

ADAPTIVE ENGLISH EVALUATION IN THE URUGUAYAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Second and Foreign Languages Department, CEIP

Ceibal English Programme, Plan Ceibal

Monitoring and Evaluation Department, Plan Ceibal

Research, Evaluation and Statistics Unit, CODICEN

British Council

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1. Introduction, General issues

The Ceibal English programme from Plan Ceibal, the Second and Foreign Languages Department from CEIP, the Research, Evaluation and Statistics Unit from CODICEN, the Monitoring and Evaluation Department from Plan Ceibal, the British Council, together with specialized technicians, put forward an assessment of learning test for English language for the children that study English in Primary Education.

The evaluation was aimed at all students from 4th to 6th who learn English in a face-to-face modality (Programme from the Second Languages Department) or via videoconferencing (Plan Ceibal English). The test items were designed by a specialised unit from the British Council in agreement with the levels from the Common European Framework of Reference for the teaching and learning of Foreign Languages. Following this framework, the Second Languages Department and Ceibal English defined the different levels that students can achieve in the test in the different components. These levels are presented in an annex at the end of the document ordered from lowest to highest. The test items were calibrated in a representative sample of schools. The highest expected level in the assessed population is A2+, which corresponds to an advanced beginner (elementary¹).

The test was applied between 16th and 27th November, 2015 and it was adaptive in nature, that is to say, it adjusts the questions to the level of the child that is answering. This implies that the questions will be harder or easier depending on the ones given by the child. An adaptive evaluation is a very useful tool since it allows the assessment of students who have potentially varying degrees of language development.

The evaluation was carried out online using the SEA platform. The test included three components. The first component included an adaptive test of three areas: *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar*. The second component, also of an adaptive nature, evaluated *Listening skills*. Finally, the third

¹ Translator's note

component evaluated *Written production* through an open-ended task. Two of these components had been previously assessed in 2014: *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar* and *Writing*. In 2015, *Listening* was included for the first time.

When the test was over, each student was asked whether they studied English outside of the school at an institute or with a private tutor.

2. Evaluation objectives

The main objectives of the evaluation are the following:

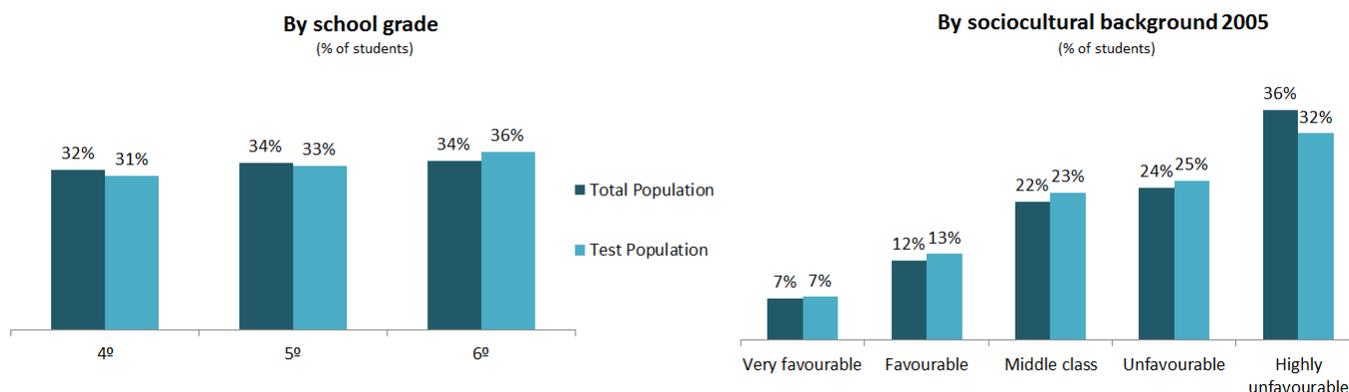
- To obtain data about the English language knowledge achieved by children in 4th, 5th and 6th in both English teaching modalities (face-to-face and via videoconferencing).
- To follow up on the evaluation carried out in 2014 and identify inter-annual improvements in their learning process.
- To inform Secondary Education about the levels achieved by the students who finish Primary in order to contribute to the English language learning throughout their educational path.

3. English teaching coverage and evaluation coverage

In 2015, English teaching was extended to 87% of the groups in 4th, 5th and 6th in urban schools, reaching 106105 students, of which 77068 (73%) take part in English via videoconferencing (Ceibal English) meanwhile 29037 (27%) take part in the face-to-face programme (Second Languages Department).

Regarding evaluation coverage, the test was taken by 62% of the students who learn English in Primary (65699 students). Even though coverage was not universal, the responses were balanced, that is to say, there is no bias in the responses by sociocultural background or school grade. The following charts compare the tested population distribution compared with the total population of students that learn English in Primary.

Comparison of distribution of students in total population and test population



4. Evaluation design

The test items were designed by a specialised unit from the British Council and calibrated in a representative sample of schools.

The application of the different test components was organised in such a way that each student began with the *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar* adaptive test. In this test, each student could obtain a score from 0 to 1500 marks. This scale was classified into five levels (A0, A1-, A1+, A2-, A2+) related to the performance standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages (see Table 1 Annex 1).

Once this test was finished, students were given the *Listening* adaptive test. In order to answer the *Listening* adaptive test questions, the student had to listen to brief audio files and answer a related question. The scale also went from 0 to 1500 marks, which was classified in three levels (A0, A1, A2) with their corresponding achievement descriptors (see Table 2 Annex 1).

Finally, students were given the *Writing* component. Using an image and a rubric as starting points, each student had to produce a written response. The texts were marked using a five-level marking grid (A0, A1-, A1+, A2-, A2+; see table 3 in Annex 1).

In the case of adaptive tests, the level estimation is given in real time, whereas for the writing test, these were marked by a team of teachers in the month of December 2015.

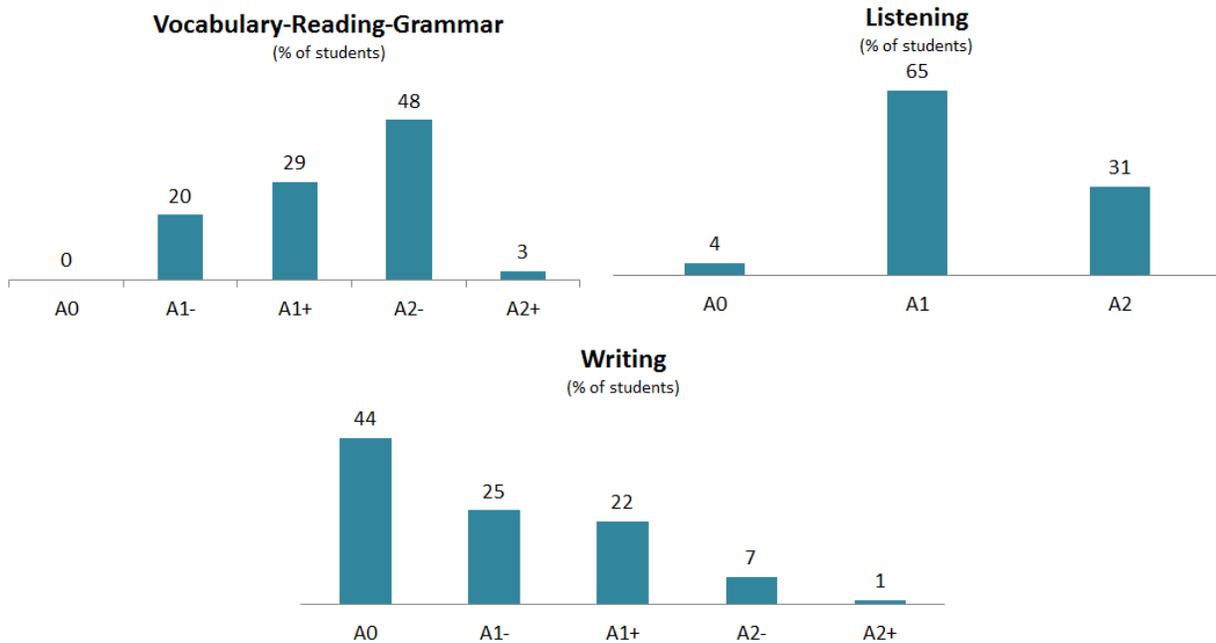
5. Global results

The results obtained in the different components by the assessed students are found in this section.

As shown in the charts below, 49% of the students who completed the test obtained an A1 level in the *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar* test and the remaining 52% obtained an A2 level in these dimensions. In the *Listening* test, 64.5% of the children obtained a score of A1 and 31% of A2.

The results in the *Writing* component show that 44% of the students find themselves in the A0 level (no knowledge of English) and 47% obtained a score of A1.

Levels obtained in the 2015 test

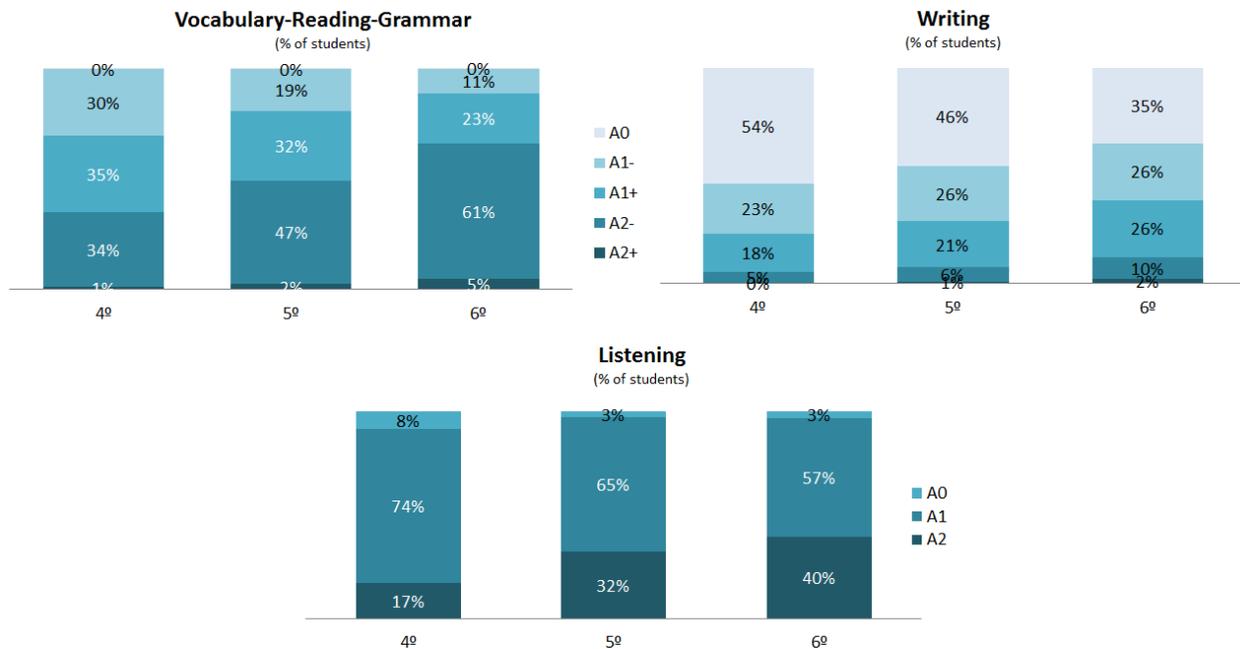


6. Results by school grade, sociocultural background and English studies outside of the school system

- **School grade**

The analysis of results by school grade indicates that student performance improves by grade and this is evident in the three evaluation components. It is necessary to clarify that a higher school grade does not mean higher exposure to the language. For instance, 24% of the students evaluated at 6th grade are covering the first year of exposure to the language, that is to say, they just had one year of English lessons.

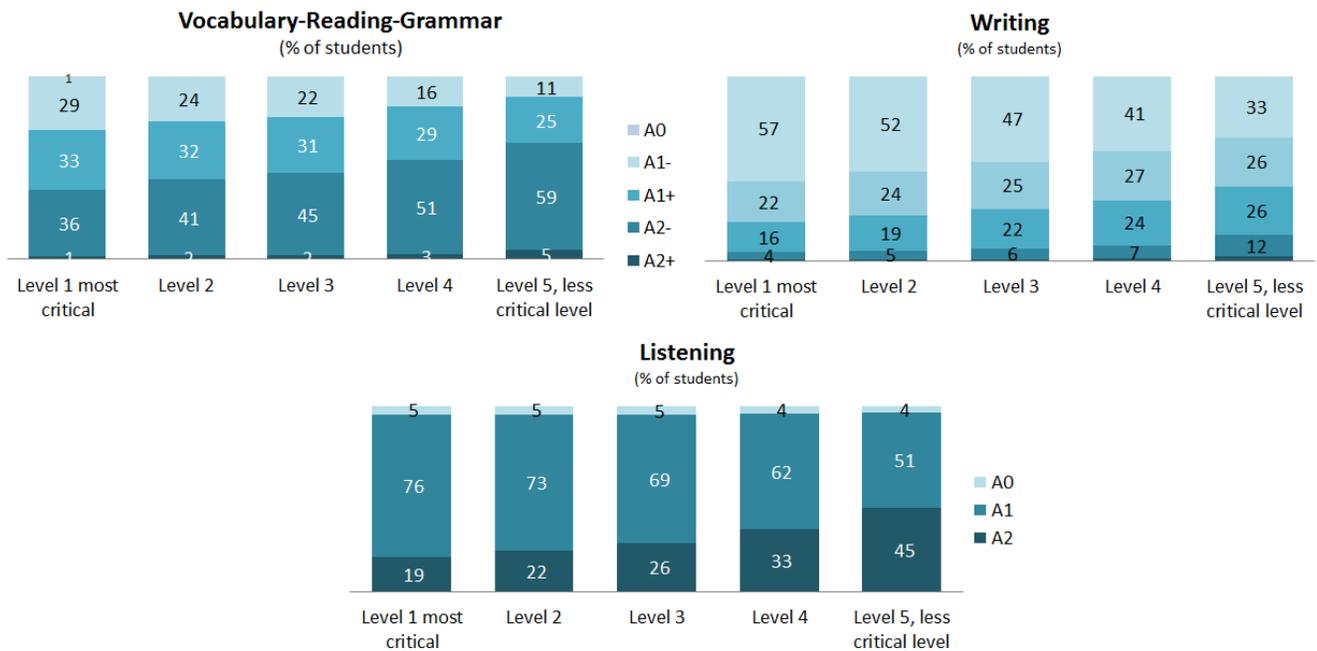
Levels obtained in the test by school grade



- **Sociocultural background**

As the results reported for 2014 and similar to other indicators of educational performance, the difference in results taking sociocultural background are significant. The better results are obtained by the less critical contexts. However, the results obtained indicate that all children even those who belong to the most unfavourable group show levels of English learning.

Levels achieved by sociocultural background 2010

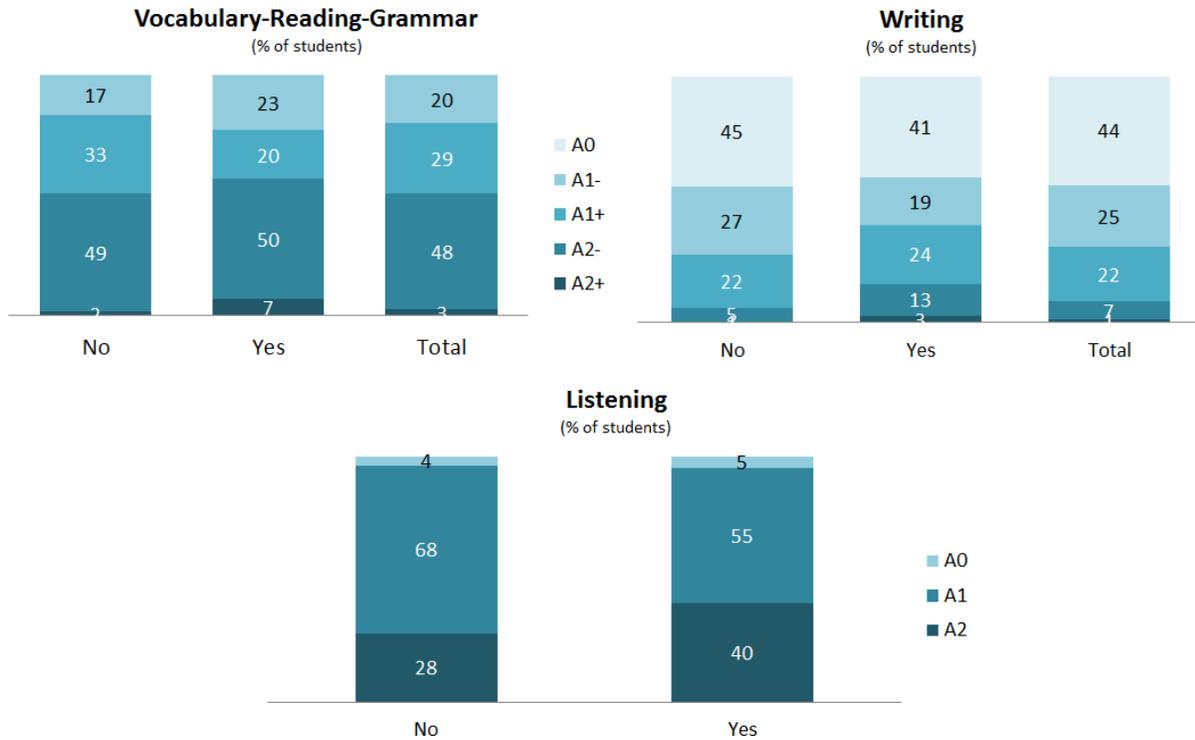


- **English studies outside the school**

A total of 54722 students answer the question regarding English studies outside the school system. Twenty six per cent declared that they do so at an institute or with a private tutor.

These students who study English outside the school system obtained slightly better results in all the evaluated components compared to the students that study English only at the school system.

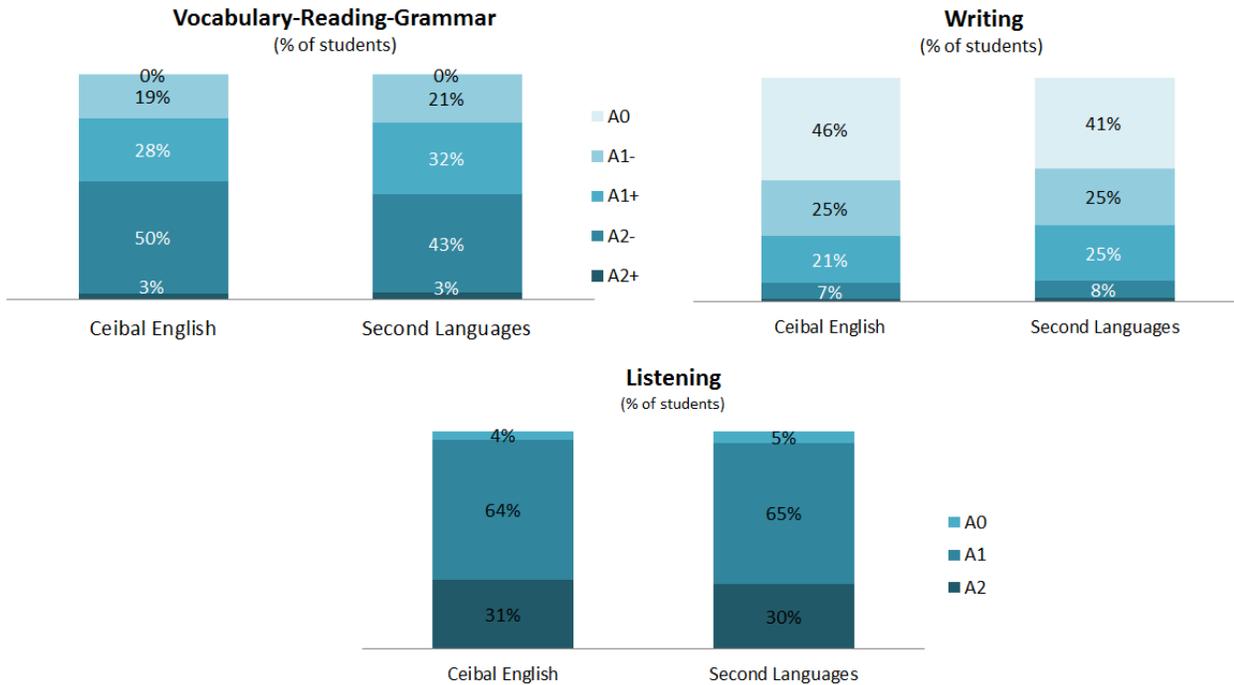
Levels obtained by students who study outside the school system



7. Results according to programme and length of exposure to the language

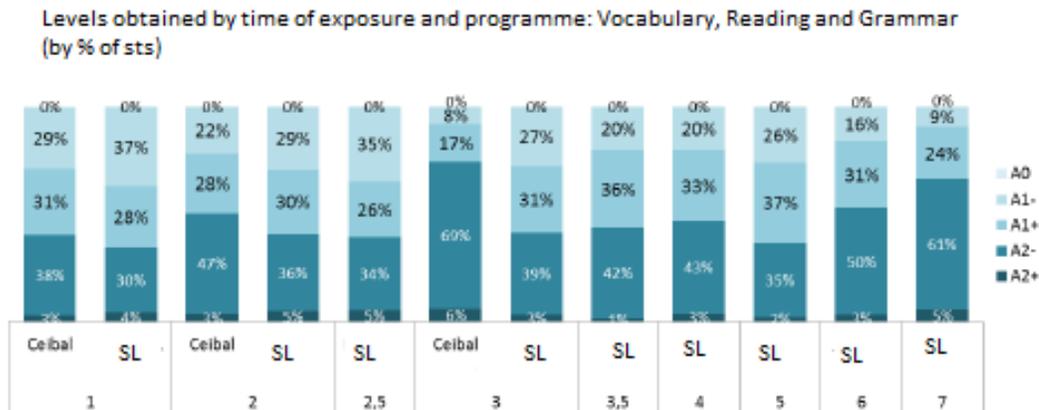
The students participating in both English language learning programmes (Ceibal English and Second Languages) show similar performance in all skills as seen in the charts below. However, the comparison must be down in the light of the differences in the population that these programmes have, which mainly present differences regarding the length of exposure to the language.

Levels obtained by programme

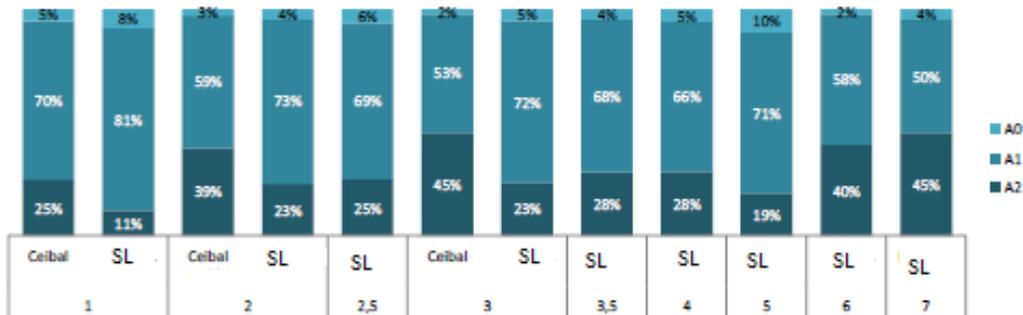


Ceibal English's population has an average exposure of one to three years, meanwhile Second Languages' population has an average exposure of one to seven years.

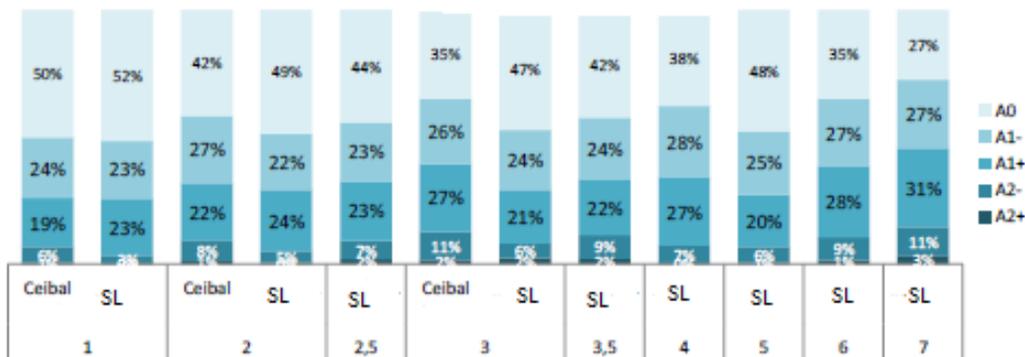
The following graph reflects the results obtained by those students that stated not to study English outside of the school regarding time of exposure and programme.



Levels obtained by sts by time of exposure and programme: Listening
(by % of sts)



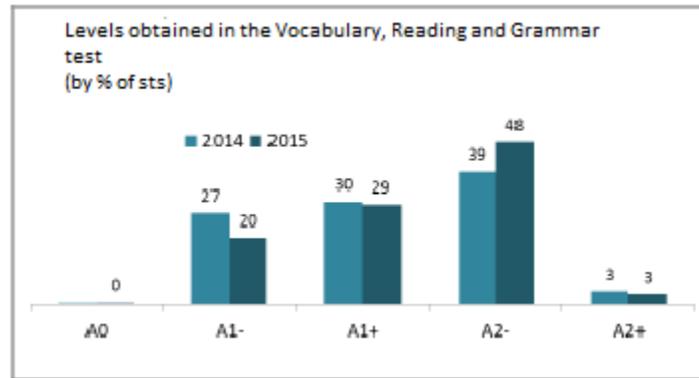
Levels obtained by time of exposure and programme: Writing
(by % of sts)



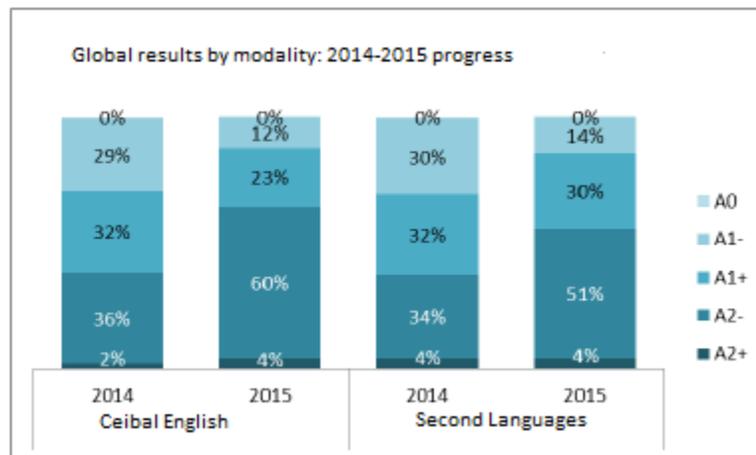
8. Performance Evaluation for the period 2014-2015

The results compared below correspond to the *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar* test in 2014 and 2015 since this component was present in both evaluation instances. Even though writing was assessed in both times (2014 and 2015), an interannual comparison was not carried out given that in 2014 only a sample of the test was marked and in 2015 all Writing tests were marked. For this reason, it is not possible to carry out a follow-up of the students in these two years.

It can be observed that there is slight shift towards the right in the results, which indicates better performance in 2015 compared to 2014, with a 9-point increase in the percentages of students in the A2- level.



If we consider just the students that have taken both tests (21989 students), which allows a more robust analysis of interannual variations, the progress made are even more significant. This is evident in both programmes as shown in the graph below. This trend was evident in all sociocultural contexts.



9. Main conclusions

The adaptive test of English language learning of the Primary students was carried out at the end of 2015 for a second year running. The skills evaluated were Vocabulary, Reading, Grammar, Listening and Writing in a series of three concatenated tests.

The results obtained reflect the achievements made in English language learning in both programmes, face-to-face as well as via videoconferencing, indicating significant interannual improvement in all sociocultural contexts.

The test shows that 66% of the students in 6th grade achieved a A2-level performance in the first test, that is to say, they finish Primary with the given level in Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar, meanwhile 40% achieve a A2 level in Listening at the end of Primary. The weakest results are found in the Writing skill, where only 12% of the students achieved the highest level (A2).

Annex 1

Table 1: Descriptors and levels for the Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar test				
Level	Category	Descriptor	Min	Max
A0	IN PROGRESS	The student is in the process of English language learning and needs more time to initiate his/her progress in the language.	0	288
A1-	BEGINNER LOW	The student shows an initial level of understanding of basic vocabulary in English, of simple sentences and grammatical structures referring to him/herself, his/her family and his/her environment.	289	456
A1+	BEGINNER HIGH	The student shows a consolidated understanding of basic English vocabulary, of simple sentences and grammatical structures referring to him/herself, his/her family, and his/her environment.	457	536
A2-	ELEMENTARY LOW	The student distinguishes and shows understanding of diverse familiar expressions in English, recognises some frequent and essential grammatical structures that refer to him/herself, his/her activities, his/her tastes and his/her environment.	537	923
A2+	ELEMENTARY HIGH	The student distinguishes and shows consolidated understanding of diverse familiar expressions in English and recognises the most frequent and essential grammatical structures that refer to his/herself, his/her activities, his/her tastes and his/her environment.	924	1500

Table 2: Descriptors and levels for the Listening test				
Level	Category	Descriptor	Min	Max
A0	IN PROGRESS	The student needs more exposure time to develop listening skill in English.	0	353
A1	BEGINNER	The student shows an initial ability for listening comprehension in English. He/she is able to understand greetings and very basic dialogues that refer to familiar topics for children of the age. He/she understands basic descriptions of physical environments with reference to colour, size and shape.	354	544
A2	ELEMENTARY	The student shows a listening skill in English of phrases used in everyday situations and of familiar topics for children of their age, such as the weather, clothes and likes. He/she also is able to understand descriptions of physical environments that include geographical and environmental concepts.	545	1500

Table 3: Descriptors and levels for the Writing test			
Level	Category	Descriptor	Score Max
A0	IN PROGRESS	The student is in the process of learning to write in English and requires more time to make progress in the writing skill.	0-1
A1-	BEGINNER LOW	The student can write isolated words in English and is in the process of starting to write sentences related to	2
A1+	BEGINNER HIGH	The student is able to write very basic sentences about very familiar topics. He/she can give very basic information about him/herself and another person.	3
A2-	ELEMENTARY LOW	The student is able to write sentences in English about familiar topics with some details, making proper use of syntax and vocabulary.	4
A2+	ELEMENTARY HIGH	The student is able to write several sentences in English with several details about a variety of familiar topics, making use of accurate syntax and vocabulary. He/she can write using cohesion devices.	5

Annex 2

Level A0 questions (showing no knowledge of English)

	<p>Mira la foto y responde con la opción correcta.</p> <p>¿Qué es esto?</p> <p>A Hamburger</p> <p>B Cabbage</p> <p>C Hot dog</p>
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	<p>Mira la foto y responde con la opción correcta.</p> <p>¿Dónde están?</p> <p>A Hospital</p> <p>B School</p> <p>C Garage</p>
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Level A1 question, Reading component

Lee la frase y completa la oración.
I met Lucy and Tom at school. Now they are _____ and I really like them.
a) my friends b) my siblings c) my parents

Level A1 question, Vocabulary component

	<p>Mira la foto y completa la oración con la opción correcta.</p> <p>I can't move my _____. I hurt myself playing tennis.</p> <p>A arm</p> <p>B knee</p> <p>C leg</p>
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Level A1 question, Grammar component

	<p>Completa la oración con la opción correcta.</p> <p>The elephant is the _____ animal of all</p> <p>A biggest</p> <p>B bigger</p> <p>C big</p>
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Level A2 question, Reading component

<p>Lee la frase y completa la oración.</p>
<p>Yesterday Tom was really happy. It was his birthday and all his_____.</p>
<p>a) friends came to play b) neighbours hated him c) favourite pets escaped</p>

Writing test rubric



CLUES:

- She likes....**
- She doesn't like....**
- She can**
- She can't**
- She's wearing**
- She's got**

Esta es una foto de Mariana. Mira el dibujo y escribe todas las oraciones que puedas sobre ella. Puedes escribir sobre su aspecto físico; la ropa que está vistiendo en la foto; lo que le gusta y no le gusta; lo que puede y no puede hacer; la casa donde vive; etc.

"This is Mariana. She's..."

This is a picture of Mariana. Look at the drawing and write all the sentences you can about her. You can write about the way she looks, the clothes she is wearing in the picture, what she likes and dislikes, what she can or can't do, the house she lives in etc.