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# The impact of Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners and Fun for Starters learning materials in France

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## CONTEXT

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has been working since 2018 with the local city council and mayor's office in the Chantilly municipality in France, to provide an English language assessment and a learning course for young learners. This partnership involved over 300 students from years 4 and 5 (CMI-CM2) in four primary schools of the Chantilly municipality. Cambridge's Fun for Starters course materials were used during their English as a foreign language class, and students had the opportunity to sit the Pre A1 Starters Cambridge English Qualification for young learners at the end of year 5.

## FUN FOR STARTERS

Cambridge English's Fun for Starters is one of several official Cambridge English exam preparation materials designed for the Pre A1 Starters assessment.

The learning materials are structured along 15 themed units, structuring English learning and teaching through familiar and engaging topics such as 'colours' and 'animals'.

Each unit forms the basis of a 75 to 90 minutes lesson. The Home Fun booklet provides guidance for learning at home and vocabulary practice.

The accompanying Fun for Starters Teacher's Book contains pedagogical guidance, practice tests and syllabus coverage indications. The Teacher's Book was exceptionally translated into French based on discussions with the project's stakeholders.

## PRE A1 STARTERS

Pre A1 Starters is aimed at young learners who are just starting to learn English. The assessment is designed to be fun, engaging, colourful, activity-based, reassuring and motivating.

It is a paper-based assessment of four English language skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) firmly grounded in the communicative approach to language learning.

The assessment's length is 45 minutes. Most notably, candidates cannot fail the assessment. Instead, candidates receive a certificate with one to five shields indicating their level of achievement.

## IMPACT EVALUATION STUDY

A study was conducted to evaluate the impact of jointly delivering the Fun for Starters learning materials and the Pre A1 Starters assessment. The study focused on students' learning outcomes, motivation, attitudes and engagement towards learning English, English assessment, as well as the use of English in their lives. Parents' and teachers' perceptions of the assessment were also analysed.

The data for the impact evaluation included student assessment scores, questionnaires distributed to students, teachers and parents, and interviews with teachers and members from the local education community.

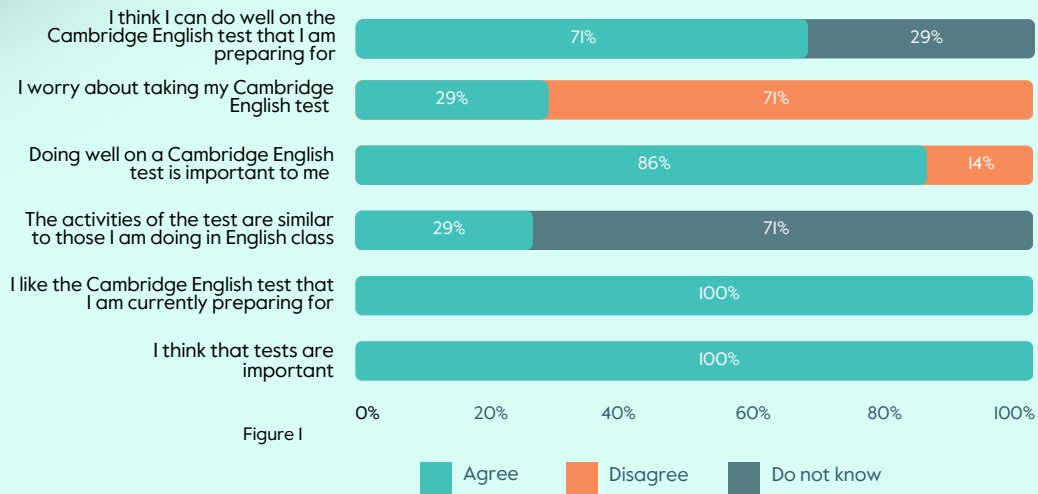
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“What we wanted to do was to make learning English accessible to everyone, but in a way that was different from the traditional teaching that could be given in schools.” Mayor of Chantilly

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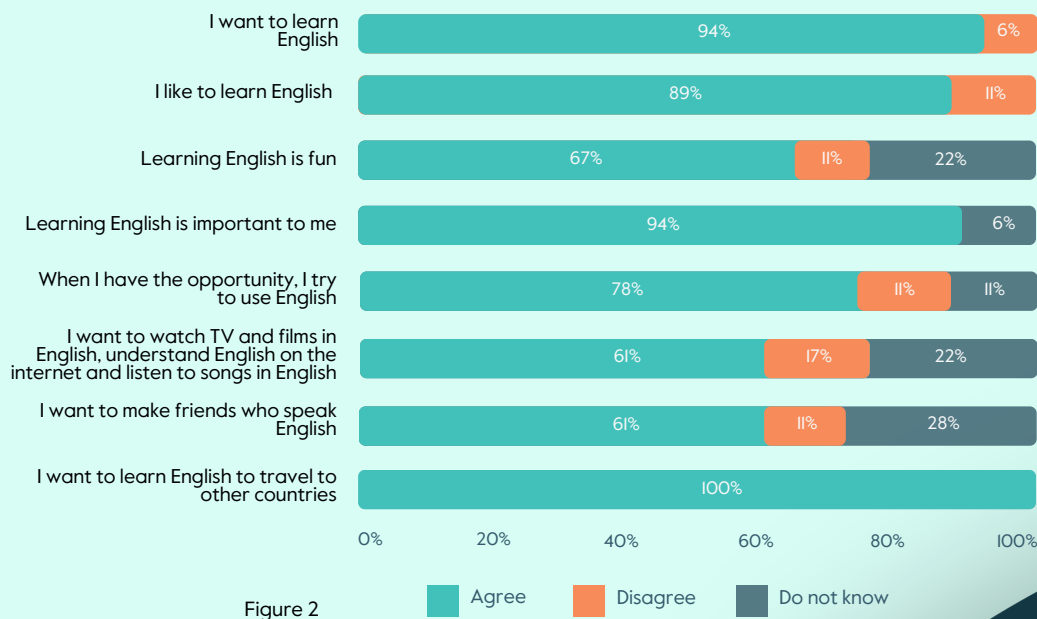
100% of students had a positive outlook on the Cambridge English test they were preparing, and believed tests to be important more generally.

## Student motivation, engagement and attitudes



The data gathered showed that participating students reported strong motivation and positive attitude towards learning English. Ninety five percent reported wanting to learn English, and 89% stating that they enjoy learning English. Ninety five percent of students also stated that learning English was important to them.

Students' engagement with the test was associated with a heightened perception of English as important for future plans of study, travel, socialising, etc.



“[Cambridge] assessments are approachable, because of the shields and the fact everyone gets them. It is a very rational approach. It is not about differentiation or adaptation. No, it is the same exam for everyone. And then we celebrate everyone in the same way regardless of different results.”  
School leader

Teachers reported how the preparation for Pre AI Starters helped build their students' confidence in learning and using English.

## Stakeholders' perceptions of Cambridge learning and assessment

98% of parents and 80% of teachers believed that the introduction of Pre AI Starters would add value to their child's/students' English language education.

Additionally, 80% of teachers believed that the Cambridge English test is an important means of assessing students' level of English language proficiency.

Stakeholders also described their perceptions of Pre AI Starters as a reassuring and confidence-building experience.

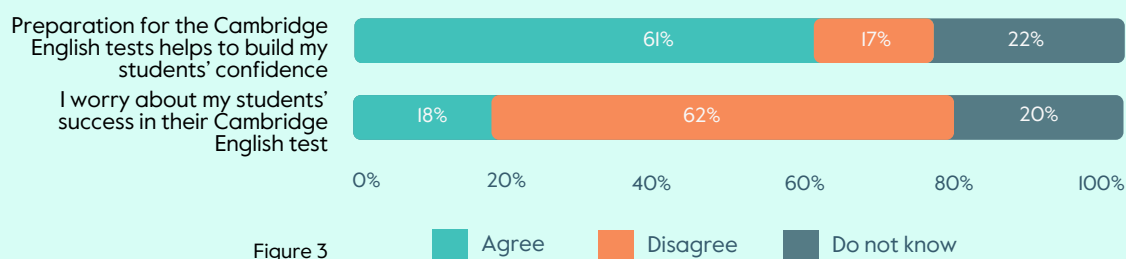


Figure 3

Additionally, stakeholder perceptions confirmed that Fun for Starters and Pre AI Starters were a well integrated learning and assessment package, and fit for purpose. Four out of five surveyed teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I believe my students will be well prepared for their Cambridge English test by using Fun for". Similarly, 81% of surveyed students agreed that the Fun for Starters manual will help them do well in Pre AI Starters.

Importantly, Fun for Starters was also perceived as especially impactful in that it marks a continuation of learning over two years, and both the materials and assessments have been stable. The Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners offer a notably positive change in a context where teachers sometimes lack confidence, additional support and limited curriculum guidance. Parents and educators welcomed improved consistency in their child's English language learning journey through the first cycle.

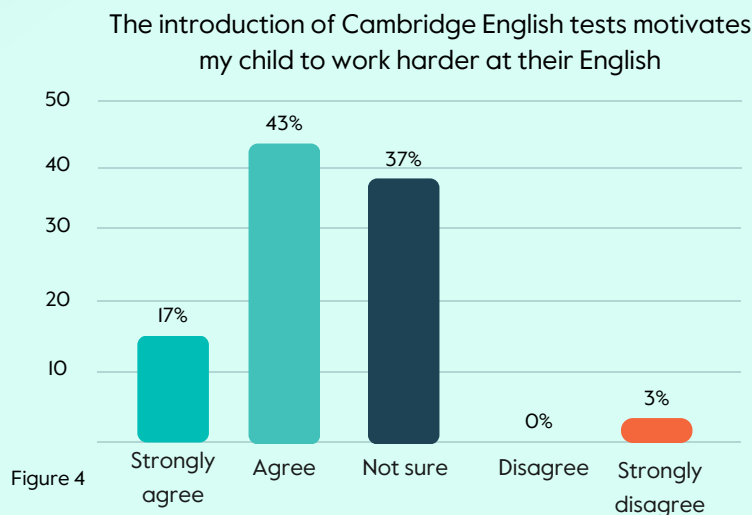
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“When you're an adult, you're asked to obtain a score on [...] some other test. But if we took tests in modern languages and therefore in English throughout our school life, it would be a less daunting task.” Parent

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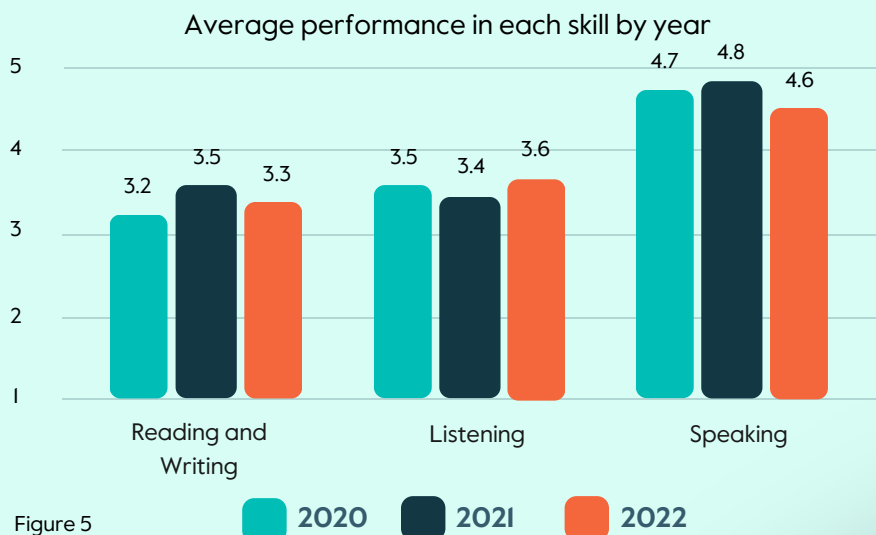
“In your assessment, [...] even a student who has not acquired everything, will still get a shield. That alone is a badge of ability and is already something that's rewarding.” Teacher

Parents believed that the assessment was a source of motivation for students learning English. This is aligned with the Pre AI Starters' purpose and design principles.



## Overall student performance

Overall, students performed highly across all skills, and particularly in Speaking. Student performance was also very stable between cohorts, a testament to the teachers' ability to reliably prepare their students for the Cambridge tests. Indeed, equivalent cohorts of students performed similarly.



Teachers also reported an increased level of confidence and lower test anxiety among the students, improving from cohort to cohort.

“Here, what gives confidence is also the fact that the children don't do the same thing every year.” School leader

“Beyond practising the method and taking the test, I find it very rewarding for a child to be able to show his or her level with a certificate.” Parent

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## SUMMARY

This impact study examined the outputs and outcomes of Pre AI Starters by involving students, teachers, parents, school leaders, local decision makers, and members of the local educational community. The emphasis on communicative target language use seems to have greatly benefited students' speaking skills, with average scores between 4.6 and 4.8 out of 5. Students' performance was notably stable from one cohort to the next, a testament to the reliability of Pre AI Starters to assess students' level of English language proficiency.

Participating students, teachers, and parents emphasised the positive impacts of Pre AI Starters on the confidence and motivation of students learning English and their attitudes to English language learning. Students preparing for the Pre AI Starters reported relatively low test anxiety. Participants perceived external English language assessment as important for effective learning and building language competence beyond the classroom.

The joint delivery of the assessment with the Fun for Starters learning materials suggest the quality and suitability of the materials for an integrated approach with Cambridge English Qualifications for young learners. Teachers described the materials to be appropriate and helpful in preparing their students for the Pre AI Starters.

The continuity of learning which Fun for Starters offers was greatly appreciated by stakeholders. Learners, teachers and parents knew what to expect and could build their confidence with the method year after year, enabling compounding improvements.



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