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C1 Advanced: Impact Performance Indicator Report

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Please note that this report contains unedited quotes and comments and therefore linguistic errors may occur.



INTRODUCTION

The term “washback” (or “backwash”) is common in testing literature to indicate the effects of preparing for a test on teaching and learning. An example of washback might be the use of a speaking test promoting more focus on teaching speaking skills in the classroom (Taylor, 2005). Hughes (2003) noted that washback can be both beneficial (positive washback) and detrimental (negative washback). More recently, the word “impact” has gained currency as a superordinate term which encompasses washback but extends more broadly to the effects of assessment in society at a macro level (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). These could include its influence on government policy or the effects it has for test takers beyond the classroom, e.g. immigration or employment.

At Cambridge English, we operate an Impact by Design approach to product development and management. Firstly, we consider the possible impacts of an assessment or learning material on its principal stakeholders, and we design it to accentuate the positive outcomes and mitigate any potential negatives. Then, when the product is in use, we monitor and evaluate its effects, paying attention to any unexpected consequences as well as those predicted in the product design phase. This monitoring is a key part of a cycle of product improvement, in which we analyse the impact data collected and feed them back to those who review and revise the product.

Impact evaluation is implemented through the lens of our [English Impact Framework \(2022\)](#), using the following two approaches:

- In-depth impact studies which focus on product usage within specific contexts. These studies gather extensive quantitative and qualitative data to assess the product's impact.
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) projects which gather data about products globally, comparing outcomes against a set of impact performance indicators

For the second of these, the impact indicators provide a measure of a product's performance in key areas. For instance, in the case of a coursebook, data is collected to determine how effectively the product supports student learning. An indicator in this scenario could relate to the percentage of learners using the textbook who achieve the intended CEFR level upon completing the course. Similarly, for an exam, an indicator might measure the percentage of teachers who report a positive impact on classroom activities resulting from the assessment. The indicators also have the potential for trend analysis if we can gather data across a range of products and over time.

This report describes the findings from an M&E project investigating the impact of the C1 Advanced exam on a set of its principal stakeholders: teachers. The intention was also to include data from learners, but the number of participants was too low to be representative, and so, they were left out of the data analysis.

DATA COLLECTION

Data gathered from teachers included information about the perceived impact of the exam on lesson planning, classroom activities and homework, as well as their views on student engagement and motivation. These data have then been assessed against impact indicators. Qualitative data have also been collected to give a richer picture of specific changes in teaching and learning.

All data in this report were collected via online questionnaires in fifteen countries where C1 Advanced is taken.

All respondents completed a consent form before filling in the questionnaire. No personal data other than age and gender was collected. However, teachers had the option of providing an email address to participate in a prize draw with the winners receiving a voucher for USD50.

FINDINGS

TEACHERS' CHARACTERISTICS

55 teachers who were preparing students to take the C1 Advanced exam (n=55) completed the questionnaire.

Most teachers were female (65%), 87% had been teaching for eleven years or more, and 80% reported having either a C1 or C2 level of English (see Figures 1–3). Respondents came from 15 different countries, with the largest representations from Italy and Spain (see Figure 4).

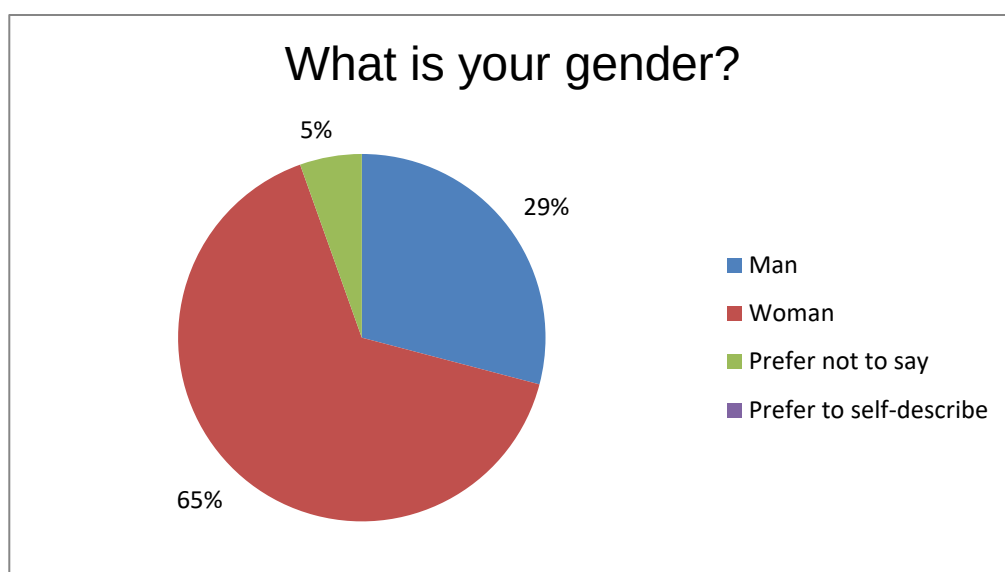


Figure 1: Teachers' gender

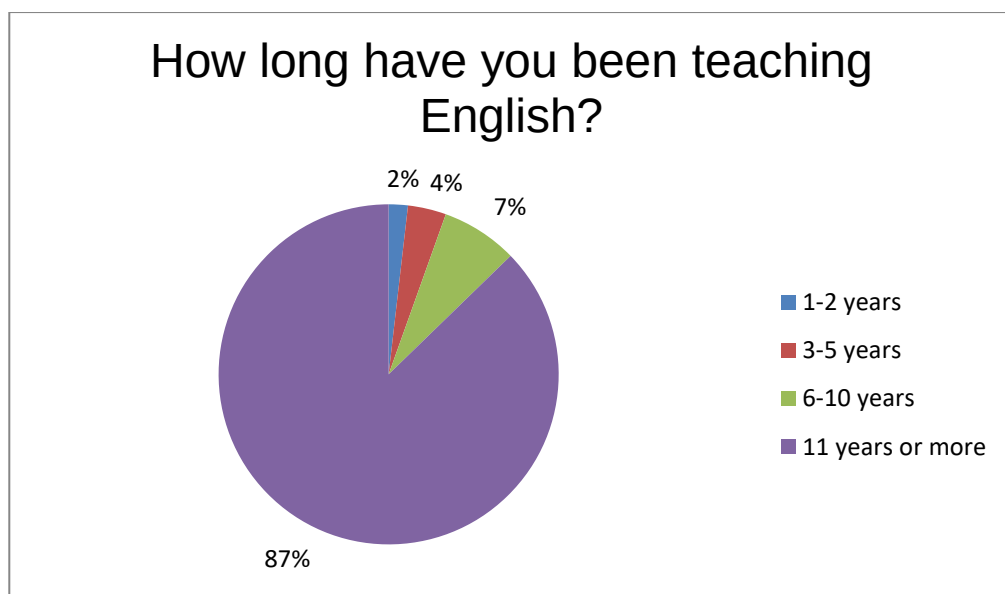


Figure 2: Years spent teaching English

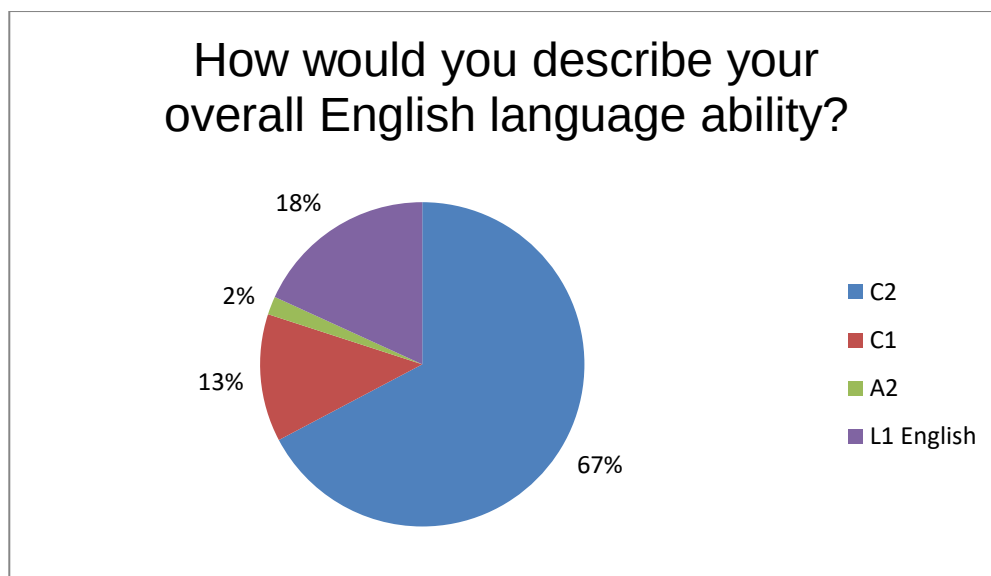


Figure 3: Self-report of teachers' language proficiency by CEFR level

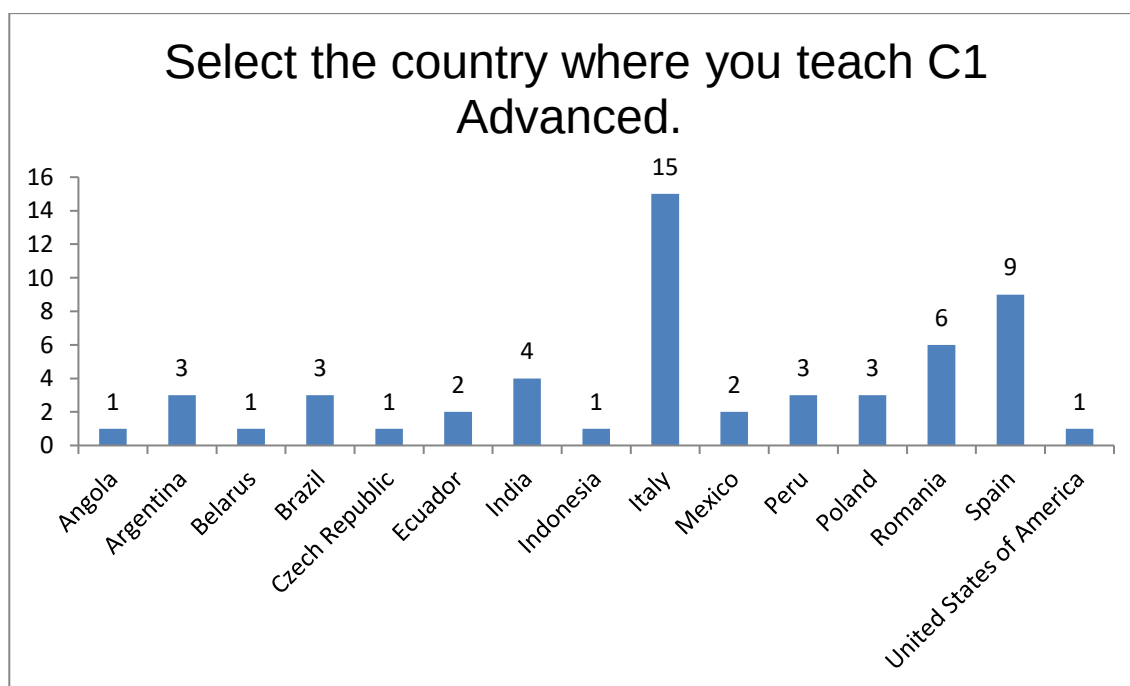


Figure 4: Number of teachers by nationality

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF EXAM IMPACT

Teachers were asked questions related to the impact indicators listed in Table 1 below. There were focuses on how well the C1 Advanced exam supported important traits in students such as engagement, motivation and confidence, as well as its influence on teaching and learning.

Engagement

Student engagement is not a simple construct and there is much debate as to the elements that constitute it (Bryson, 2014). Despite this, there is general agreement that it is a key element in effective learning. In the words of Kahu and Nelson (2018), “simply put, students who are more engaged with their studies are more likely to be successful.” (p. 59). For the purposes of this report, the focus is on student interest in a subject and enjoyment of learning (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Bryson, 2014).

Motivation

Gardner (1985) characterised motivation for L2 learning as “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of language learning” (p. 10). High levels of motivation to learn have also been found to positively impact educational attainment (Kuyper et al., 2000) and levels of language proficiency (Clément et al., 1994; Gardner et al., 1997; Zhang et al., 2013).

Confidence

Furthermore, studies have also shown that, similarly to engagement and motivation, self-confidence is associated with higher levels of educational attainment (Francis et al., 2020; Park & Lee, 2005; Tunçel, 2015).

In summary, research has found that elevated levels of all three of these traits (engagement, motivation, confidence) are correlated with higher levels of proficiency in a second language.

Teaching and learning

In addition, teachers were also asked questions about how positively the exams impacted both teaching and learning, whether there was an alignment between the exam and real-life English skills, and finally, whether the exam preparation resources are helpful for preparing learners.

Table 1: Impact indicators for C1 Advanced exam

Impact Indicator
% of teachers report positive impact on teaching from C1 Advanced.
% of teacher report positive impact on learning from C1 Advanced.
% of teachers report alignment between C1 Advanced and real-life English skills.
% of teachers report students find C1 Advanced topics engaging.
% of teachers report positive impact on student motivation from C1 Advanced.
% of teachers report positive impact on student confidence from C1 Advanced.
% of teachers report C1 Advanced preparation resources are helpful for preparing learners.

Exam impact on teaching

The questionnaire contained six items related to specific aspects of the impact of the C1 Advanced exam on teaching. 85% of teachers said that the exam influenced the homework they set; 79% said that preparing for the exam is a useful revision of language points; 88% said that the exam helped them to define learning objectives and outcomes, and 90% said that the exam helped them structure their lessons and planning. Teachers were also asked whether the exam took time away from achieving these learning objectives – only 34% answered in the affirmative, suggesting that around two-thirds thought that exam preparation was aligned to their learning goals. (Figure 5). If we take the mean scores of the five items in Figure 10, we can say that 80.4% of teachers reported a positive impact from the exam on aspects of their teaching. Finally, teachers were asked if the exam was, overall, a positive or negative influence on their teaching. 83% replied in the affirmative and 15% were neutral (Figure 6), which is similar to the mean score of the other items.

In summary, it would seem that a large majority of teachers are positive about the influence of C1 Advanced on their teaching.

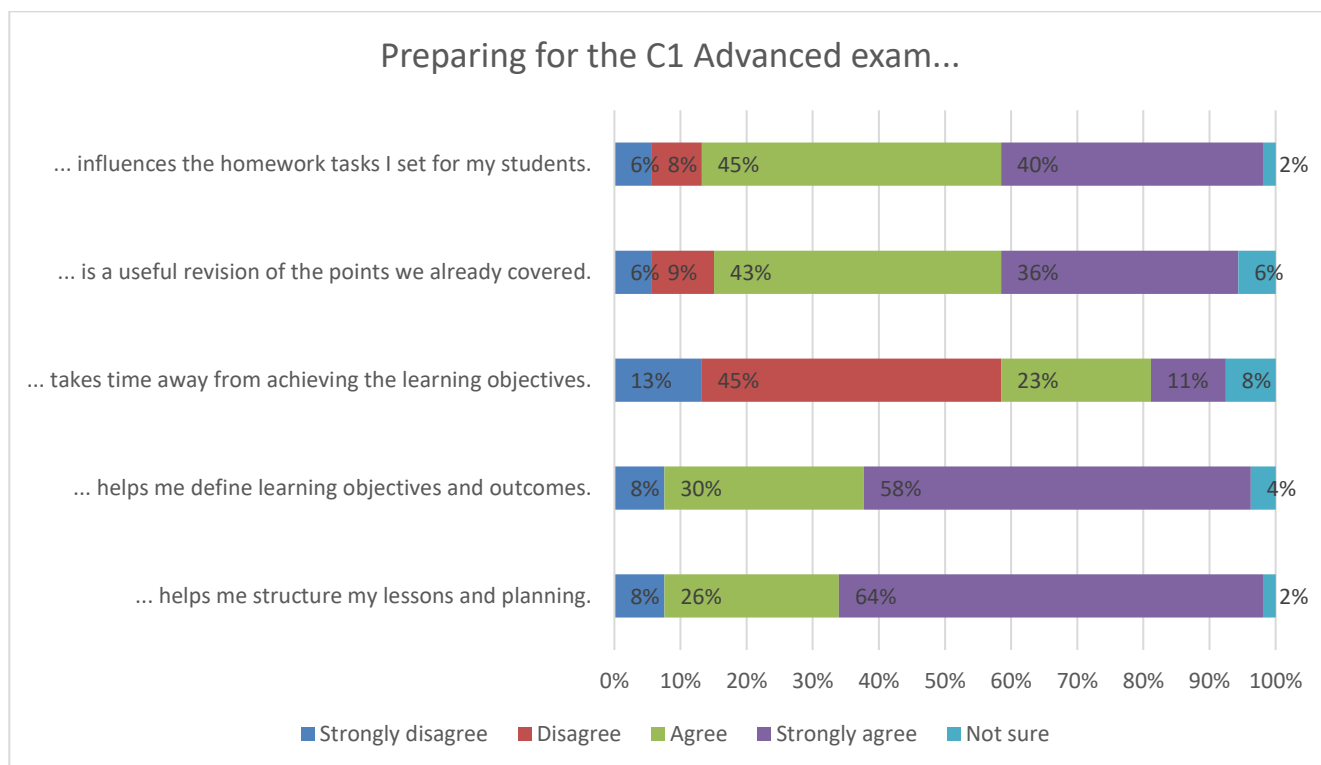


Figure 5: Teacher responses to items focused on the impact of C1 Advanced on teaching

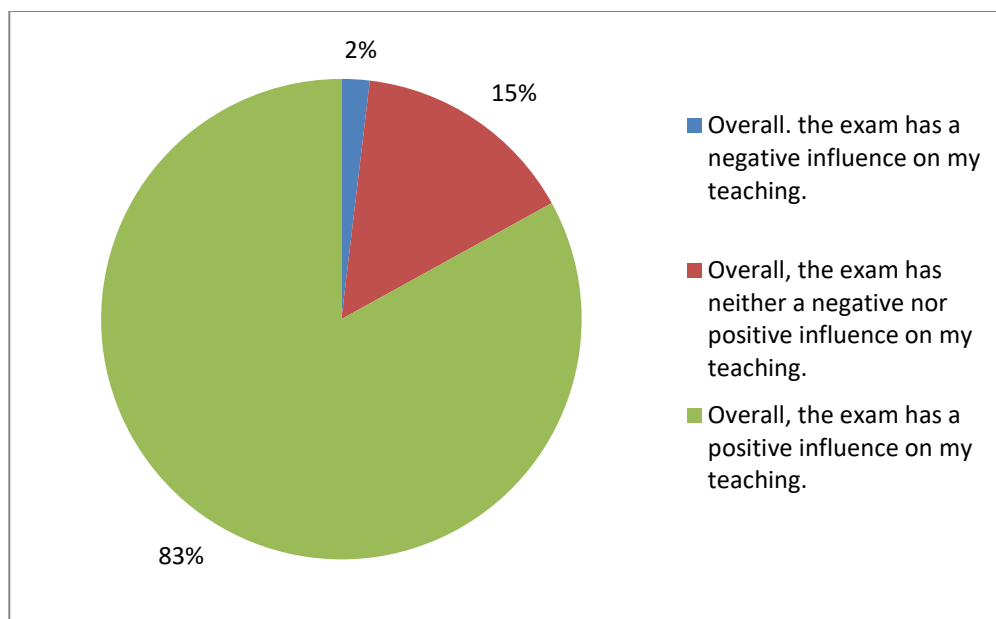


Figure 6: Teacher responses to the impact of C1 Advanced on teaching

We were also interested in whether teachers changed the balance of skills they taught when preparing for the C1 Advanced to see where they thought it most appropriate to focus. 83% of teachers said that they did alter the balance of skills taught in comparison to other classes, with the greatest focus being on Speaking and Vocabulary. Surprisingly, Writing was the area focused on the least (see Figure 7 – note that teachers were asked to rank their classroom focus, with 1 being the skill most focused on and 6 the least. Therefore, a lower number denotes a greater focus).

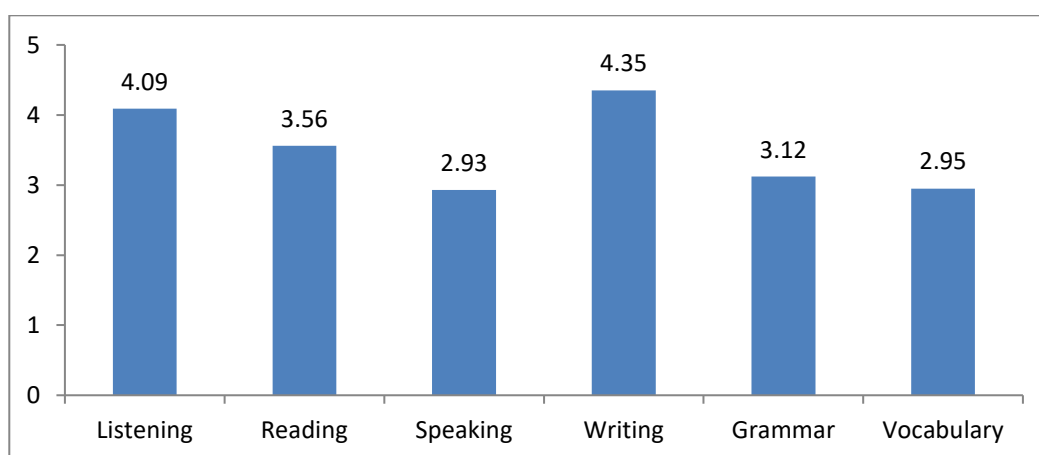


Figure 7: Teacher focus in C1 Advanced preparation classes¹

¹ Note: the lower the number, the greater the focus.

Exam impact on learning and student attitudes

As well as questions about teaching practice, the questionnaire also asked teachers a range of questions about how the exam influenced student learning and attitude.

Teachers were asked whether the skills fostered by the exam matched real-life language use (90% said they did); if the exam topics were interesting for students (80% said they were); whether students were motivated by the exam (88% said they were), and if studying for the exam helped build students' confidence (88% said it did). See Figure 8 below for more details.

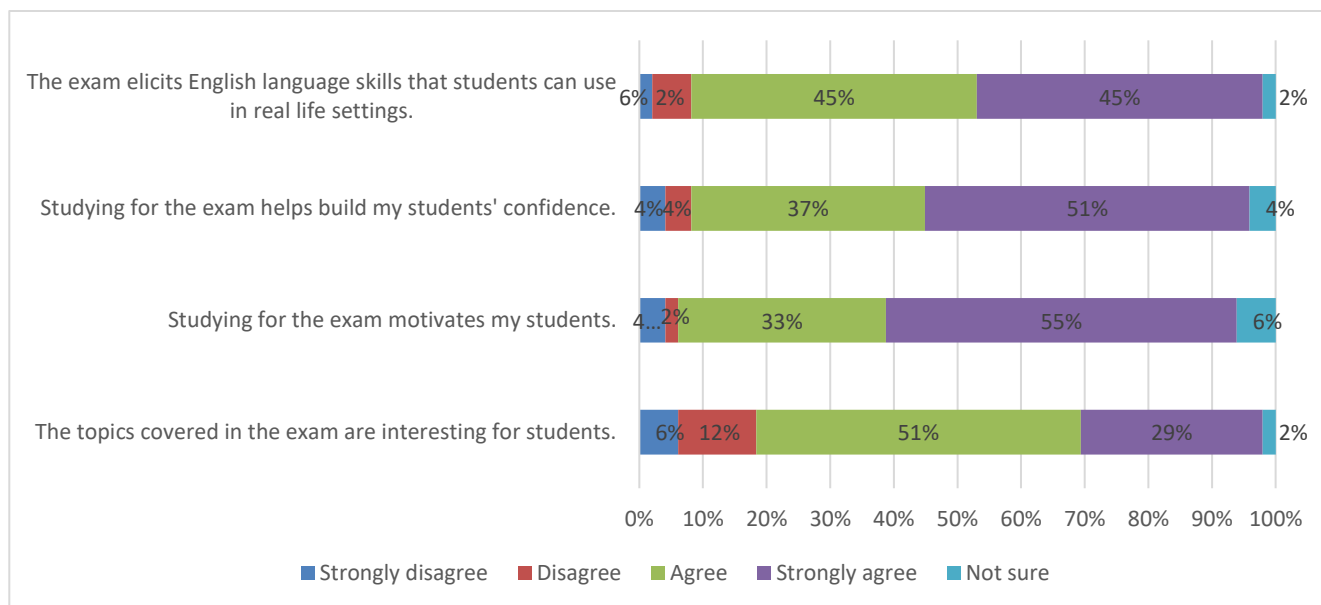


Figure 8: Teacher responses to questions about language skills, student engagement, motivation and confidence

These findings suggest the exam has a positive impact on student engagement, motivation and confidence as well as a focus on English skills that have a practical use for students.

Furthermore, 92% of teachers said that preparing for the exam helped students develop new language and skills. 94% thought that exam preparation helped students to put their language knowledge into active use, and 90% thought that studying for the C1 Advanced helped them consolidate previous learning. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 94% thought that preparing for the exam helped students learn exam strategies, and the same percentage said that exam preparation helped students achieve their learning objectives (see Figure 9).

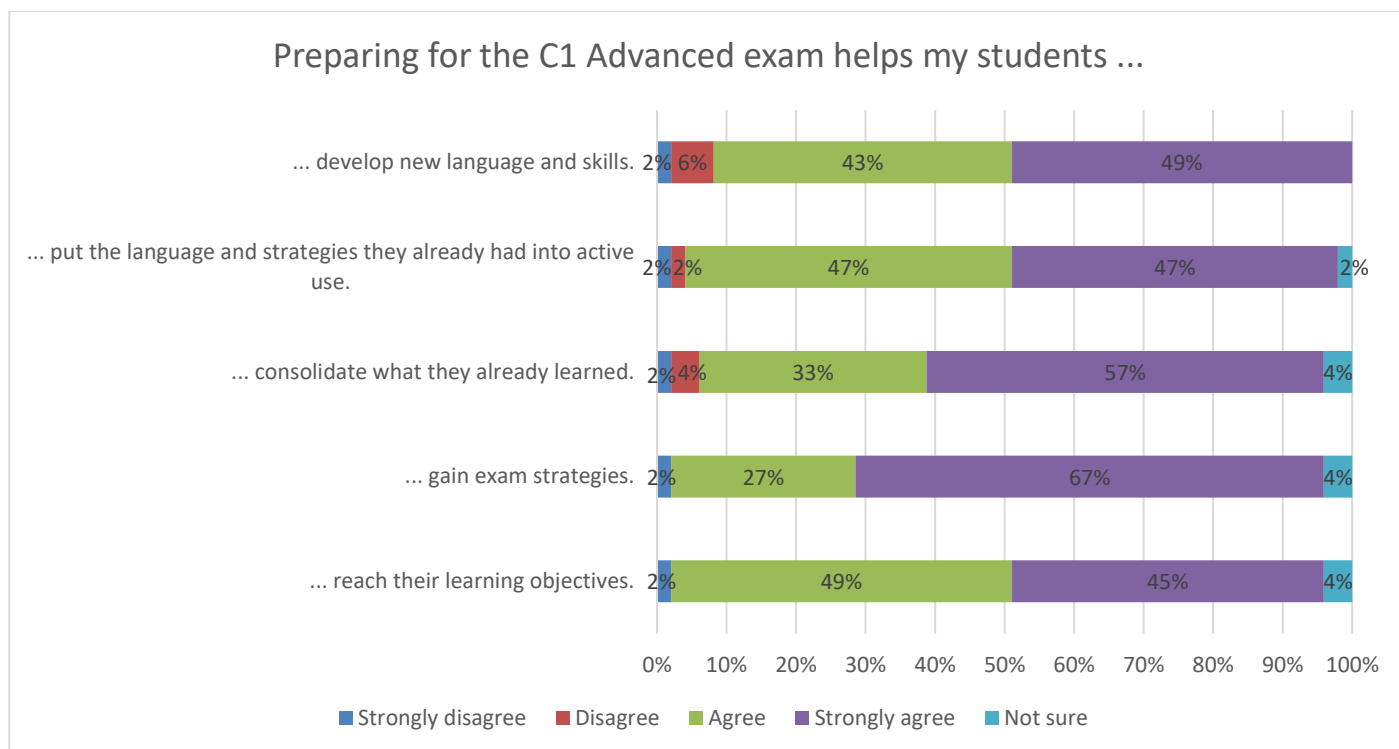


Figure 9: Teacher responses to question about how the C1 Advanced supports student learning

Finally, teachers were asked a couple of overarching questions about student learning and exam performance. 88% said that students were able to do more in English because of the exam preparation, and 96% thought that students would do better in the exam as a result of the exam preparation classes (see Figure 10).

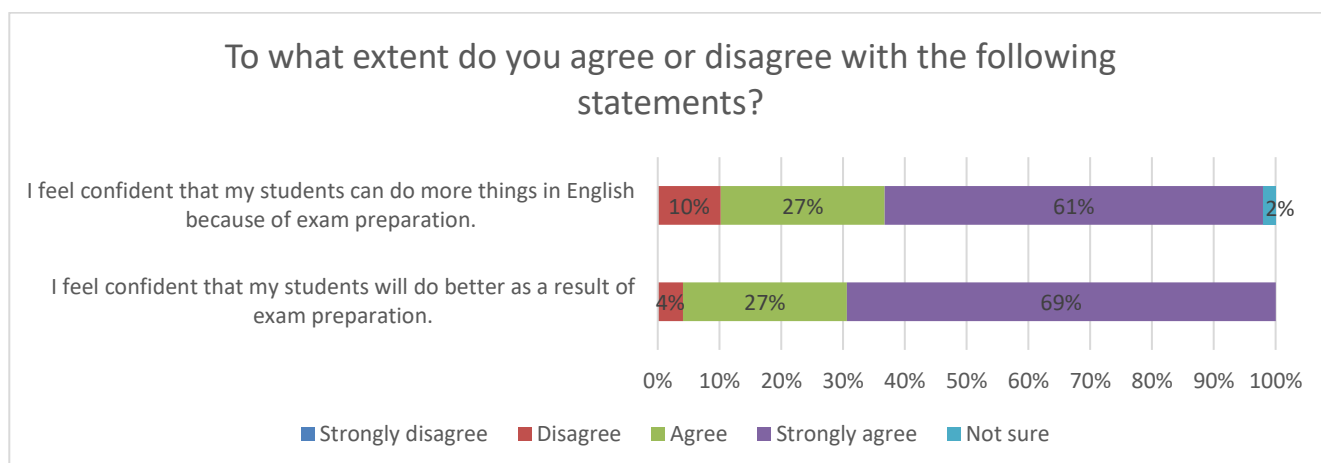


Figure 10: Teacher responses to questions on exam preparation

If we take the mean score of all the items in Figures 9 and 10, we can say that 93% of teachers reported a positive impact on learning from the C1 Advanced exam.

Qualitative findings on teaching, learning and attitude

Teachers were also asked to explain in what ways, if any, the exam influenced teaching and learning. There was a range of comments on a number of themes, with many teachers commenting on how the exam was motivational, both for students and also for themselves as teachers:

It helps motivate both me and my students to reach our common goal. (Teacher, Italy)

I'd say motivation is key as students who have a goal while learning English are far more motivated than the ones who don't. (Teacher, Romania)

The exam boosts my students' level of motivation. (Teacher, Romania)

Teachers also mentioned that the exam provided them with learning goals linked to a standard of achievement.

[The exam influences my teaching by] setting clear goals for learning and assessment. (Teacher, Italy)

It sets a standard to strive to achieve. (Teacher, Spain)

It structures my lessons, gives me content, provides objectives for my teaching and clear goals for students. (Teacher, Poland)

It helps me focus on clearly defined learning objectives. (Teacher, Italy)

Some teachers also commented on how the exam challenged them to improve their knowledge and teaching:

[The exam] helps me grow as a teacher because I practiced all the vocabulary, and in Mexico, we have a saying, that teaching is learning twice. (Teacher, Mexico)

It helps me to awake my interest in learning things that I've never been taught such as Idioms, Phrasal verbs, Collocations (Teacher, Peru)

Finally, a few teachers mentioned how the skills learned while preparing for the exam were useful more widely:

The skills that we practice [while preparing for the exam] are useful not only for their English but also for later high school and university studies. (Teacher, Spain)

In summary, the most common comment was that the exam was motivational for students. Many teachers also mentioned how it helps them structure their teaching by providing learning objectives linked to a standard of achievement. A few teachers commented that the exam provides them with a challenge which helps them improve as teachers, and that the skills learned by students are useful beyond their English studies.

Exam preparation material

Teachers were also asked about the effectiveness of any Cambridge material that they used to prepare students for the exam.

97% of responses about Cambridge teaching and learning material rated it “Effective” or “Very effective”, and the following positive comments were made:

The topics [in Complete Advanced] are interesting and appropriate for the students which helps them relate to the lessons more easily. (Teacher, Romania)

I always use a combination of the units of Complete Advanced and some worksheets from the Exam Booster as a complementary material. That's the perfect combination to take your skills to the C1 level and to succeed in the exam. (Teacher, Ecuador)

Complete we've used successfully for years and the Open World series is great at introducing teens/young adults to the levels presented in an interesting and engaging way. (Teacher, Spain)

Exam Booster and Practice Tests are very effective since they focus on all the skills and components of the exam. (Teacher, Romania)

Complete is the best as it is not only exam preparation (like Compact, which is also good but has a limited quantity of input), but it also has a lot of language development which is useful in and of itself and for the exam. (Teacher, Italy)

Practice Tests for C1 Advanced - by doing the tests, the students can better understand what their weaknesses are and work on improving those aspects; moreover, the writing samples at the end of the book are useful for teachers as well as they give insights on how writing is assessed; (Teacher, Romania)

Complete Advanced (2nd edition): it is flexible and really "complete"; it offers a thorough preparation for the different parts of the exam, improves learners' knowledge of the exam's structure and self-confidence. (Teacher, Italy)

However, teachers did highlight some areas in teaching and learning material that they felt were lacking or could be improved:

I'd say though that the Reading exercises [in Complete Advanced] are less difficult than the ones in actual tests. (Teacher, Romania)

The Complete Advanced is effective since it focuses on all parts of the exam. However, some of the topics and materials (texts, audios etc) are outdated and do not motivate the students. (Teacher, Romania)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Data were gathered from teachers (n=55) in fifteen different countries, including Italy, Spain, Romania and India. Questions were asked through online questionnaires about a range of traits, including motivation, engagement and confidence, and also, English language skills and pedagogy. The following results related to the impact indicators were found:

Table 2: Impact indicators with percentages for C1 Advanced

Impact Indicator
82% of teachers report positive impact on teaching from C1 Advanced.
93% of teachers report positive impact on learning from C1 Advanced.
90% of teachers report alignment between C1 Advanced and real-life English skills.
80% of teachers report students find C1 Advanced topics engaging.
88% of teachers report positive impact on student motivation from C1 Advanced.
88% of teachers report positive impact on student confidence from C1 Advanced.
97% of teachers report C1 Advanced preparation resources are helpful for preparing learners.

Regarding the impact on teaching from C1 Advanced, a particularly high percentage of teachers said that the exam helped them to define learning objectives and outcomes, and plan and structure their lessons (88% and 90% respectively). These responses suggest that teachers really value the exam for the pedagogical structure it provides. This was reinforced by the qualitative data gathered, one of the main themes of which was the benefit of having an objective standard and the learning goals that the exam provides.

Turning to the impact of the exam on learning, it was notable that over 90% of teachers reported that preparing for the C1 Advanced helped students develop and use their English language skills. This indicates that teachers view exam preparation as not just about learning exam strategies, but rather more holistically as a framework for improving language proficiency across the skills.

Again, high percentages of teachers recognised a positive impact on both confidence and motivation. As mentioned earlier, both constructs have been identified as correlating strongly with high levels of educational attainment. The percentage of teachers that rated the exam topics as engaging was also high (80%), albeit slightly lower than other areas. All of these seem to suggest that the exam has a beneficial effect on attitudes which support successful language learning. In the qualitative data, the motivational aspect of the exam was a particularly prominent theme.

Finally, nearly all the teachers surveyed were positive about the Cambridge exam preparation materials that they had used. From the comments, they particularly appreciated *Complete Advanced*

and its focus on language skills development through exam task types, and the *Exam Booster* and *Practice Tests*, which introduce the exam format and help students understand what is required at the C1 level.

Overall, the findings from teachers on the impact of the exam on teaching, learning and student attitudes were very strongly positive. However, there were areas identified which could be improved: how engaging topics are in both the exam, and in some cases, the exam preparation material. Further research is needed to clarify which topics would improve engagement.

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