

Education
First



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EF EPI

EF EPI English Proficiency Index





Introduction

More people are learning English than ever before

Every year, more and more speakers of other languages are learning English. In countries around the world, public school systems are teaching English to children from primary or pre-school grades. Secondary schools are making English mandatory and are including English-language instruction in other academic subjects, most often math or science. A growing number of universities require English for admission or graduation, and many now offer degree programs entirely in English to compete with the top-ranked institutions in the U.S. and the U.K. In addition to all the young people learning English through public education, the private English-instruction sector is an estimated 50 billion dollar industry. Indeed, it has been proposed that within the next decade as many as two billion people will be learning English at any given time.

How do we measure success?

Yet despite the billions of hours and dollars poured into teaching people English, there is little measurement of the success of these investments. Within the English-teaching community, there is no consensus on the best ways to evaluate English proficiency, or indeed on the ultimate goals of English study. While most English teachers and students agree that communication is the primary objective, more work must be done to define target competencies and how each competency can best be evaluated.

Standardizing measurement of adult English proficiency

The EF English Proficiency Index (EPI) has been created in this context as a standardized measurement of adult English proficiency, comparable between countries and over time. It is the first index of its kind to give countries a benchmark against which to measure the average English competency of the working population. The index uses a unique set of test data from over two million adults who took free online English tests over a period of three years. Because this group of test takers is so diverse and the entry barrier to taking an online English test is so low, the resulting scores are reasonably representative of the average English level of adults. While there is no guarantee that this particular proficiency score corresponds to the academic and economic goals set by an individual nation, the EF EPI does provide a uniquely standardized comparison of English proficiency. This is useful for citizens and governments alike when trying to evaluate the effectiveness of their English language policies as compared to their neighbors'.

Two billion people will be learning English in the next decade.

The EF EPI uses English test scores from over two million adults around the world.

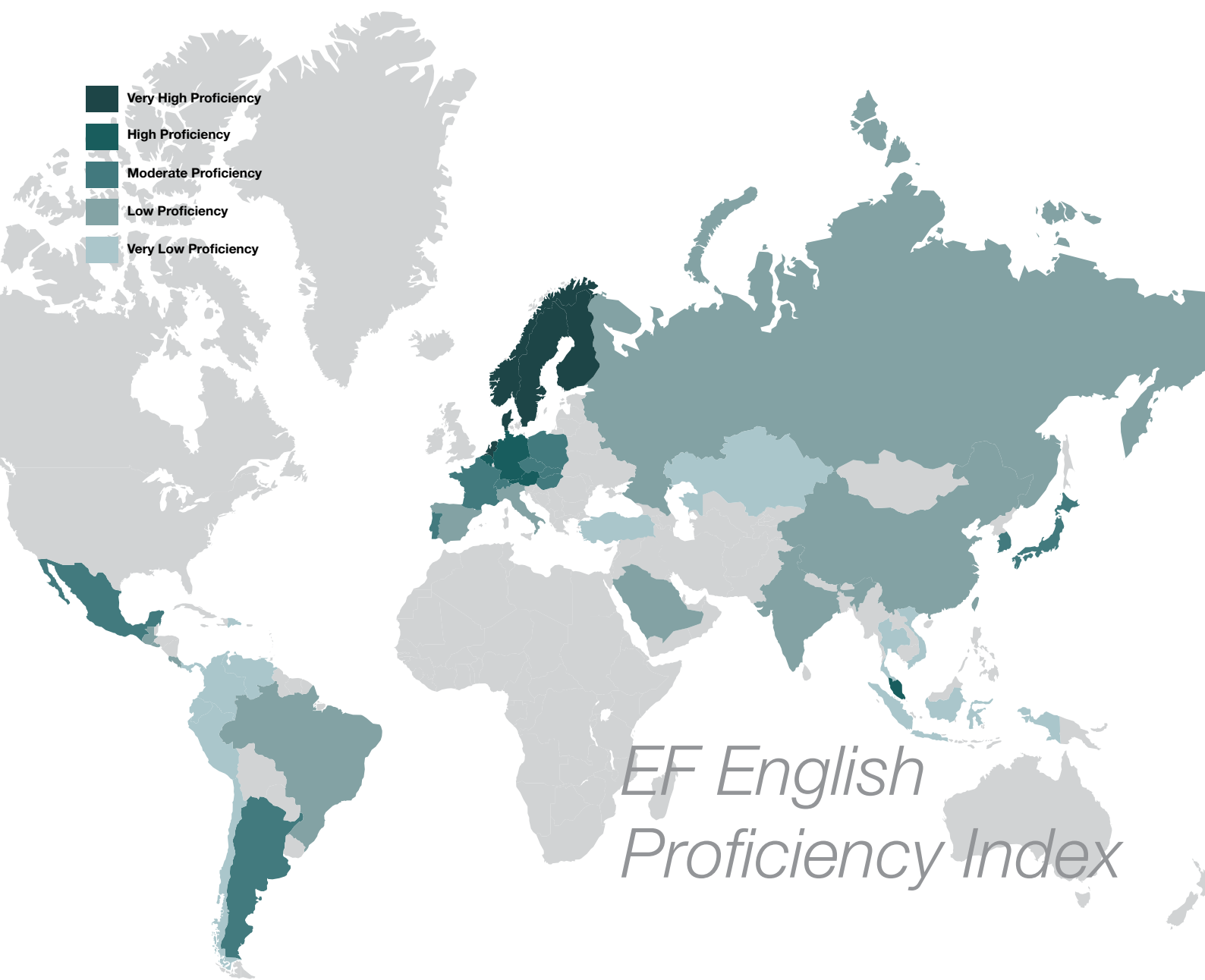
“In a world where speaking English is becoming a basic skill rather than an advantage, the EF EPI stands out from the existing language tests for three reasons: its focus on communicative competence, the unique database on which it is standardized, and its availability over the internet. This is the first time that policy-makers, educationalists, and researchers have a tool that allows decisions on language teaching to be informed by comparisons with 44 countries and over two million learners. In the years to come, the EPI is likely to set the benchmark for the assessment of international English proficiency.”

Dr. Napoleon Katsos

Senior Research Associate

University of Cambridge Research Centre of English and Applied Linguistics





Rank	Country	EF EPI Score	Level	Rank	Country	EF EPI Score	Level
1	Norway	69.09	Very High Proficiency	23	Italy	49.05	Low Proficiency
2	Netherlands	67.93	Very High Proficiency	24	Spain	49.01	Low Proficiency
3	Denmark	66.58	Very High Proficiency	25	Taiwan	48.93	Low Proficiency
4	Sweden	66.26	Very High Proficiency	26	Saudi Arabia	48.05	Low Proficiency
5	Finland	61.25	Very High Proficiency	27	Guatemala	47.80	Low Proficiency
6	Austria	58.58	High Proficiency	28	El Salvador	47.65	Low Proficiency
7	Belgium	57.23	High Proficiency	29	China	47.62	Low Proficiency
8	Germany	56.64	High Proficiency	30	India	47.35	Low Proficiency
9	Malaysia	55.54	High Proficiency	31	Brazil	47.27	Low Proficiency
10	Poland	54.62	Moderate Proficiency	32	Russia	45.79	Low Proficiency
11	Switzerland	54.60	Moderate Proficiency	33	Dominican Republic	44.91	Very Low Proficiency
12	Hong Kong	54.44	Moderate Proficiency	34	Indonesia	44.78	Very Low Proficiency
13	South Korea	54.19	Moderate Proficiency	35	Peru	44.71	Very Low Proficiency
14	Japan	54.17	Moderate Proficiency	36	Chile	44.63	Very Low Proficiency
15	Portugal	53.62	Moderate Proficiency	37	Ecuador	44.54	Very Low Proficiency
16	Argentina	53.49	Moderate Proficiency	38	Venezuela	44.43	Very Low Proficiency
17	France	53.16	Moderate Proficiency	39	Vietnam	44.32	Very Low Proficiency
18	Mexico	51.48	Moderate Proficiency	40	Panama	43.62	Very Low Proficiency
19	Czech Republic	51.31	Moderate Proficiency	41	Colombia	42.77	Very Low Proficiency
20	Hungary	50.80	Moderate Proficiency	42	Thailand	39.41	Very Low Proficiency
21	Slovakia	50.64	Moderate Proficiency	43	Turkey	37.66	Very Low Proficiency
22	Costa Rica	49.15	Low Proficiency	44	Kazakhstan	31.74	Very Low Proficiency

English Learning Today

Half of employees in international companies use English every day at work.

Importance of English as a second language

Historically, speaking a second language—or more specifically speaking a highly valued second language—was a marker of the social and economic elite. English spread under the influence of the British Empire and the post-war economic expansion of the United States, in many countries replacing the role that French had played previously as a marker of the well educated upper class. However, globalization, urbanization, and the internet have dramatically changed the role of English in the past 20 years. Today, English proficiency can hardly be thought of as an economic advantage at all. It is certainly no longer a marker of the elite. Instead, it is increasingly a basic skill needed for the entire workforce, in the same way that literacy was transformed in the last two centuries from an elite privilege to a basic requirement for informed citizenship.

The expanding business process outsourcing sector relies on a large, skilled pool of English speakers.

Globalization is driving English learning

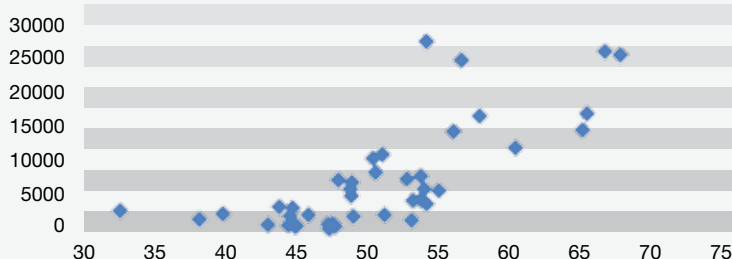
A 2007 survey of 10,000 non-native English-speaking employees in international corporations indicated that 49% of employees were using English every day at work. Only 9% indicated that they did not use English at work at all. English has become the de facto language of communication not only in international business but also in nearly every context where two people do not share a language.

Even within countries where several regional or tribal languages meet, English serves as a common communication tool. Despite the controversy this de facto status can cause, governments around the world are increasingly recognizing that English proficiency is a necessary skill for all their citizens to participate in a global economy.

English is key to attracting foreign investment

After cost, the most important factor for U.S. and U.K. companies when considering outsourcing business processes is the education level of the local population and English proficiency. Developing countries ready to tap into the business process outsourcing boom recognize that producing large numbers of skilled graduates able to communicate in English is the most reliable way to expand their service economy. A strong service economy is in turn essential to creating a middle class, strengthening spending, and growing the national economy. It is no surprise that many developing countries are now integrating English into the curriculum from the primary or even pre-school years, using it as a medium of instruction in addition to teaching it as a separate language. Increasingly English is also being included on national standardized testing.

Exports per capita (\$)*



EF EPI Score

Exports and English Proficiency Demonstrate Positive Correlation

Countries such as France, Spain, and Russia, where exports do not play as large a role in the economy, tend to have lower English proficiencies. Poor economic integration weakens incentives to develop English skills, which are, in turn, vital to participation in the world economy.

*CIA World Factbook 2010.

For an interactive version of this chart, visit www.ef.com/epi/ef-epi-ranking/exports-per-capita/

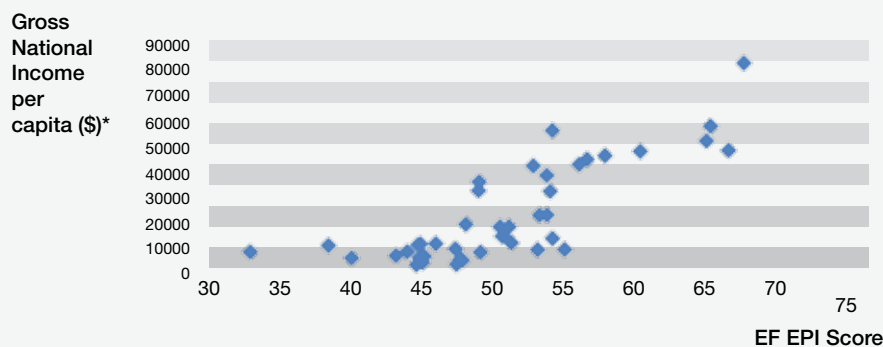
English spreads innovation

International communication amongst scientists and engineers is central to collaborative research and the sharing of technology between countries. Researchers in the United States publish by far the most scientific papers every year and the U.K. ranks third in publication numbers, after China. But countries with low English proficiency demonstrate unusually low levels of international collaboration on research. In 2009 only 15% of scientific papers published in China cited an international collaborator, compared to 45% in the U.K. and 48% in Germany. This inability to read the research published by others and to contribute to international innovation is a significant challenge for countries lacking English skills amongst highly trained professionals.

Individual earning power and English

Although English skills have long been an explicit requirement in certain types of jobs like diplomacy and translation, those skills today are an implicit advantage in nearly any job across all sectors of the economy. Recruiters and HR managers around the world report that candidates with English skills above the local average stand out from the crowd and garner 30-50% higher salaries than similarly-qualified candidates without English skills. On a broader scale, countries with higher income levels per capita are also more proficient at English. English skills and income levels appear to be in a virtuous cycle where better proficiency leads to higher incomes, which in turn drives greater investment in English training.

English proficiency shows a strong correlation to a country's gross national income.



Better English means higher income levels

The interaction between English proficiency and gross national income per capita is a virtuous cycle, with improving English skills driving up salaries, which in turn gives governments and individuals more money to invest in English training. At the moderate proficiency level (EPI score 50-55) English skills are not well correlated with income, indicating that other factors play a larger role in determining national income for those countries.

*The World Bank 2008.

For an interactive version of this chart, visit www.ef.com/epi/ef-epi-ranking/gross-national-income/

English Study

Three-fourths of English speakers today are non-native.

Even in full-immersion environments, children need 4–7 years to gain native-level English skills.

English increasingly belongs to non-native speakers

Not surprisingly, English teaching theory has evolved rapidly in the last two decades according to the changing student population. Linguists and English teaching professionals more and more view successful communication as the end goal of English language instruction rather than an inflexible standard of correctness or native-like pronunciation. In a world in which more than three-fourths of all English speakers are non-native, ownership of the English language has clearly shifted from the historic centers in the United Kingdom and the United States. Most communication in English today is between non-native speakers, who usually accept non-standard grammar and pronunciation as long as communication remains clear. Anecdotally, many non-native English speakers report easier communication in English with other non-native speakers than with native speakers. Native speakers tend to be less tolerant of perceived errors, differences in pronunciation, and non-standard grammar. They are also less skilled in achieving successful communication because of these obstacles.

English learning is focusing on communication and application

Accordingly, studies suggest that English teaching in all its forms needs to shift towards teaching successful communication strategies, and student performance should be measured along those same lines. It will take years before this shift can propagate into classrooms and test centers around the world, but students with this type of communication-based training will be far better suited to tomorrow's workplace than those memorizing grammar rules. Even native English speakers working in multi-lingual environments benefit from training in careful listening and rephrasing tactics to achieve smoother communication with non-native speakers.

Myths and truths about age and English language acquisition

Despite the increasingly young age at which students around the world are beginning their English studies, there is no scientific proof of a critical period for learning a second language. That is to say that there is no cutoff point after which language-learning becomes nearly impossible. Language learning abilities decline slowly and steadily with age after a peak in late childhood, although many adults are still extremely effective language students. Starting younger obviously allows for more total years of language education. However, studies show that older children (8–12) are generally faster at learning English and maintain their advantage even after several years of study. For younger children, development of sound and pattern recognition, linguistic curiosity and playfulness, and meta-linguistic awareness are all presented as advantages of early exposure to foreign languages. These effects are not measured by tests like those used in the EF EPI.

Regardless of starting age, general consensus in the academic community is that even in full-immersion settings children need four to seven years to be as competent in academic English as their native-speaking peers, and three to five years to be as fluent orally. In the partial-immersion environment in which most students learn English, a far longer time frame is required. More general recognition that complete proficiency in a language is a long-term goal would help students to set realistic milestones for themselves and commit to their study programs accordingly.



Public and Private Education

Most English tests do not evaluate a learner's true goal: successful communication.

Seeing results from English education reform may take decades

English is increasingly a part of public school education around the world, much as math and science. Changing policies on starting ages of language learning in the past decade have sometimes meant that eight-year-olds and fifteen-year-olds are all starting English at the same time. Such policy shifts are slow to show impact amongst adults. For our test-taking population, language policies that were in place between 1980 and 2001 are those that most strongly impacted their public school years. Governments making reforms now need patience and dedication to a clear language acquisition goal for several decades before they will see a measurable rise in English proficiency in the full adult population.

English functions in parallel with national languages

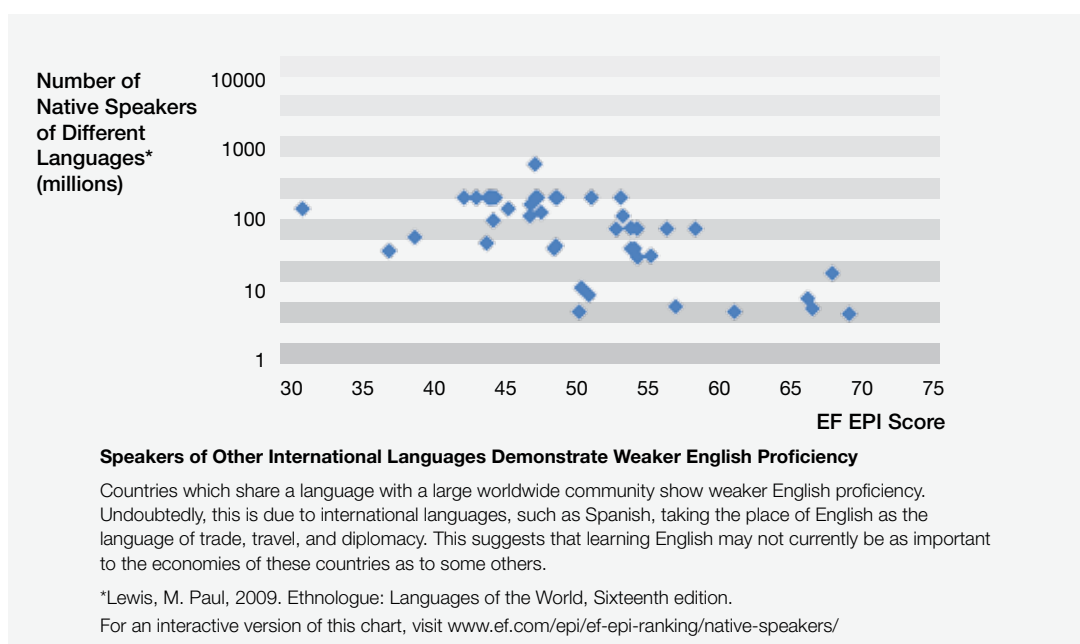
Requiring English of all students remains controversial in many countries, either because of the concern that other national languages taking priority or because of the perceived imperialism of English's global dominance. However, there is little evidence to support either fear. Multi-lingual countries can clearly achieve high levels of English proficiency without sacrificing their identities, as illustrated by Finland and Malaysia. It is even more difficult to argue that the U.S. and the U.K. are today driving the spread of

English. In the past decade, anti-Americanism has been polled at record levels since the end of World War II. Instead there is far more evidence that a globalized economy requires a shared language and English serves that function.

Students and adults are turning to private English-language industry

The private English language industry is immense and includes a dizzying array of study options for all ages and budgets, both online and off. Parents who are unsatisfied with the language policy in public school turn to group courses for ever-younger children.

Adults who attended school during a time when English was less important take online or evening courses to improve their employability. Students aiming to achieve top marks in high school exit, or university entrance, exams spend time abroad. Companies trying to improve internal communications to increase productivity train their staff. In addition to all these formal language courses, tens of thousands of websites dispense English lessons, tips, videos, and e-mails to be consumed individually outside any structured language-learning program.



The English language training industry needs standardization

Today students are presented with an ever-increasing variety of learning methods, from the basic teacher-at-a-blackboard, to the tailored, mission-oriented, multi-platform learning program available 24 hours a day on demand. Historically most students have received their formal education through the public school and university system and have relied on that system to set appropriate competency goals, align curriculum and teaching methods to reach them, and evaluate success before delivering diplomas. In the private English-learning sector what students encounter instead is overwhelming options in a fragmented marketplace. The lack of standardized methods to describe ability, quality, and goals in English learning, and students' lack of practice in setting such goals independently, lead to time and money wasted on English-learning methods that are unproven, low quality, or poorly matched to the needs of individual students. Students are discouraged both at the outset by the confusing diversity of options and over time, as they lack any feeling of progress. There is a near total absence of personalized, unbiased guidance available.

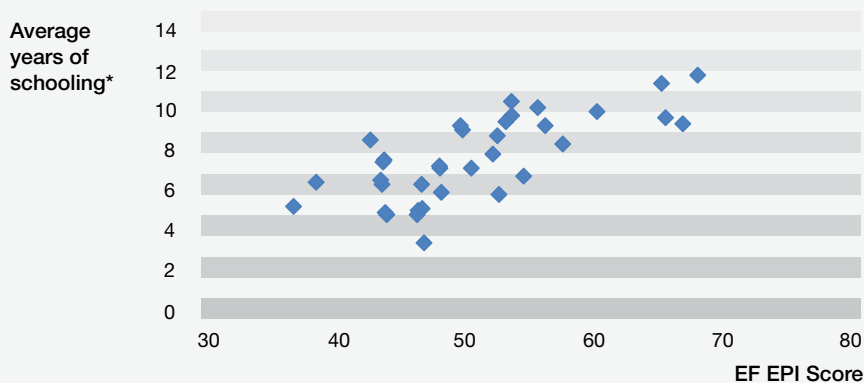
Current English competency tests focus on outdated definitions of proficiency

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a broad attempt to define the different abilities of language students at different levels of study. Since its conception in the last decade, it has been widely adopted by both public- and private-sector language instructors to align course levels. However, the CEFR is only a first step towards standard-setting in language education. More detailed definitions of finer-grained skill levels and accompanying evaluative tools are needed, particularly those which take into account current thinking on communication as the primary goal of English study. The most widely-adopted English competency tests today are still heavily weighted towards an older notion of proficiency, no longer in sync with the role that English plays in the world today as an international communication tool.

Private English instruction — a 50-billion-dollar industry — is excessively fragmented.

A comparable and relevant worldwide standard

The EF EPI was developed in response to the clear demand for a way to compare English proficiency across countries. Drawing data from four tests, across well over two million test takers in 44 countries, the EF EPI offers unique insight into the state of global English proficiency in adults.



Average Years of Schooling Correlates Positively with English Proficiency

Given the incredible diversity of educational systems across political, economic, and cultural contexts, there remains a strong correlation between average years of schooling and English proficiency. Countries looking to improve their English proficiency, and the benefits it brings, must keep children in school longer.

* World Bank. Robert Barro and Jong-Wha Lee, 2000.

For an interactive version of this chart, visit www.ef.com/epi/ef-epi-ranking/number-of-years-of-schooling/

Europe

EF EPI Ranking



Rank	Country	Score	Level
1	Norway	69.09	Very High Proficiency
2	Netherlands	67.93	Very High Proficiency
3	Denmark	66.58	Very High Proficiency
4	Sweden	66.26	Very High Proficiency
5	Finland	61.25	Very High Proficiency
6	Austria	58.58	High Proficiency
7	Belgium	57.23	High Proficiency
8	Germany	56.64	High Proficiency
10	Poland	54.62	Moderate Proficiency
11	Switzerland	54.60	Moderate Proficiency
15	Portugal	53.62	Moderate Proficiency
17	France	53.16	Moderate Proficiency
19	Czech Republic	51.31	Moderate Proficiency
20	Hungary	50.80	Moderate Proficiency
21	Slovakia	50.64	Moderate Proficiency
23	Italy	49.05	Low Proficiency
24	Spain	49.01	Low Proficiency
32	Russia	45.79	Low Proficiency
43	Turkey	37.66	Very Low Proficiency

The 44 countries and territories represented in this year's index illustrate the wide range of English skills around the world today. Comparison of countries to their neighbors, trading partners, and closest allies provides a fascinating study in divergent national priorities and educational policies.

Europe's explicit culture of multilingualism gives it the highest English proficiency of any region.

Europe shows strong English proficiency

Europe is remarkably strong in English, containing all but one of the highest proficiency countries in the world. The European Union has an explicit goal of multilingualism for all its citizens. This affirmation of a culture of multilingualism is a powerful force pushing changes in public school curricula, corporate culture, and European Union policies. Today, over 90% of all students in Europe exit their years of required schooling having studied English. In addition, many multinational companies and factories in Europe have adopted English as their working language.

Even students who begin English study later can attain very high proficiency

In Europe, countries which start English instruction at an earlier age often have too few hours of second language instruction to make a measurable difference. Although many studies have shown the benefits of being exposed to a foreign language early, it seems that the limited hours of English instruction for young children in the public school systems of Europe are not enough to impact proficiency. For example, between 1984 and 2000 in the Netherlands and Denmark, children started English courses between ages 10 and 12, while in Spain and Italy they started between ages 8 and 11. Spain and Italy have the lowest adult proficiency levels in the EU

despite the younger starting age. This lesson is an important one for policy makers: lowering the starting age of English study alone will not raise proficiency. The quality of the instructors, their teaching materials and methods, and the number of hours of exposure to English are central in determining which skills students master.

English study does not conflict with other national languages

The presence of other national languages also does not correspond to a dampening of English proficiency, as demonstrated by Finland, Belgium, and Switzerland. This should reassure speakers of regional languages, concerned that they are competing with English for space in the curriculum. When English is clearly defined as an international language, it plays a separate role from regional languages, second national languages, and immigrants' native languages in society and in the construction of a personal identity. Debate often breaks out when English appears to be given priority over national languages. When some German-speaking cantons in Switzerland began teaching English to pupils at a younger age than French, another Swiss national language, it sparked national debates. However, our data show that there need be no conflict between English and local languages.

Requiring English as the first foreign language results in high proficiency

There is, however, a strong correlation between the requirement of English for all students as the first foreign language and high English proficiency. Only Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Germany required English as the first foreign language for 100% of students between 1982 and 2000. Other countries either required all students to learn another language first, or allowed schools or students a choice of first language.

Germany's relatively lower level of English proficiency in this group can be explained in two ways. First, until 1989 English was the required first foreign language for all students only in West Germany. A portion of the students in our test data were schooled in East Germany before 1989 under an educational system that did not require English. Second, Germany requires fewer years of English study during school (5–6 years as compared to 7–10 years in the very high proficiency countries). Although we found no absolute correlation between number of years of English study and English proficiency, there is a logical combined correlation: where English is the required first foreign language for all students, the number of years of study has an impact on overall proficiency.

Understanding lower proficiency: Lack of education reform and funding

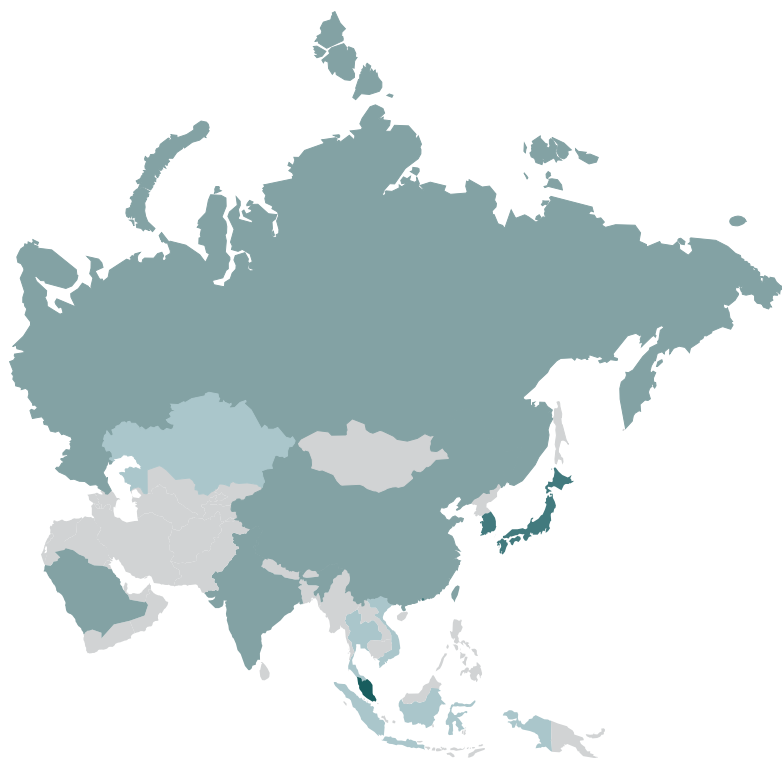
Spain's relatively low proficiency score for the region is easier to understand in the context of the vast educational reforms that have taken place in the past 30 years. In the mid-1980's Spain was 45th in the world in per capita spending on education, far behind most other countries in Western Europe. Sweeping educational reforms in the 1990s and 2000s mean that today Spain's children are educated to a standard in line with their neighbors. However, the case of Spain shows that it takes many years before educational reform is reflected in the adult population as a whole.

Russia's public school infrastructure was very poor during the period our test takers attended school. In the late 1980s, 30% of students were reportedly studying in schools without running water. Tens of thousands of schools were subsequently closed due to decaying infrastructure, with the effect that in the mid 1990s one student out of two was attending a school operating two or three shifts to accommodate all its pupils. The public expenditure on education in 2005 was just 3.6% of GNP, significantly lower than any country in the EU.



Asia

EF EPI Ranking



Rank	Country	Score	Level
9	Malaysia	55.54	High Proficiency
12	Hong Kong	54.44	Moderate Proficiency
13	South Korea	54.19	Moderate Proficiency
14	Japan	54.17	Moderate Proficiency
25	Taiwan	48.93	Low Proficiency
26	Saudi Arabia	48.05	Low Proficiency
29	China	47.62	Low Proficiency
30	India	47.35	Low Proficiency
32	Russia	45.79	Low Proficiency
34	Indonesia	44.78	Very Low Proficiency
39	Vietnam	44.32	Very Low Proficiency
42	Thailand	39.41	Very Low Proficiency
44	Kazakhstan	31.74	Very Low Proficiency

When several languages co-exist, English is a bridge language; owned by no one and used by all.

Asia can still make improvements in English proficiency

Asia's English proficiency scores show that reputations are not always accurate. Take for example the nearly equivalent scores of China and India. Despite its British colonial legacy and reputation as an English-speaking nation, India is today no more proficient in English than rapidly-improving China. Indeed, although it is very difficult to measure the number of people who speak English in each country because of different definitions of proficiency, the British Council estimated in 2010 that India had anywhere between 55 and 350 million English speakers while a report published by Cambridge University Press estimates that China has 250 to 350 million English learners. It appears that China is poised to surpass India in the number of English speakers in the coming years, if it has not already done so.

Taiwan and Hong Kong also have scores that are lower than many would expect. Both show that economic development and spending on education alone are not equivalent to high levels of English proficiency.

Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong all have a very literate populations and a strong Confucian history that values education. It is interesting to note that the

three territories have very different educational policies and histories of contact with the English language. Despite Hong Kong's historic ties to the U.K. and the official status of English as a language of government and public life, it does not significantly outpace its neighbors in English proficiency amongst adults. A strong emphasis has been placed on English study in Korea and Japan, both in the public school system and through the thousands of private English training institutes in those countries. Korea and Japan also have ties to an English-speaking country in the past century, but those were less lengthy and more fraught.

English serves as a bridge between linguistic communities

Malaysia, the highest proficiency country in Asia and the only high proficiency country outside Europe, is an excellent example of how English can be used to bridge linguistic divides between different communities within the same country. Malaysia has large Chinese and Indian communities in addition to the Malay majority, each with its own traditions and language. English has long been a required subject for all pupils starting in primary school and English proficiency is tested at the end of primary school and again at the end of secondary school under

the British 'O' level system. In Malaysia, English is valued as a shared language across communities, not owned by any one of the three, as well as being an international medium of communication.

China will require momentous English language training

China is attempting a remarkable linguistic feat. It is at once pushing its citizens towards Mandarin as a shared national language and ramping up English training to reap the full economic benefit of its current global position. More people are learning English in China than in any other country. The EF EPI score shows that China still has a way to go before it can consider itself adequately proficient in English. But the government has shown great motivation both in training children via the public schools and in retraining adults, particularly those in the public sector. China used the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010 to set detailed goals for different public sector employees as well as used the events as a deadline for correcting English-language signposting in public places such as restaurant menus and restrooms. To the extent that China is increasingly driving much of the regional economy, its ability to communicate in English will pressure all of its neighbors to keep pace.



Latin America

EF EPI Ranking



Rank	Country	Score	Level
16	Argentina	53.49	Moderate Proficiency
18	Mexico	51.48	Moderate Proficiency
22	Costa Rica	49.15	Low Proficiency
27	Guatemala	47.80	Low Proficiency
28	El Salvador	47.65	Low Proficiency
31	Brazil	47.27	Low Proficiency
33	Dominican Republic	44.91	Very Low Proficiency
35	Peru	44.71	Very Low Proficiency
36	Chile	44.63	Very Low Proficiency
37	Ecuador	44.54	Very Low Proficiency
38	Venezuela	44.43	Very Low Proficiency
40	Panama	43.62	Very Low Proficiency
41	Colombia	42.77	Very Low Proficiency

Below average school quality and attendance levels push Latin America to the bottom of the regional rankings.

A solid basic education for all citizens is a prerequisite for English proficiency.

Spanish serves as an international language in Latin America

Latin America is the weakest of all regions, with an average English proficiency score barely surpassing the low proficiency cutoff. In part this is explained by the importance of Spanish to the region. A shared language already allows for some international trade, diplomacy, and travel, lessening the motivation to learn English.

Weak primary public education reduces proficiency

However, the poor quality of public education across Latin America, combined with often low enrollment ratios, goes much further to explain the region's weakness in English. In 1999 a task force reported that half of the students entering public schools in Latin America did not complete primary school and that only one in three eligible students ever attends secondary school. Compared to a 95% completion rate of primary school in Malaysia, the divide is striking.

Even those who do receive a public education are too often getting low-quality training, leaving them unprepared for a globalized workplace. Indeed, during the 1990s several reports and international tests found that the quality of education in Latin America was far below that of countries with comparable levels of development in other parts of the world.

Understanding higher proficiency

High public school enrollment rates are key to proficiency

Brazil and Argentina had the highest public school enrollment ratios between 1984 and 2001. Brazil showed meteoric improvement in public school enrollment during the period, moving from 62% enrollment in 1984, one of the lowest levels in the region, to 90% enrollment in 2001, the best in Latin America. However, for a portion of the years when our test takers were of public school age, enrollment levels were extremely low in Brazil. Clearly the population's general level of education is an essential factor when determining the priority of learning English and their ability to do so.

Economic and social ties to English-speaking countries influence proficiency

Guatemala and Mexico, the other two countries in the region with some level of English proficiency, are likely to be benefiting from the very strong ties they maintain with the United States through immigration. Between 1990 and 1999 nearly 30% of all legal immigrants to the United States came from Mexico, by far the highest portion from any single country of origin. Some immigrants remain in the United States, increasing personal ties within families between English-speaking American-born children and family members who remained home, while others return to their countries, bringing English back to their communities. In both cases, strong ties of immigration with an English-speaking country can clearly influence English proficiency, although the influence is not strong enough to result in high proficiency amongst the general adult population.





Conclusions

The requirement of English proficiency in a globalized economy

The ability to communicate in English is rapidly becoming a requirement in a globalized economy. The early-adopter advantages of English language proficiency are already declining and are being replaced by economic disadvantages for those who do not speak English. Governments and individuals recognize the trend and are driving the explosion of English language study seen over the past decade.

But despite this explosive growth, little data is available to evaluate how countries are doing in their pursuit of English proficiency. The EF EPI allows us to draw some conclusions about how to encourage English proficiency:

- Send all children to school and give them an education on par with today's global standards.
- Teach English in public schools as a required language for all students, starting by age 12. This study should continue throughout secondary school and into university or professional school.
- Cultivate a culture of multilingualism. The more families and governments do to foster the expectation of everyone speaking more than one language, the more children will expect it of themselves. This culture of multilingualism is difficult to define but easy to recognize. Visitors notice it immediately in Scandinavia and other high proficiency countries. One reliable indicator of a strong national culture of English proficiency is a head of state who makes public appearances abroad utilizing English, giving speeches and speaking to the media in this international language.
- Recognize that many adults missed out on English training in public school. Amongst adults feeling economic pressure, demand for English learning is already high. They need low barrier paths to training and realistic goals that take into account the years required to master a foreign language. Long-term workplace training programs and adult education scholarships can both be effective strategies. Governments can exercise particular influence over public sector employees, who in most countries represent well over 10% of the workforce.

- Teach both communication skills and strategies to negotiate meaning when communication breaks down. To gain maximum benefit from time spent studying English, both students and teachers should place the priority on communication, not grammatical correctness. Many adults, having studied in a more traditional English as a Foreign Language context, need extra practice listening and speaking.
- Develop more robust, standardized proficiency assessment methods to recognize and reward effective communication skills over rote learning and grammatical correctness. The conception and adoption of such standardized assessments will reduce student frustration and drive higher quality language instruction in both the public and the private sector.

International testing of English proficiency

International testing of English proficiency not only gives a comparative measure of different education systems and their effectiveness, it also encourages discussion of evaluation standards and learning goals. Like the TIMSS and PISA tests which compare science, math, and reading skills amongst schoolchildren around the world, the EF EPI aims to compare adult English proficiency on a global scale. We welcome others with data on English learning around the world to join the conversation in the hope that together we can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of English study for the hundreds of millions of people worldwide currently learning to speak English.

More robust, standardized assessment methods are needed to recognize communication skills over grammatical correctness.

About the Index

This is the first edition of the EF English Proficiency Index. Our intention is to release updated reports evaluating the changing face of English proficiency in the coming years.

Test

The EF English Proficiency Index calculates a country's average English skill level using the best available data from four different English tests completed by hundreds of thousands of adults every year. Two of the tests are open to any internet user for free. The other two tests are online placement tests used by EF during the enrollment process before students start an English course. All four tests include grammar, vocabulary, reading, and listening sections. One test is a 30-question adaptive exam, whereby each student's questions are adjusted in difficulty according to his previous correct and incorrect answers. The three non-adaptive tests range from 60 to 80 questions in length. All test scores have been validated against EF's course levels. The test administration is identical across tests with students completing the exam on their own computers at home. There is no incentive for students to artificially inflate their scores on these low-stakes tests by cheating or cramming, as the results do not lead to certification or admission to a program.

Test takers

The EF EPI was calculated using combined test taker data from 2007 to 2009. Test results from 2,368,730 test takers across 42 countries and two territories were included. Demographic data was not collected. Only countries with a minimum of 400 test takers were included in the index. Countries with fewer than 100 test takers per test on two or more of the tests were also excluded, regardless of the total number of test takers.

We recognize that the test-taking population represented in this index is self-selected and not guaranteed to be representative of the country as a whole. Only those people either wanting to learn English or curious about their English skills will participate in one of these tests. In addition, since the tests are online, people without internet access or unused to online applications are automatically excluded. These biases would tend to skew scores higher than for the general population, excluding poorer, less-educated, and less-privileged people.

Score Calculation

In order to calculate a country's EF EPI score, each test score was normalized to obtain a percentage correct for that test according to the total number of questions. All the scores for a country were then averaged across the four tests, giving an equal weight to each test.

Each country is assigned to a proficiency cluster based on its score. These proficiency clusters allow recognition of groups of countries with similar English skill levels and comparison within and across regions. The cutoff scores for the proficiency clusters have been set according to EF's English proficiency evaluation standards based on more than 40 years of experience in English language education. EF's course levels were independently investigated by Cambridge University ESOL Examinations and rigorously mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference.

EF Education First

EF Education First (EF), was established in 1965 with the mission to break down the barriers in language, culture, and geography. With 400 schools and over 15 million students, EF specializes in language schools, academic degrees, educational travel abroad, and cultural exchange.

EF English First and EF Englishtown are divisions of EF Education First, committed to teaching English around the world. In addition to helping 1,200 corporations with English training, EF was the Official Language Training Supplier to the Beijing Olympics and is helping Brazil prepare for the 2014 World Cup. For more information, please see www.ef.com/epi and www.englishtown.com.

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