



EVALUATION OF ECA'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS: English Language Specialist Program Key Findings

EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

Enhancing English language teaching and learning overseas is central to the mandate of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to increase understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. English language programming results in expanded educational and economic opportunity for young people from underserved sectors, offers access to objective sources of information in English on the internet and in other media, builds educational capacity, and also increases opportunities for collaboration and innovation with American citizens, organizations and businesses. The English Language Specialist Program, a central part of ECA's English language programming, sends U.S. experts (Specialists) in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TESOL¹/TEFL) to provide teacher training, curriculum design, materials development, and other assistance to English language professionals, governments and institutions overseas.

The following are highlights from a global evaluation of the Specialist Program funded by ECA and released in 2015:

- Almost all Specialists reported encouraging student-centered teaching practices (98%) and critical-thinking (92%) during their assignments. Further, in-country teachers who participated in Specialist trainings indicated that new interactive teaching approaches were useful in the classroom:

Now I give my students [the] opportunity to share their opinions, and not give them my opinion and correct answer. I give them [the] possibility to share their meanings, work in groups, prepare material for our lessons. So absolutely, I changed [my teaching method], thanks to such workshops.

—University professor/Professional association representative, Russia

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Specialists said they worked frequently with individuals in remote areas during their assignments.
- The Specialist program contributed to revised curricula or assessment procedures at English teaching institutions around the world. For example, one Specialist worked on the “redesign of a 4-year curriculum at a teacher training institute” in Uzbekistan, and also conducted lectures at the U.S. Embassy.
- Specialist programming assisted in the development of the Unified State Exam for the English language in Russia, which also influenced the design of unified exams for other foreign languages.

Thanks to [a Specialist], we managed to create [the Unified State Exam], and ... it's only thanks to her visit. Now we have a national group of [test question] writers officially accepted by the Minister of Education.

—University professor, Russia

- Specialists assisted in the formation of new or stronger associations for English language professionals, such as a new TESOL chapter in Iraq and a network of English grammar instructors in Chile.
- Nearly all (90 percent) of surveyed Specialists reported forming new professional relationships with English instructors and others who had participated in their trainings during host country visits.
- Specialists introduced new technologies, including online teaching platforms and web-based resources.

¹ TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.



PROGRAM AND EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Specialists typically are requested by U.S. posts/embassies abroad to meet a specific need identified by host country educational institutions, government entities or professional associations. Most Specialist assignments send Specialists to a single country for 2 weeks to 5 months, though occasionally assignments involve visiting a few countries within the same region.

ECA's English language programming helps promote a broad array of U.S. public diplomacy and foreign policy goals, including increasing engagement and understanding between U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries, building institutional capacity, and providing educational and economic opportunities abroad.

In 2011, the research firm EurekaFacts, LLC, was contracted to conduct an evaluation of the Specialist Program in order to assess program impacts in three general areas:

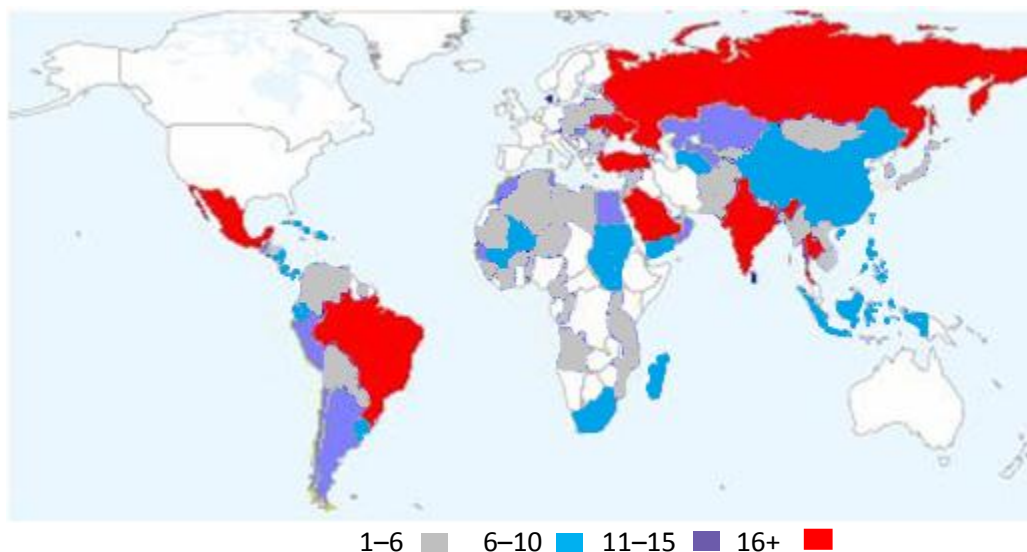
- ***English language teaching and learning.*** What type of support have Specialists provided to institutions and English language professionals in host countries? What have been the outcomes of this support? To what extent have host country English instructors² benefited from the program and/or applied what they learned?
- ***Mutual understanding.*** To what extent does the program foster mutual understanding, cross-cultural learning, and relationships between U.S. citizens/institutions and those in other countries?
- ***Specialists' professional knowledge, expertise, and development.*** How have Specialists benefited professionally from their program participation? Has the program provided them with opportunities they would not have had otherwise?

² In this report, the word "instructors" is used to refer to instructors of English at any level of education, including primary and secondary school teachers, university faculty and teachers of adults.

PROGRAM REACH

Between 2004 and 2009, the time period covered in this evaluation, more than 250 Specialists completed approximately 700 assignments in 110 countries around the world.

Figure 1. Numbers of English Language Specialists Placed per Country, 2004–09



DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

The evaluation used a mixed-method data collection strategy to evaluate the Specialist Program, including the following components:

- **Online Survey:** The evaluation team conducted an online survey of Specialists in the fall of 2012, which collected responses from 163 Specialists who participated in the program between 2004 and 2009. The final sample of Specialists invited to take the survey consisted of 231 participants.³ A total of 163 respondents took the survey, representing a response rate of 71 percent.
- **Qualitative Fieldwork:** In 2011 and 2012, the evaluation team traveled to Chile, Russia, Thailand, and Turkey to conduct interviews with professors and administrators at universities and other institutions visited by Specialists as well as Ministry of Education officials and U.S. Post/Embassy English language programming staff.

Some in-country interview respondents were participants in Specialist programs in their country while some were program coordinators and/or supervisors of English instructors who participated.

³ The evaluation team was not able to locate contact information for some participants, and did not survey others who currently work for ECA or the Department of State.

WHAT ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPECIALISTS DO

Specialist assignments vary widely, from serving as a keynote speaker at a national TESOL/TEFL conference to serving as a consultant on a specific project. In many cases, once a Specialist arrives in a country, he or she is called on to perform additional tasks, such as visiting schools or giving public lectures.

Areas of professional development. The most common areas of professional development provided during the evaluation period (which surveyed Specialists reported addressing to a “great” or “moderate” extent) were the following:

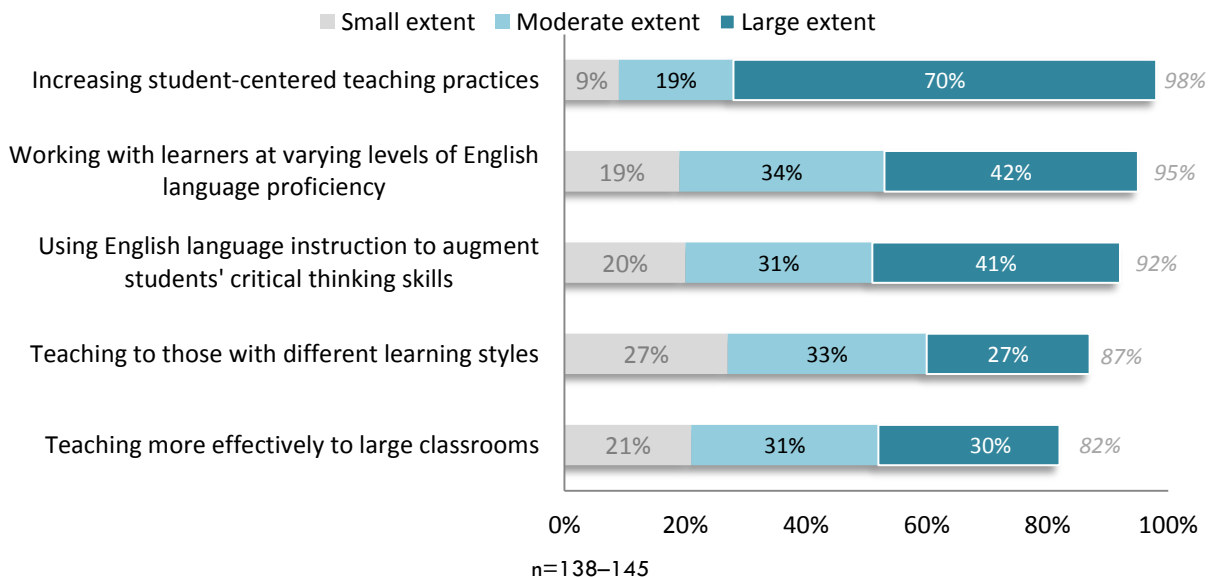
- Teacher training (98 percent)
- Curriculum design (74 percent)
- Development of teaching materials or textbooks (65 percent)

Audiences. Specialists work with or address audiences ranging from English teachers (primary and secondary) and TEFL professors to government officials, students, business professionals, and the general public. In addition, surveyed Specialists worked frequently (“often” or “very often”) with English language professionals who have a particularly strong need for professional training, as in the following examples:

- Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Specialists worked frequently with individuals in remote areas.
- Nearly half (44 percent) of Specialists worked frequently with individuals with low levels of English proficiency.

Focus: Student-centered teaching. The main focus of training activities during the evaluation period was showing English instructors how to create a more student-centered, interactive learning environment: 70 percent of surveyed Specialists reported focusing on this to a “large extent.” In addition, Specialists presented a wide array of specific pedagogical skills/methods that support such an environment, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Pedagogical Skills/Methods Addressed: Student-Centered Teaching



SPECIALISTS' IMPACT ON ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS: TEACHING PRACTICES

Specialists often make a lasting impact on the classroom practices of host country English instructors. Program participants benefited from learning about the latest TESOL/TEFL methods and best practices, which some host country interviewees described as eye-opening for training participants. Host country interviewees particularly identified as beneficial learning specific techniques or methodologies that could be implemented in the classroom:

- **Student-centered, interactive teaching.**

In many countries visited by Specialists, the student-centered classroom was a new concept and thus represented a paradigm shift for participating English instructors, some of whom found that their students became more motivated to learn English.

- **Use of technology for language teaching and learning.**

Specialists provided training in various uses of technology for language instructors, including self-study computer programs, online teaching platforms, and the use of Internet resources in the classroom. Many host country professionals found these tools very useful in their classrooms.

- **Assessment techniques.**

Specialist trainings helped host country professionals to expand their range of methods for assessing students' English skills or to simplify the way they assess certain kinds of assignments.

In addition, several host country interviewees cited the teaching materials provided by Specialists as the most lasting impact of Specialist visits because they helped workshop participants remember what they had learned, could be implemented directly in classrooms, and could be shared with others easily.

Specialist Program can be a transformative experience for participants.

In 1 hour, she [the Specialist] showed ... if you somehow relate to each person—and remember there were 60 people in the audience there—but the impression was that she was addressing absolutely each of them personally. ... Just in an hour, she probably changed the lives of at least several teachers.

—University professor, Russia

Host country interviewees describe impacts of new teaching methods.

The fact that [the Specialist] made us see that you could study real-life English also made our students become more motivated with real-life English.

—University administrator, Chile

[The Specialist] explained some difficult issues of assessment. ... She also told us about ... some terms we heard for the first time, like tests should be “transparent” to be valid ... [and] some other terms which many people just didn't think about at that time.

—University professor, Russia

SPECIALISTS' IMPACT ON ENGLISH INSTRUCTORS: PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS

Participation in a Specialist program has resulted in various professional benefits for English instructors beyond the classroom:

- **Meeting and receiving feedback from a U.S. expert.** According to host country interviewees, English language professionals valued the opportunity to meet and interact with international experts in TESOL/TEFL. Likewise, three-quarters (73 percent) of surveyed Specialists believed that participants had benefited in this area to a “large extent.”
- **Increasing English proficiency by interacting with a native speaker.** In many countries visited by Specialists, English instructors have limited proficiency in the language. For these instructors, Specialist visits represent an important opportunity to practice English with a native speaker and thus to improve their own proficiency. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Specialists believed that these interactions had benefited participants to a “large extent.”
- **New professional opportunities or recognition.** Specialist visits sometimes afford English teaching professionals in other countries opportunities for professional recognition, development, or advancement. For example, some training programs award certificates of completion to participants, which help them to advance professionally at their home institutions. In other cases, participation led to increased publications or motivated some English instructors to pursue further education.

Host country instructors benefit from meeting and interacting with Specialists.

[Hosting] a visiting scholar is not that frequent in Turkey. Right here the academe are in a closed society, limited, restricted in the Turkish world, so ... even though they are working at well-known universities, ... [they are interested] to have connections with the [outside experts].

—University instructor/PhD student, Turkey

[Having Specialists come] is a very good chance for us Thai teachers who teach English to meet with English native speakers who are professional teachers.

—University administrator, Thailand

Participating instructors gain recognition or motivation for further professional development.

At the closing, somebody from the Ministry [of Education] came and gave out participation [certificates]. ... The teachers valued it a lot.

—Retired university professor, Turkey

Some participants have only a bachelor degree, and then after they have attended [a Specialist's conference presentation], ... they want to study more, and that [Specialist is] the inspiration

—University dean, Thailand

NATIONAL-LEVEL IMPACT AND MULTIPLIER EFFECTS

According to host country interviewees, Specialist visits often have resulted in institutional-level or even national-level changes to English language teaching.

Institutional impact:

- Revised curricula
- New assessment procedures
- Development of new programs

National impact:

- Developing or strengthening national English teachers' associations (various countries).
- Advising on the development of the first national college placement exam in the English language (Russia).
- Informing changes to national English performance standards (Chile).
- Increased attention to instructional technology at TEFL conferences (Russia).

Specialist visits lead to new programs at host country institutions.

[After the Specialist program, host country professors] felt stronger to (tell) their administrators, "Look, we four, three people got together, and we're planning to open a writing center." It gave them the urge to write a proposal for a writing center.

—University writing center coordinator, Turkey

We now have a distance learning program for our potential students. ... [Before the Specialist program on instructional technology,] we used to have it only for Muscovites and for people who could physically come to our evening classes. With this distance program we can offer it nationwide.

—University professor, Russia

Indeed, the majority of surveyed Specialists agreed that their visits had made an impact at both the institutional (63 percent) and national (53 percent) levels.⁴

Specialists impact English language teaching at the national level.

[The Thai TESOL network is] getting to be stronger, with the help of the U.S. Government in terms of the Specialist Program.

—University professor/TESOL officer, Thailand

I think that we owe our success with the ... assessment series and Unified State Exam ... to the American Specialists and to [the] English Language Office at the Embassy, because they are our immediate colleagues.

—University administrator/English teachers' association officer, Russia

Multiplier Effects: Furthermore, according to host country interviewees, the impact of individual Specialist programs is often multiplied when participants replicate trainings and/or share materials with colleagues within or beyond their home institution. In some cases, Specialist materials have been distributed nationally either by the local TESOL association or by the Ministry of Education. Another important multiplier effect is the training of university TEFL faculty, who train pre-service teachers, who in turn will implement the new teaching methods in their future primary and secondary classrooms around the country.

⁴ Figures represent the combined total of "mostly" and "entirely" responses.

SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES

Most surveyed Specialists reported forming new professional relationships with English instructors and other program participants (90 percent) as well as with fellow TESOL/TEFL experts they met in host countries (77 percent), some of which have endured for many years.

Collaboration and linkages. Numerous host country professionals have collaborated with Specialists on research, joint publications, and/or conference presentations. In addition, 20 percent of Specialists reported establishing formal institutional collaborations.

Providing support. Most Specialists also have continued to provide support to host country colleagues in one or more ways:

- Serving as a resource.
- Providing support for pursuing U.S. graduate study or professional development programs.
- Conducting further training.
- Facilitating professional visits to the United States and abroad.

Host country interviewees describe ongoing collaborations and linkages.

[My colleague] is still working with [the Specialist] on an international project. And she helps [him] with his research.

—University professor, Russia

You know that if you need that [collaboration] at any time in the future, you know who to contact, to what extent you can benefit [from] their expertise, or how you should approach them. Both [the] personal and institutional benefits are a lot.

—University administrator, Turkey

SPECIALIST PROGRAM FACILITATES CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Nearly all the survey respondents (97 percent) shared the perception that their work as an English Language Specialist had “contributed to opportunities for cross-cultural learning,” and the evaluation results corroborate that two-way cultural exchanges indeed took place during many Specialist visits and made an impact on participants. In fact, 95 percent of Specialists felt that they had gained “significant new insights” into the cultures of the countries they visited; some deemed this cultural learning even more important than the professional knowledge they had imparted to their counterparts.

Similarly, host country participants gained firsthand knowledge of U.S. culture by interacting with Specialists both formally and informally. Some Specialists also helped to broaden local participants’ understanding of the diversity of U.S. society and thus to break down commonly held stereotypes.

Both Specialists and host country interviewees believe that the program fosters increased mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries.

Specialists and host country interviewees believe that the program increases mutual understanding.

[The program] helps build lasting bridges between the US and host countries.

—Specialist, instructional technology

This is how we can make the world small, not the politicians.

—University writing center coordinator, Turkey

PROGRAM IMPACT ON SPECIALISTS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Participation in the Specialist Program resulted in multiple professional benefits for nearly all the surveyed Specialists. In fact, some Specialists stated that the program had been a significant influence on their professional development.

Figure 3. Impact of Specialist Program on Specialists' Professional Lives

		Moderate Extent	Great Extent	Total
Knowledge Gains	Acquired significant new insights into different countries, cultures, or societies that I would not have had otherwise	8%	87%	95%
	Gained deeper insights into the issues/challenges that impact English language teaching around the world	14%	82%	96%
Knowledge/Experience Applicable to Specialists' Work	Experiences have allowed me to enrich my teaching/work in TESOL/TEFL with concrete examples from my assignments	14%	77%	91%
	Better prepared to meet the needs of English language professionals in countries with little exposure to American pedagogies/American English	19%	77%	96%
Other Professional Benefits and New Directions	More interested/motivated to pursue research/work opportunities outside the United States	21%	68%	89%
	Have had new opportunities to educate/inform the general public about my work in TESOL/TEFL	28%	49%	77%

n=145–148

In addition, three-quarters (74 percent) of respondents attained greater recognition or an enhanced professional reputation at their home institution as a result of their Specialist Program participation.

Many Specialists also reported that their assignments had led to specific new professional opportunities, most commonly conference presentations (64 percent) or publications (32 percent). In addition, some Specialist assignments resulted in additional opportunities to provide training abroad or in new directions in Specialists' careers and/or research agendas.

Specialist Program profoundly impacts Specialists' careers.

There is nothing quite like working as an English Language Specialist. It's the most fulfilling aspect of my professional life and has certainly contributed in a major way to my own professional development.

—Specialist, curriculum design

The Evaluation Division enhances the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' leadership in the effective management of international exchanges by commissioning independent evaluations of ECA's programs.

The evaluation of the English Language Specialist Program was conducted by EurekaFacts, LLC.

Visit <http://eca.state.gov/evaluations-eca> to download the full report.