

2016 English Adaptive Assessment

Executive Summary

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2016 English Adaptive Assessment

Introduction - Overview

The third edition of the English adaptive test was carried out during November 2016. The test was designed, produced and administered by the Ceibal English Programme of Plan Ceibal, the Second and Foreign Languages Department of CEIP, the English Inspections from CES and CETP, the Research, Evaluation and Statistics Division of CODICEN, Plan Ceibal's Supervision and Evaluation Department and The British Council, together with technical experts.

The assessment was aimed at all students from Years 4 to 6 in Primary Education who learn English either through face-to-face lessons (Programme by the Second and Foreign Languages Department) or by videoconference (Ceibal English Programme). On this occasion, the test was also administered to students in their first year of Secondary Education.

The test, which was administered during November 2016, is adaptive in nature, i.e. it adjusts to the level of English proficiency of each student who takes it. This kind of assessment uses the activities from an items bank in order to assess students' performance. The activities each student does are adjusted based on the answers provided so that students do different sets of activities according to their performance.

As in previous editions, the test was administered online through the SEA platform and it comprised three components: a reading comprehension component (vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension as such), a listening comprehension component and a writing component (which is the only one not adaptive in nature).

Assessment Objectives

The assessment objectives are as follow:

- To gather information about levels of English proficiency attained by students in Years 4, 5 and 6 of Primary Education (both in face-to-face and videoconference lessons) and in Year 1 of Secondary Education.
- To ensure continuity of the assessment implemented in 2014 and to identify the year-on-year progress in students' learning process.
- To inform Secondary Education of the levels of proficiency achieved by the students who graduate from Primary School in order to foster continuity in the learning process throughout the school journey.
- To provide students who sit for the test with a certificate that attests the results obtained.

Coverage of English Teaching and Assessment

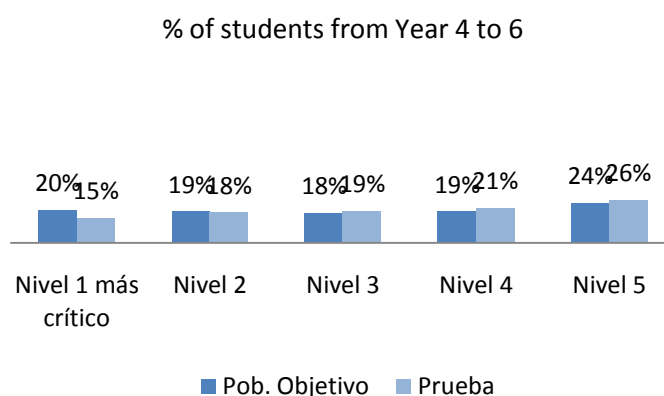
In 2016 the coverage of the English language instruction to students in Years 4, 5 and 6 from urban schools across the country reached 93%. Out of the 109,517 students who learn English, 80,217 (73%) take part in the Ceibal English Programme and the remaining 29,300 (27%) in the Second Languages Programme. As far as Secondary Education is concerned, English is a mandatory subject in the curriculum so coverage is total (with the exception of the groups that haven't been allotted since no teachers have chosen them).

Out of the 109,517 students in Primary Education that were regarded as the potential universe, 66,345 sat for the test, which represents a response rate of 61%. As for Secondary Education, 6,925 students sat for the test, which represents a response rate of 13%¹.

Even though coverage was not universal, the response received in Primary Education was relatively balanced, i.e. there were not big differences in the responses according to sociocultural context or school year. The following graphs compare the distribution of the population assessed with the total number of students that learn English in Primary Education.

Comparison of the distribution of students in the target population with the students who took the test in Primary Education

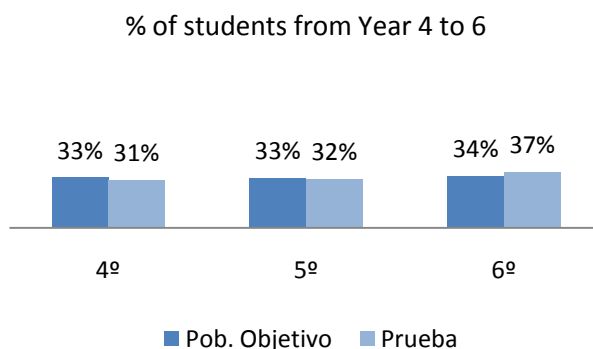
Graph 1. Distribution according to the school's sociocultural context – 2015*



¹ According to Ceibal, the universe of Year 1 of Secondary Education in 2016 was made up by 52,155 students. It should be noted that in Secondary Education teachers become familiar with this test for the first time and that administering it was optional, i.e. not compulsory.

***Translator's note:** Only the titles of the graphs have been translated. The information presented therein has been kept in Spanish.

Graph 2. Distribution according to school year



Source: Data about Primary Students from ANEP and Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

In Secondary Education, context variables are not available so as to study distribution in this respect. The results displayed about Secondary Education are not statistically representative of the total number of students in that school stage.

Assessment Design

The activities in the test were designed by a specialised unit from The British Council and gauged in a representative sample of education centres. The test was administered in a way that allowed students to begin with the reading comprehension component (*Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar*), then move on to the listening comprehension one and finally do the written production task (*Writing*).

In the first component students answered multiple-choice questions and they could score between 0 and 2,756 points. This score scale consisted of six levels (A0, A1-, A1+, A2-, A2+ and B1), which are associated to the levels of language ability stated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)². In the second component, students listened to brief audio files and then answered a multiple-choice question. The score scale, which ranged from 0 to 1,712 points, consisted of the same six levels (A0, A1-, A1+, A2-, A2+ and B1) with their corresponding achievement descriptors³. Finally, students engaged in the writing task, in which they had to write a composition based on a picture and a set of instructions. The composition was later marked using a six-level criterion (A0, A1-, A1+, A2-, A2+ and B1)⁴.

In the case of the adaptive tests, the estimation of students' level of English was reported in real time. Written productions were corrected and marked by a team of teachers between December 2016 and February 2017. Appendix 2 comprises some examples of the items applied according to levels of difficulty, together with the task to assess written production.

² See Appendix 1, Table 1

³ See Appendix 1, Table 2

⁴ See Appendix 1, Table 3

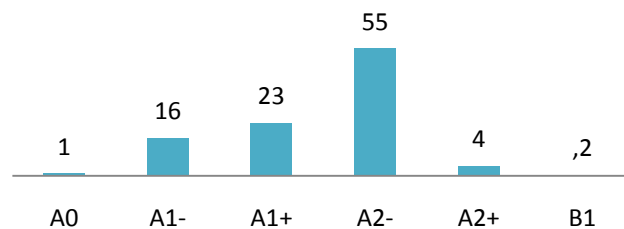
Students' Results in Primary Education

Overall Results

There follow the results obtained by all students assessed in the different test components.

Graph 3. Levels achieved in *Vocabulary-Reading-Grammar* (Primary School)

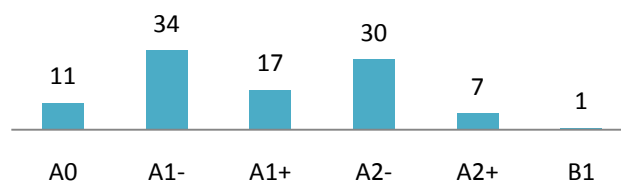
% of the students who took the 2016 test



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Graph 4. Levels achieved in *Listening* (Primary School)

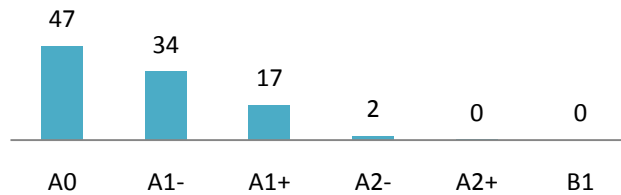
% of the students who took the 2016 test



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Graph 5. Levels achieved in *Writing* (Primary School)

% of the students who took the 2016 test



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

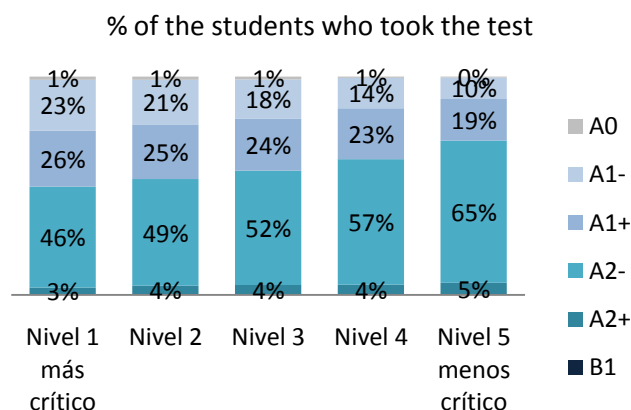
In the case of the reading comprehension component (*Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar*), 39% of students reached level A1 (both A1- and A1+) and 59% level A2 (both A2- and A2+). In the listening component, 11% of students didn't exceed level A0⁵, 51% reached level A1 and 37% level A2. Lastly, the results obtained in the writing component show that 47% of students achieved an A0 level, 51% an A1 level and the remaining 2% an A2 level.

Results according to Sociocultural Context and School Year

Sociocultural Context

When analysing the results obtained based on the school's sociocultural level, we can see that students from all contexts reach levels A1 and A2. The percentage of students who fail to demonstrate knowledge of English (level A0) both in reading and listening comprehension is similar across all contexts. Nonetheless, students' performance is better in less critical school contexts, as observed in other areas.

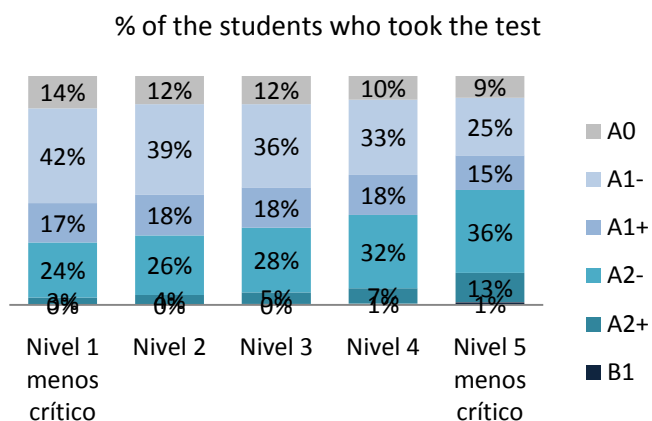
Graph 6. Vocabulary-Reading-Grammar according to context (Primary School)



⁵ The results show an increase of 4% in the percentage of students who are at level A0 in relation to the 2015 test. This could be due to an audio problem that was observed in some cases in the devices in Years 4 and 5 of Primary School. This will be dealt with further on in this report.

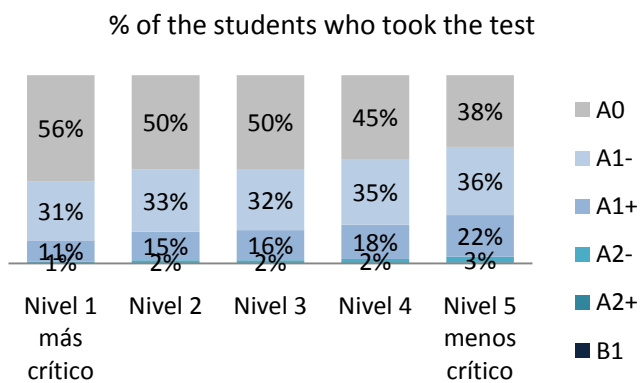
Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Graph 7. Listening according to context (Primary School)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Graph 8. Writing according to context (Primary School)



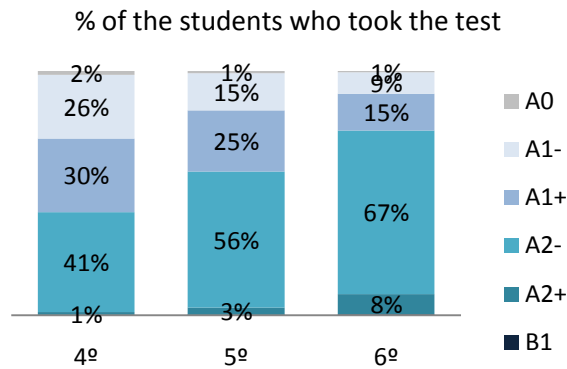
Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

School Year

When analysing the results obtained according to this variable, it is observed, as in previous years, that the higher the school year, the better the students' performance in the three test components. Such trend cannot be solely explained by a greater exposure to the English language, since in the Ceibal English

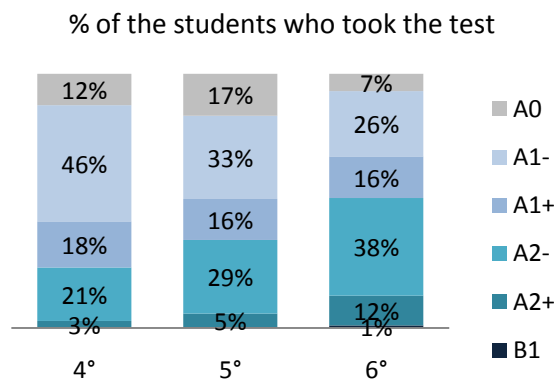
Programme a group in Year 5 or 6 of Primary School could be in their first or second year in the programme⁶.

Graph 9. Vocabulary-Reading-Grammar according to school year (Primary School)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

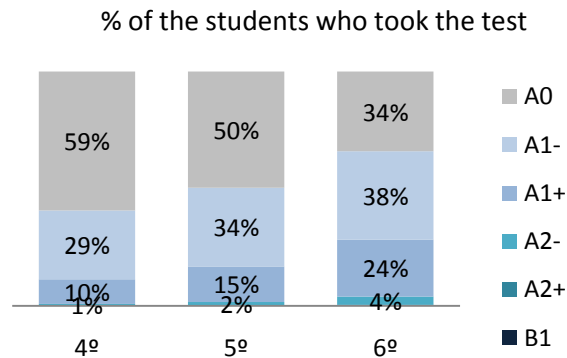
Graph 10. Listening according to school year (Primary School)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

⁶ As the Ceibal English Programme widens its coverage, the link between school year and exposure time deepens: students in Year 4 take Level 1 (one year of exposure), those in Year 5 take Level 2 (two years of exposure) and those in Year 6 take Level 3 (three years of exposure).

Graph 11. Writing according to school year (Primary School)

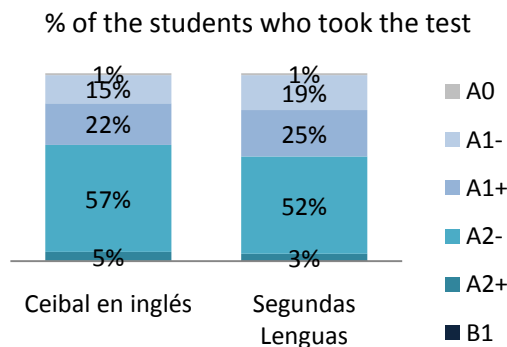


Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

In the case of listening comprehension in particular, in 2016 there was an increase in the percentage of students who got an A0 level in the test (from 4% in 2015 to 11% in 2016). While such percentage is similar across the different sociocultural contexts, it is not so across the different school years, since Year 4 and specially Year 5 show higher percentages than Year 6. Such difference among school years could be indicating that the mentioned increase could be on account of some audio problems that were identified during the administration of the tests in some specific devices⁷, which interfered with students correctly taking that test component. It was particularly confirmed that several of the students who took the listening comprehension test in the computer XO 4.0 experienced difficulty hearing the audio files of the test.

Results according to the Programme

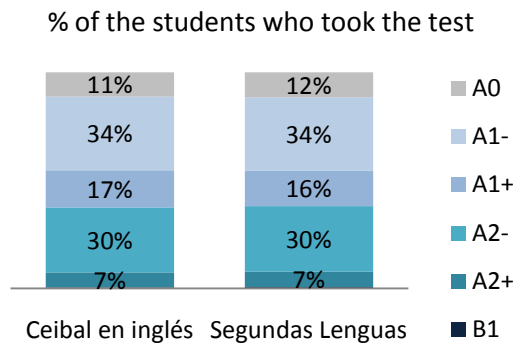
Graph 12. Vocabulary-Reading-Grammar according to Programme (Primary School)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

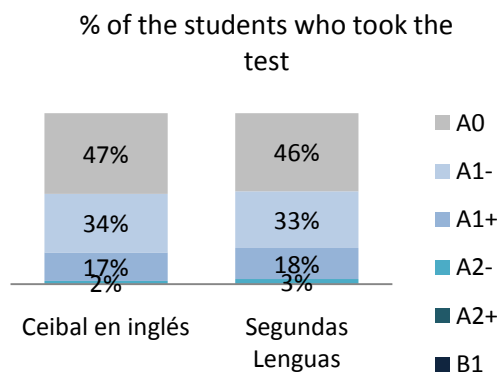
⁷ Devices which are mostly found in Years 4 and 5 of Primary School.

Graph 13. *Listening* according to Programme (Primary School)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Graph 14. *Writing* according to Programme (Primary School)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

As observed in previous editions of the test, the results obtained by the students taking the Ceibal English and the Second Languages Programme were very similar in each of the three test components.

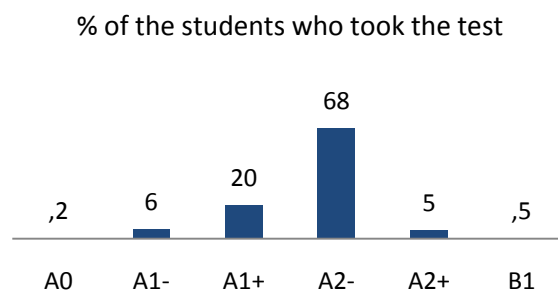
It should be noted that these programmes work with different populations of students and different exposure times: while Ceibal English is a three-year programme at the most, the Second Languages Programme can work with students up to seven years.

Students' Results in Secondary Education

2016 was the first year in which the adaptive test was administered to students in their first year of Secondary School. In order to cater for them, activities with a higher level of difficulty (B1 according to the CEFR) were introduced to the items bank. As mentioned above, the students who took the test are not representative of the total number of students in Year 1 of Secondary Education.

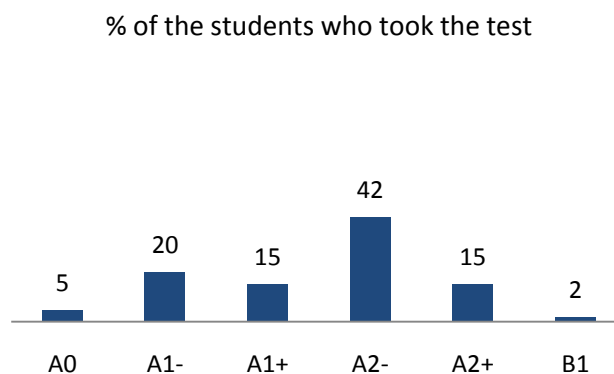
Out of the 6,925 students who sat for the test, 26% reached an A1 level in the reading comprehension component and 73% an A2 level. As regards listening comprehension, 35% reached an A1 level, 57% an A2 level and 2% a B1 level. Lastly, as far as the writing component is concerned, 59% of students reached an A1 level and 4% an A2 level.

Graph 15. Levels achieved in *Vocabulary-Reading-Grammar* (Secondary Education)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

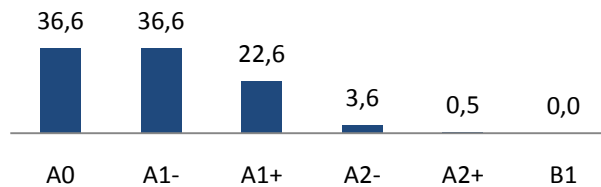
Graph 16. Levels achieved in *Listening* (Secondary Education)



Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Graph 17. Levels achieved in *Writing* (Secondary Education)

% of the students who took the test



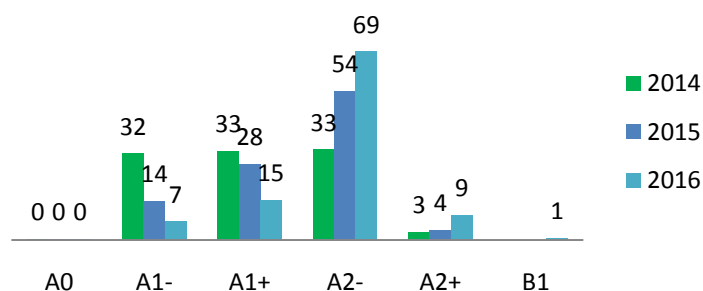
Source: Baseline test of the 2016 adaptive test

Development of Performance in the Period 2014-2016

In order to examine the development of the scores obtained in the different editions of the test, we analysed on the one hand the development of the reading comprehension component across the three years (2014 to 2016) and on the other hand the development of the listening comprehension and writing components in the last two years (2015 and 2016), for the listening comprehension test was first introduced in 2015.

Graph 18. Development of results in *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar*

% of the students who took the test the 3 years

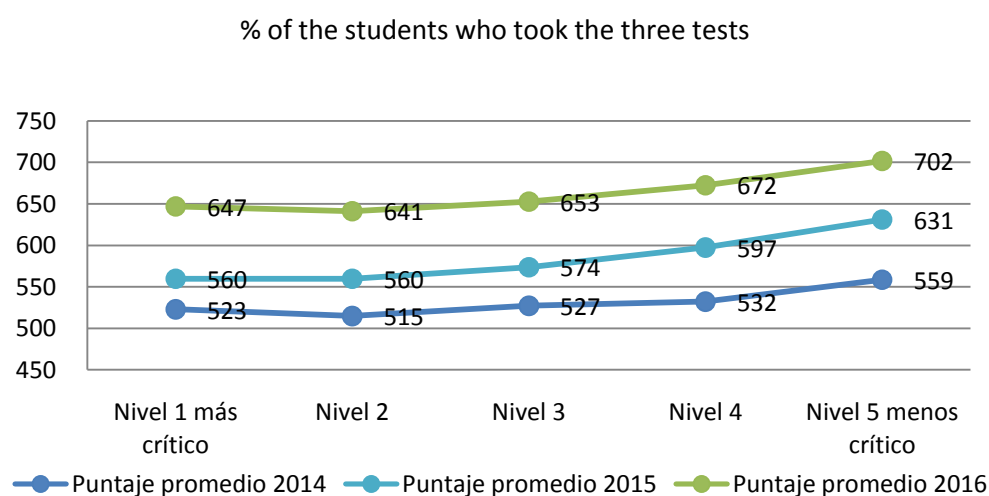


Source: Baseline test of the 2014, 2015 and 2016 adaptive tests

If we compare the students who took the first test component in the three years (a total of 10,309 students), the progress is significant. After one more year of exposure to the English language, the percentage of students with an A2 level increases by roughly 20 percentage points⁸.

If the same development is analysed based on the school's sociocultural context, it is observed that on average students from all contexts improve their test results from one year to the next.

Graph 19. Development of results in *Vocabulary, Reading and Grammar* according to sociocultural context – 2015



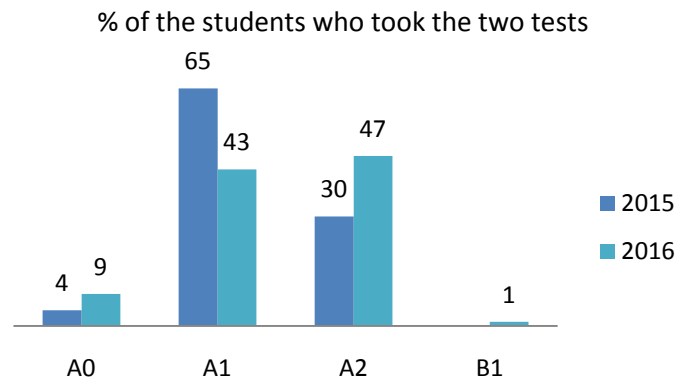
Source: Baseline test of the 2014, 2015 and 2016 adaptive tests

Furthermore, as shown in the graph, while in less critical contexts (levels 4 and 5) improvement in results from one year to the next is of around 65 to 75 points, in the more critical contexts there is a less marked difference between 2014 and 2015 (of around 37 and 46 points) but significantly larger between 2015 and 2016 (of around 79 and 87 points, even exceeding the improvement shown in levels 4 and 5). According to this, it can be stated that the third year of English language learning bridges part of the gap that exists in the first two years.

Moreover, when examining the students who took the listening comprehension component both in 2015 and 2016 (a total of 21,320 students), data shows that results also improved after one more year of exposure to the English language. In this particular case the increase in the A2 level is of 17 percentage points.

Graph 20. Development of results in *Listening* - 2015 and 2016

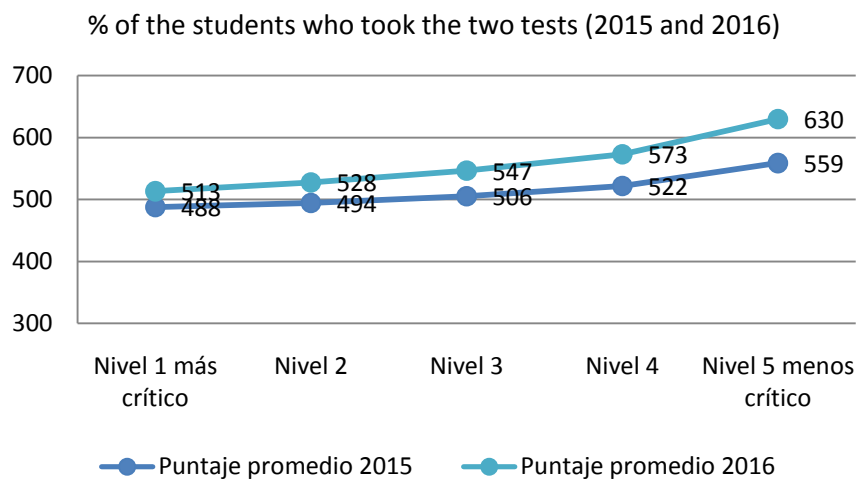
⁸ In 2014, the number of students who reached an A2 level was 36%; in 2015 it increased to 58% and in 2016 to 78%, which gives a total increase of 22 and 20 percentage points respectively.



Source: Baseline test of the 2015 and 2016 adaptive tests

When analysing such development based on sociocultural context, it is observed that, even though students across all contexts improve their results in this second component, the students from less critical contexts improve almost three times more than those from more critical backgrounds.

Graph 21. Development of results in *Listening* according to sociocultural context



Source: Baseline test of the 2015 and 2016 adaptive tests

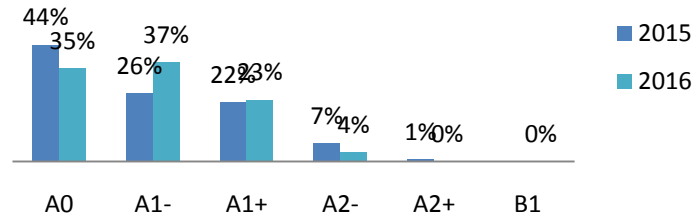
Lastly, when examining the students who took the writing component in 2015 and 2016 (a total of 21,876 students), data shows an increase in the percentage of students at A0 and A1 levels and a decrease in the percentage of students at A2 level.

It should be noted that in 2016 the format of the test writing task was modified. While in 2015 students were presented with a picture and asked to write a description of it, in this last edition they were asked to complete sentences about a picture and then to describe it⁹.

Graph 22. Development of results in *Writing* - 2015 and 2016

⁹ See Appendix 2 – Task to assess written production.

% of the students who took the two tests



Source: Baseline test of the 2015 and 2016 adaptive tests

Conclusions

The third edition of the English adaptive tests was carried out in 2016. The test was administered to students in Years 4, 5 and 6 of Primary School and for the first time to students in the 1st Year of Secondary School. As in 2015, students went through a series of tests linked together, which allowed us to assess their proficiency in different areas and skills: *Vocabulary, Reading, Grammar, Listening* and *Writing*.

The results show students' achievements and improvement in English language learning in Primary Education, both through face-to-face and videoconference lessons and across school years and sociocultural contexts. In addition, when analysing the development of results in the different editions of the test, substantial year-on-year progress is observed.

In the case of Year 6 of Primary School, the percentages of students who reach an A2 level are as follow: 75% in reading comprehension, 50% in listening comprehension and 4% in written production. This is a key factor in order to ensure continuity between Primary and Secondary Education.

Those students in Secondary Education who took the test exhibited higher levels of performance in the three test components than Primary students. However, it should be noted that the former cannot be considered a representative sample of all students in the First Year of Secondary Education. Future editions of the test with increased participation of Secondary students will certainly allow us to analyse the continuity in English language learning between both school stages.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Descriptors

Table 1. Descriptors and Levels. Test: *Vocabulary - Reading – Grammar*

Level	Category	Descriptor	θMin	θMax
A0	IN PROGRESS	The student is in the process of learning English but requires more time to achieve progress in the language.	0	288
A1-	BEGINNER LOW	The student demonstrates initial understanding of basic vocabulary and very simple sentences and grammar structures in English related to him or herself and his/her family and surroundings.	289	456
A1+	BEGINNER HIGH	The student demonstrates a clear understanding of basic vocabulary and simple sentences and grammar structures in English related to him or herself and his/her family and surroundings.	457	536
A2-	ELEMENTARY LOW	The student differentiates and demonstrates understanding of various common expressions in English and recognises some of the most frequent and essential grammar structures related to him or herself and his/her activities, preferences and surroundings.	537	923
A2+	ELEMENTARY HIGH	The student differentiates and demonstrates a sound understanding of various common expressions in English and recognises the most frequent and essential grammar structures related to him or herself and his/her activities, preferences and surroundings.	924	1499
B1	INTERMEDIATE	The student differentiates and demonstrates a broad understanding of expressions and brief texts about different topics familiar to him/her (studies, free time activities, his/her areas of interest and everyday surroundings). He/she recognises the most frequent grammar structures in the different verb tenses.	1500	

Table 2. Descriptors and Levels. Test: *Listening*



Level	Category	Descriptor	θMin	θMax
A0	IN PROGRESS	The student requires more exposure to the language to develop his/her listening comprehension skills in English.	0	353
A1-	BEGINNER LOW	The student demonstrates initial listening comprehension ability in English. He/she understands greetings and very basic dialogues about topics familiar to children his/her age. He/she understands basic descriptions worded in a clear and slow manner and which contain specific references to colour, size and shape.	354	492
A1+	BEGINNER HIGH	The student demonstrates initial listening comprehension ability in English. He/she understands greetings and simple dialogues about topics familiar to children his/her age. He/she understands basic descriptions of physical surroundings and people, worded in a clear and slow manner.	493	545
A2-	ELEMENTARY LOW	The student demonstrates listening comprehension ability in English of simple messages and exchanges which contain expressions and topics frequent to children his/her age, such as the weather, clothes and preferences. He/she understands simple descriptions of physical surroundings and people.	546	709
A2+	ELEMENTARY HIGH	The student demonstrates listening comprehension ability in English of messages and exchanges related to situations and topics familiar to children his/her age. He/she understands simple descriptions of situations, physical surroundings and people.	710	1232
B1	INTERMEDIATE	The student demonstrates listening comprehension ability in English of the main ideas in long texts and dialogues about everyday topics related to his/her surroundings, activities, studies and free time, as well as explanations, opinions and plans.	1233	

Table 3. Descriptors and Levels. Test: *Writing*

Level	Category	Descriptor	Score
A0	IN PROGRESS	The student is in the process of learning how to write in English but requires more time to achieve progress in written production.	0-1
A1-	BEGINNER LOW	The student can write isolated words in English and is in the process of starting writing sentences about very familiar topics.	2
A1+	BEGINNER HIGH	The student can write very basic sentences in English about very familiar topics and can also give very basic information about him or herself and somebody else.	3
A2-	ELEMENTARY LOW	The student can write sentences in English about familiar topics, including some detail and making proper use of syntax and vocabulary.	4
A2+	ELEMENTARY HIGH	The student can write different sentences in English about a range of familiar topics, including more detail and making a correct use of syntax and vocabulary. He/she can add cohesion devices to his/her writing.	5
B1	INTERMEDIATE	The student can write brief texts in English about a range of familiar topics, including more detail, offering explanations and opinions and making a correct use of syntax, a wide vocabulary and cohesive devices.	6

Appendix 2 – Sample items


A0 level Questions (students fail to demonstrate 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>		<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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A1 level Questions, *Reading*

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

A1 level Questions, *Vocabulary*

	<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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A1 level Questions, *Grammar*

	<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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A2 level Questions, Reading

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

Task to assess written production (Writing):



Esta es una foto de Laura. Mira la foto y completa la frase con una, dos o tres palabras en el recuadro debajo de la oración.

This is Laura. She is_____.

She has_____ hair.

She_____ friends.

She_____ apples.

She can_____.

Presta atención a la foto.

Escribe en inglés todo lo que puedas sobre Laura.

Puedes escribir sobre el aspecto físico de Laura, su ropa, lo que le gusta y no le gusta, lo que puede y no puede hacer, sobre la rutina de Laura y sus sueños.