

Why does 40K PLUS focus on English?

In investigating a Cambodia launch for 40K PLUS, it becomes important to revisit a fundamental proposition to our program. The logic chain for why 40K PLUS focuses on English has been first and foremost because our beneficiaries have requested us to. In any case, there is evidence that English leads to better opportunities for children in developing countries.

The evidence for these statements is contained below.

1. Because our beneficiaries want us to:

At the heart of our work is providing the education that people want, to assist in lifting them out of poverty. As a social enterprise, we validate what people want by selling it to them non-profit at an affordable price. Our mission is to provide quality **education** for any child in any village anywhere in the world, **not** to provide quality “English” education to any child in any village anywhere in the world. In 2012, following our decision **not** to continue building schools (as it was not scalable nor cost-effective), we **asked the villagers** what education service they were most willing to pay for. The answer was English, so that became our focus. The validation of truly responding to that need is that we have 528 children in 14 villages paying for this service.

As such we did not set out on a crusade to teach English: we started with English because that’s what the people wanted us to do. That being said, given that what we have built is a technology **platform**, it can be adapted for other subjects to fit into the same learning pathway. The platform approach to our work is in line with our mission to scale the solution globally.

2. Because English leads to better opportunities:

When we compiled our **Cambodia Feasibility Report**, it gave us an opportunity to re-check this fundamental proposition. Some key facts therein are that English should be learnt:

- To get a better tertiary education,
- To get a better job,
- Because it is the official language of ASEAN, and
- Because English is the language of the internet (and all the learning and connection resources therein)

These points have been corroborated further by the Cambodian Minister for Education,¹ where he’s said:

- *"English is the medium of communication in ASEAN which has led to more economic opportunities since Cambodia joined.."*
- *"Overall the yearning for studying English, French or other foreign languages like Chinese is linked to the job market and investment."*
- *"That is the reason why English has become popular within ASEAN because first and foremost it is the priority language in ASEAN. Capacity in English allows people to communicate better, negotiate efficiently and also to make better deals."*

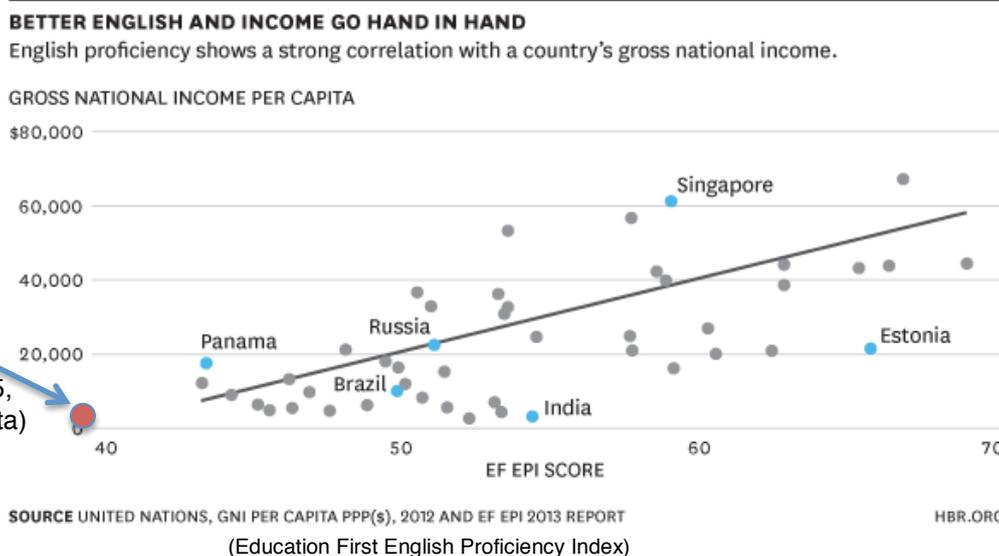
On a global level, there is a direct correlation between the English skills of a country and its economic performance (measured through its GNI) as shown by the chart below,² and the correlation between English skills and quality of life.³ The British Council (UK’s international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities) has commissioned a report by Euromonitor (a leading research organisation) that *"concluded that the (English) language can*

¹ <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/minister-page/education-reform,-english-language-learning-and-the-asean-community.html#.V5WLJ5N96cz>

² <https://hbr.org/2013/11/countries-with-better-english-have-better-economies/>

³ <https://hbr.org/2013/11/countries-with-better-english-have-better-economies/>

increase the earning power of individuals by around 25% and that developing economies need access to English if they are to grow and position themselves in the global economy.”⁴



Indeed the scholars who argue that English does not aid economic improvement⁵ argue that teaching English tends to focus on the urban elite, which increases inequality for the rural poor. This criticism cannot apply to 40K PLUS, as our program is targeted at the rural poor, and is designed to overcome this criticism.

3. It has now become a national priority for the Cambodian Government:

The Cambodian Government released an Education Strategic Plan in 2014. The plan sets a goal to increase learning English specifically from Grade 4.⁶

This point was highlighted by **Room to Read Country Director** Kall Kann in a video entitled “Why and How 40K will work in Cambodia”, in which he says: *“English as a second language has been integrated into the lower and upper secondary school in Cambodia. Recently the government has increased that into Grade 4 in Cambodia... given the need in this country, given the commitment of the government, given that Cambodians have been integrated into ASEAN. This role of learning English is becoming a very big challenge for the success of the Cambodian younger generation.”*

You can see the video in full at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qc23LAJnLLM&feature=youtu.be>

We are certainly not saying that children should not be learning their mother tongue. In the 2014 speech,⁷ Education Minister Naron said that English should be introduced at Grade 4: *“When we talk about improving the quality of education, we want to focus on studying foreign languages like English, French or other languages, especially at Grade 4 because in Grades 1, 2, and 3 students focus on Khmer language and mathematics.”*

⁴ <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/benefits-english-language-individuals-societies>

⁵ <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=rNULCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA359&lpg=PA359&dq=ef+epi+report+2013&source=bl&ots=DCFdMLcpec&sig=laVbXiJhvnMND0u6-2iYwOOXlhY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj57dmw15DOAhWBX5QKHSq1A-YQ6AEIQDAG#v=onepage&q=ef%20epi%20report%202013&f=false> at p5

⁶ http://www.veille.univ-ap.info/media/pdf/pdf_1436325627550.pdf at p25

⁷ <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/minister-page/education-reform,-english-language-learning-and-the-asean-community.html#.V5WLJ5N96cz>

4. Because the Cambodian government does not have the capacity to teach it at scale:

Currently, the Cambodian government is **not equipped** to meet their goal. As Kall Kann says (in the video contained above):

- *“This commitment remains faced with a lot of challenges for the Cambodian government,; they have a lack of funding, resources and know-how.... 40K has such a good experience in using this ICT as a learning tool, and I think the approach is cheap and easy to adapt and bring to scale by the Cambodian government.”*

The poor quality of education in Cambodia is well established, with a major issue being the unavailability of quality teaching resources. A 2014 Asian Development Bank Country Diagnostic Study on Cambodia suggests “*The low level of learning outcomes suggests a serious deficiency in the education system. The scarcity of basic learning materials and equipment and a weak curriculum in English and mathematics are major issues. In addition, the quality of teachers is a critical constraint on the performance of schools.*”⁸ The report states that only 14% of Cambodia’s 89,000 teachers hold a bachelor’s degree, and more than 95% of primary school teachers have completed upper secondary school education.⁹

Our Cambodian feasibility study also pointed out that English is to be taught 2-4 hours per week from, but there are not available enough teachers to do so. The Assistant Director for Teacher Training, when we met him in February 2016 said “*there is only budget for training 200 new English teachers per year, but we need 6,000 new teachers per year to meet the need.*”

The Cambodian government, therefore, has decided to teach children English, but do not have the capacity to do so. 40K PLUS has been designed so that you don’t need a qualified teacher to run it, and still achieves learning outcomes despite this significant restriction.

⁸ <http://www.cdri.org.kh/webdata/download/wp/wp36e.pdf> at p38

⁹ Ibid