Improving English language learning in Portugal: an integrated approach

Helder Sousa
Overview

Project background: why a Key for Schools test at the end of the 9th grade?

Project funding: an innovative approach

2014 KfS results: strengths and weaknesses

Conclusion: impact and future perspectives
Why a KfS test at the end of the 9th grade?

Social, political and educational awareness of the importance of English learning in Portugal

Need for an internationally acknowledged language proficiency certification

The impact of portuguese students’ performance in Surveylang (2012)
Why a KfS test at the end of the 9th grade?

At the end of the 9th grade (lower secondary) students should have reached level B1 ... but Surveylang showed a quite different picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEFR levels</th>
<th>Pre A1</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students (%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why a KfS test at the end of the 9th grade?
The role of external assessment in the Portuguese educational system: major goals to achieve with Key for Schools (1)

1. To have a diagnosis of the full cohort of students at the end of the 9th grade

2. To develop a comprehensive teacher training programme
Why a KfS test at the end of the 9th grade?

The role of external assessment in the Portuguese educational system: major goals to achieve with Key for Schools (2)

3. To have an internationally acknowledged foreign language proficiency certification accessible to Portuguese students, regardless of their social or economic background, or place of living

4. To create an opportunity to include Speaking in a large external assessment context in Portugal for the first time in more than 40 years
Project funding: an innovative approach

The impact of the economic crisis and the sponsorship approach

Parents’ commitment to enroll their children for the certificate
Project funding: an innovative approach

The funding scheme

The Sponsors – 4 leading companies and 1 foundation

The parents’ contribution – the enrollment for the certificate

• Optional for 9th grade students
• Compulsory for non 9th grade students
Project funding: an innovative approach

**Scenario A**

Certificates fees $<$ Cambridge English fee $\rightarrow$ Sponsors financial support

**Scenario B**

Certificates fees $\geq$ Cambridge English fee $\rightarrow$ Sponsors financial support [Red line]

Support educational programmes
2014 KfS results: strengths and weaknesses

The test was delivered in 1,325 schools (both public and private)

Approximately 101,000 students took the test:

- 9\textsuperscript{th} grade students – 92\% (compulsory);
- 6\textsuperscript{th}, 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} grade students – 3\% (optional)
- 10\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th} grade students – 5\% (optional)

3,954 speaking sessions
2014 KfS results: strengths and weaknesses

Results for 9th grade students by level of proficiency according to CEFR
2014 KfS results: strengths and weaknesses

Results for 9th grade students by score class
2014 KfS results: strengths and weaknesses

Results by test component (skill) – 9th grade students
2014 KfS results: strengths and weaknesses

Results according to certificate enrollment – 9th grade students (19.5% of total 9th grade students enrolled for the certificate)
Conclusion: impact and future perspectives

1. Feasibility of a large scale external speaking assessment

2. Putting English learning on the top of the educational agenda

3. Increasing teaching opportunities and quality training programmes
Conclusion: impact and future perspectives

4. Improving results regarding *Surveylang* ... but still having Speaking as the weakest skill when it comes to students’ performance
Conclusion: impact and future perspectives

5. Evidence of a breakthrough over a negative attitude on speaking teaching and learning in classroom context

6. Evidence of an increasing commitment to improve teaching
Conclusion: impact and future perspectives

7. Future steps

- Moving forward from KfS to PET at the 9th grade (2015)
- FCE at the end of upper secondary (11th or 12th grade) in a near future (2017 or 2018?)

8. Curricular changes: English is going to be a compulsory subject since 3rd grade (2016)
Assessment is probably the best tool to improve teaching and learning
Thank you!

helder.sousa@iave.pt