



IMPACT EVALUATION STUDY REPORT

Stepping Stones' Class Teaching Program in a Migrant Primary School in Minhang

Background

In Spring 2011, Stepping Stones started a class teaching program in a particular Migrant Primary School in Minhang District (the School).

During the first semester of teaching at the School, only select classes in grades 3, 4 and 5 were assigned volunteers. This way, a comparison can be made between the classes with Stepping Stones volunteer teachers (i.e. experimental group) and those without (i.e. control group). At the end of Spring 2011, there was an average 9% improvement in the English grades of students being taught by Stepping Stones volunteers compared to 0% improvement in the English marks of the other students. Starting the Fall 2011 semester until the present, all classes in grades 3 to 5 are now being taught by Stepping Stones volunteers.

Method, Scope and Limitations

Prior to the start of the class teaching program at the School in Spring 2011, a questionnaire was administered to all the students from grades 3 to 5 to gauge their interest in English and their level of confidence in using the language. A year after, toward the end of Spring 2012, a similar questionnaire was administered to the students. Both questionnaires tackled the students' perceptions about the following:

1. English as a favorite subject
2. English as a least favorite subject
3. How much they like learning English
4. English difficulty
5. English importance
6. Confidence in the following areas:
 - a. Talking in English in front of their classmates/ during English class
 - b. Understanding what their (volunteer) English teacher says in class
 - c. Completing their English homework correctly
 - d. Greeting/ talking to a foreigner in English
 - e. Improving their grade in English

By Spring 2012, most of the grade 3 and 4 students that were surveyed in Spring 2011 were now grade 4 and 5 students respectively. For these students, the Spring 2012 semester marked either their second or third semester of having supplemental English classes with Stepping Stones volunteers, depending on whether they were part of the experiment group or not during Spring 2011.

It was thus possible to compare the responses of the same students to the same questions over time, generating the first set of findings in this report (Longitudinal Analysis). Only the responses from students that gave a valid response both at the start of Spring 2011 and at the

end of Spring 2012 were included in the analysis of each question. As such, the number of valid respondents per question varies. The range goes from 213 valid respondents (for the question about how much they like learning English) to 346 valid respondents (for the question about English difficulty).

Since students' overall confidence tend to decline as they become older and the reality that the difficulty of academic subjects, including English, increases from one grade level to the next – a view corroborated by the principal of the School, questions pertaining to confidence and the students' perception of English difficulty were analyzed differently (Alternative Analysis). Instead of comparing the responses of the same students as they move from one grade level to the next, the responses of the students from the same grade levels were compared, generating the second set of findings in this report (i.e. responses of grade 3 students in Spring 2011 VS. responses of the grade 3 students in Spring 2012, etc.).

Additionally, there are 3 questions from the Spring 2011 and Spring 2012 questionnaires that were not compared, since they were phrased differently in the iterations. The 3 excluded questions are:

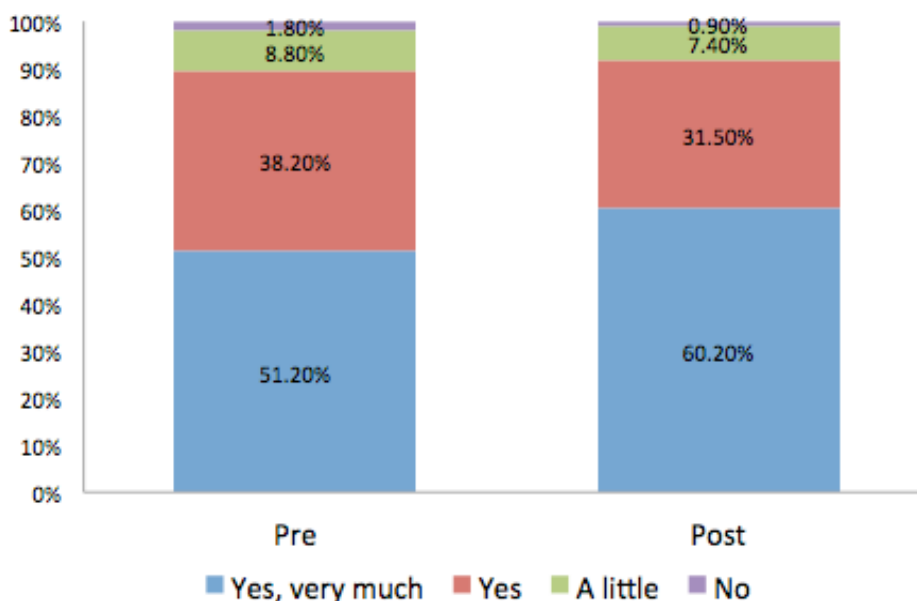
Spring 2011 Questionnaire	Spring 2012 Questionnaire
Confidence to talk in English in front of your classmates	Confidence to talk in English during English class
Confidence to understand what your English teacher says in class	Confidence to understand what your volunteer English teacher says in class
Confidence to greet a foreigner in English	Confidence to talk to a foreigner in English

Highlights – First Set of Findings (Longitudinal Analysis)

1. The students' perception of the importance of English was already high prior to the start of the entry of the Stepping Stones volunteers, at 89.4%. This increased even more to 91.7% by Spring 2012 (Table 1).

Table 1

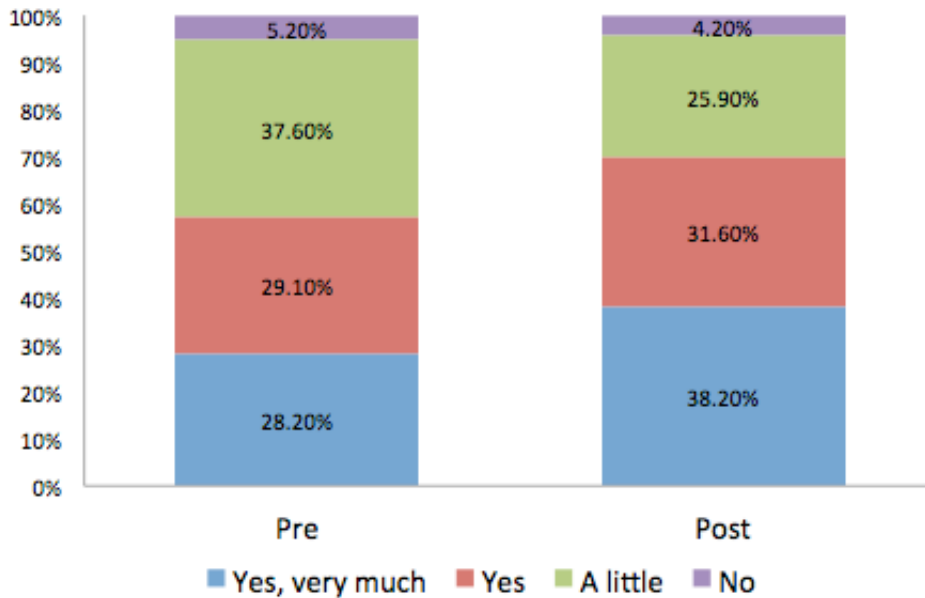
Do you think English is important?



- The percentage of students who like learning English increased by 21.8% from 57.3% to 69.8% over the period of the study (Table 2).

Table 2

Do you like learning English?



- The percentage of students that consider English as their favorite subject and as their least favorite subject increased and decreased respectively, exhibiting an overall improvement in the students' interest in English. From 32.72% at the start of Spring 2011, 47% of the students by the end of Spring 2012 indicated that English is their favorite subject (Table 3), jumping by 43.6%. While 26.73% of the students said English is their least favorite subject at the start of Spring 2011, by the end of Spring 2012 the percentage has gone down by 87.1% to only 14.29% (Table 4).

Table 3

What is your favorite subject?

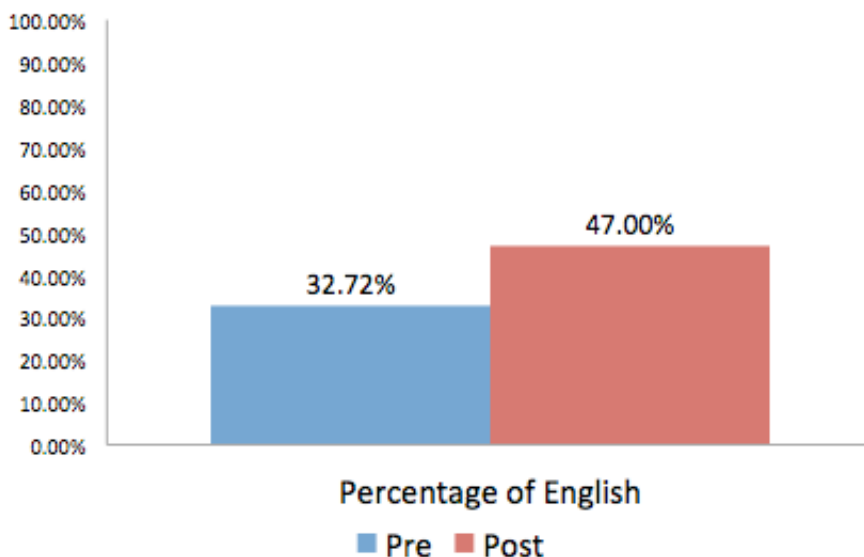
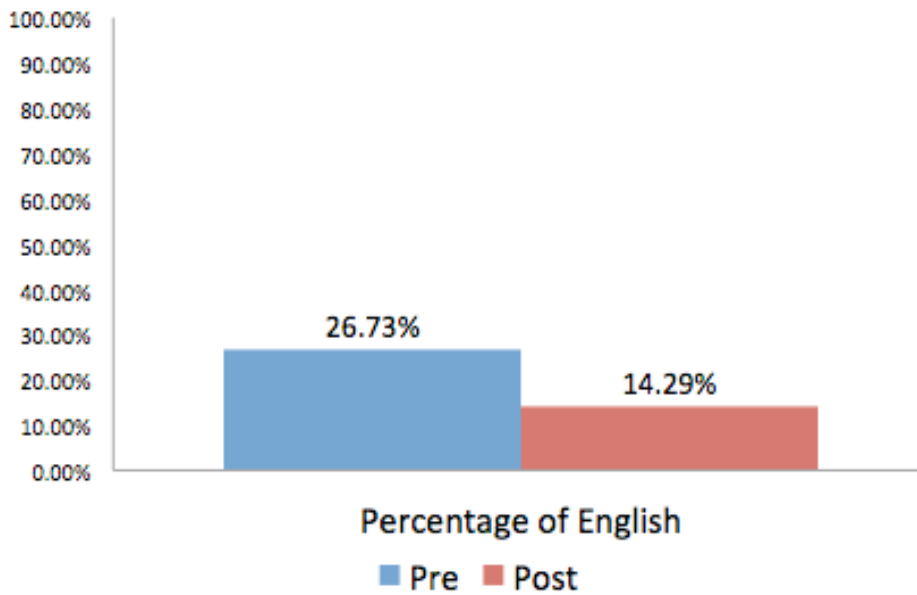


Table 4

What is your least favorite subject?

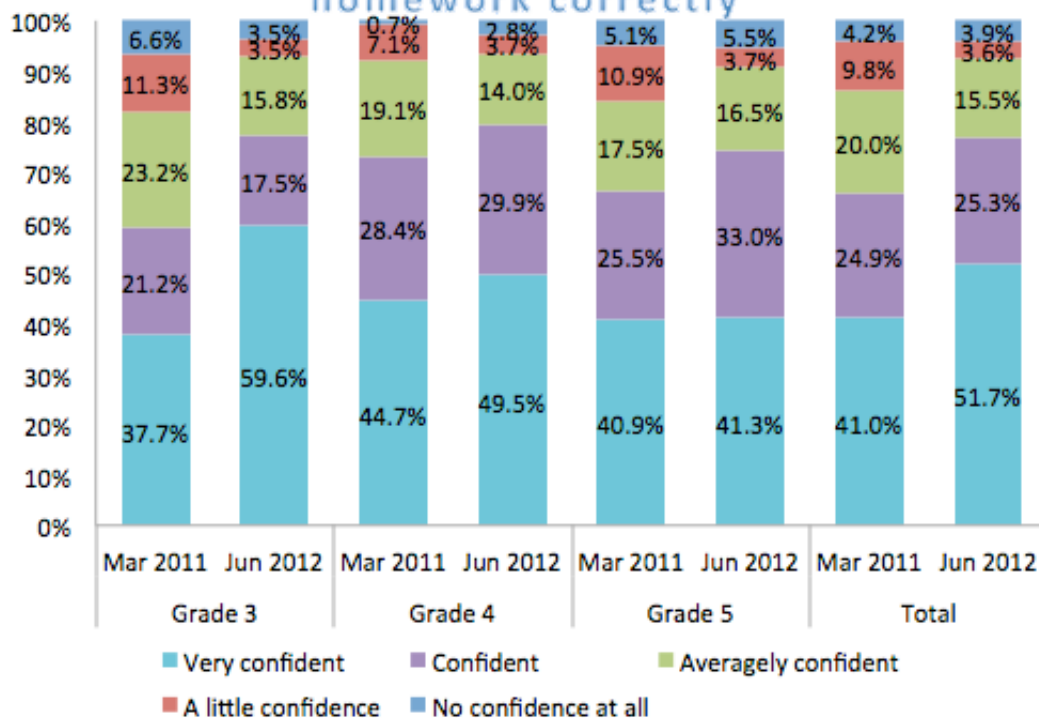


Highlights – Second Set of Findings (Alternative Analysis)

1. The percentage of students that are confident to complete their English homework correctly rose by 16.8%, from 65.9% to 77% (Table 5).

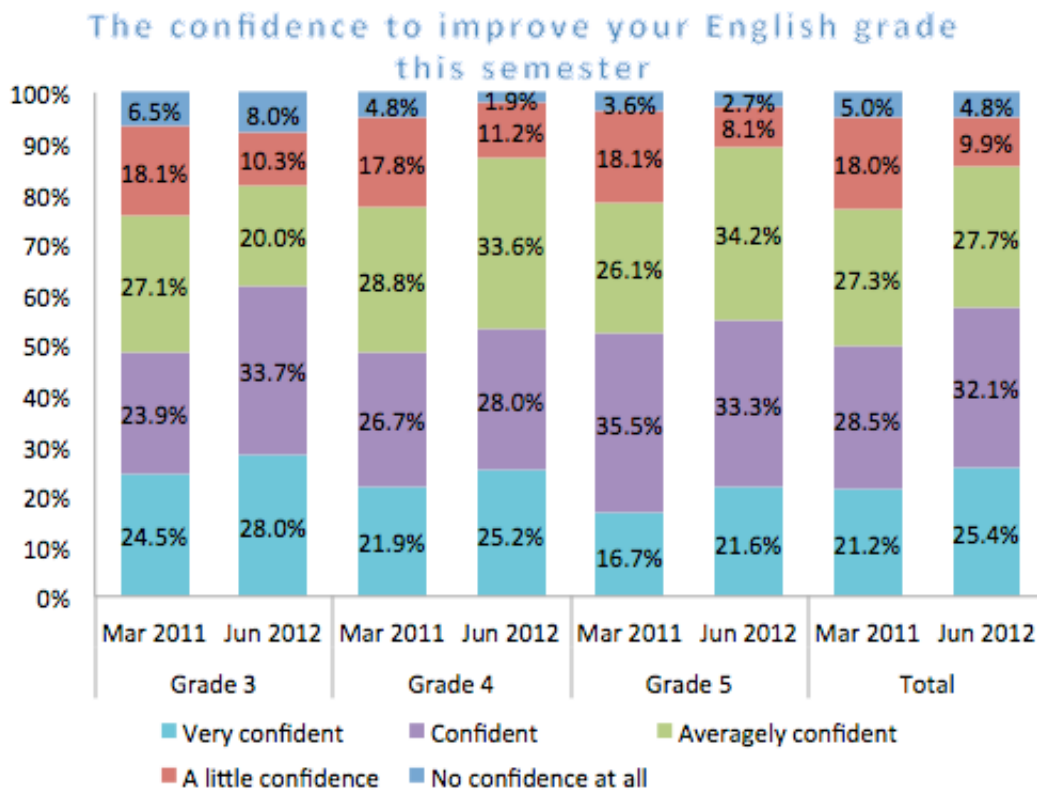
Table 5

The confidence to complete all your English homework correctly



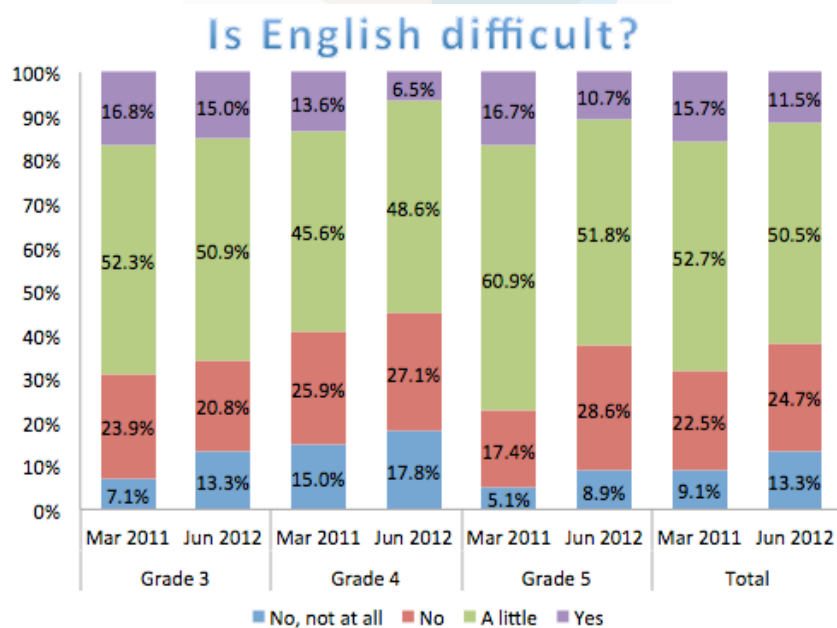
- The percentage of students that are confident to improve their English grade also went up by 15.7%, from 49.7% to 57.5% (Table 6).

Table 6



- 68.4% of the students found English difficult or a little difficult in March 2011, but the percentage goes down to 62% in June 2012 (Table 7).

Table 7



Implications for Further Study

The results presented in this report need further validation, since the similarity and comparability of the factors affecting the English learning of the students, such as their ages and their assigned local English teachers, must be established.

At the same time, while the results are encouraging, the positive gains noted cannot necessarily be attributed to the Stepping Stones interventions, in the absence of bona fide control and experimental groups, where the only difference is exposure to Stepping Stones programs. This type of impact evaluation study is precisely what Stepping Stones is undertaking in the spring term of 2013, where the interest and confidence of students with and without Stepping Stones volunteers will be compared. Nevertheless, the principal of the School acknowledges the major contribution of the Stepping Stones program in achieving these positive results.

For succeeding surveys to be conducted at the same school, the appropriate control questions (i.e. “Do you like going to school?”, “Do you find Chinese and Math difficult?”, etc.) must be included so that more accurate results can be generated. It is imperative for Stepping Stones to determine whether changes in the students’ interest and confidence in school and subjects are confined to learning English or part of a broader shift in students’ confidence about their abilities in general, as they grow up and move from one grade level to the next.

Additionally, responses of appropriate subgroupings of the survey students can be conducted, to understand the program’s impact better. For example, the responses of students with shorter exposure to English as a subject can be analyzed separately from the responses of students with longer exposure to English as a subject. For this to be done, such differentiating questions must be integrated in succeeding iterations of the survey questionnaire to be used.

Finally, while quantitative data, such as the results discussed in this report, provide valuable information regarding the program, they do not capture the totality of the program’s impact. Quantitative data will be supplemented with qualitative accounts, in the form of case studies and/or anecdotes from the volunteers, students, and school staff involved in the program, in the interest of presenting a more balanced assessment.