of students achieved B1 level, while 48 per cent achieved at A2 level.
- Reading achieved the second highest mean scale score of 14.92. Just over 56 per cent of students achieved A2 level on the CEFR.
- Participating students achieved their lowest performance scores for the productive skills. Speaking skills had the lowest mean scale score with 4.91, followed by writing skills, with 8.34.
- Female students performed better than male students across all skills.
- Female students reported a higher level of confidence in their ability to learn English and more motivation to learn English, than male students. However, positive relationships between proficiency and all motivational variables were more pronounced among male students than female students.
- There are clear effects of socio-economic status on language learning motivation, with students from more advantaged backgrounds reporting higher motivation in all examined areas than their peers from less advantaged families.

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