

ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY THROUGH STRUCTURED APPROACH - A CASE STUDY OF GIIS TOKYO

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ABSTRACT

Global Indian International School (GIIS) in Tokyo provides English-language education to a diverse student body, including 55% Japanese students. Achieving English proficiency is crucial for academic success, yet learners face significant challenges in becoming fluent. The language acquisition process mirrors first language development, underscoring the need for ongoing support and the application of translanguaging techniques. In response, GIIS Tokyo has developed the English Language Pathway Program (ELPP), a comprehensive initiative designed to address the varied needs of its students. The ELPP comprises four stages designed to scaffold language skills while integrating with the school's curricula. Foundational stages focus on establishing vocabulary and fluency, progressing to the intermediate stage emphasizing comprehension and integration into academic contexts. Additionally, the program offers specialized tracks for students enrolled in Cambridge or IB curricula, ensuring tailored support aligned with curriculum requirements. Central to the program's success is the dedication of a qualified academic team and the implementation of internal benchmarks aligned with external standards, such as those set by ACTFL. Through structured instruction, personalized learning pathways, and ongoing assessment, the ELPP aims to cultivate English language fluency and confidence among students. This paper synthesizes research findings to underscore the importance of integrating language development with content learning for English learners. Furthermore, the ELPP extends beyond traditional classroom hours, offering supplementary online support to reinforce learning. By embracing a holistic approach to language development and academic success, GIIS Tokyo aims to equip students with the essential skills for navigating an interconnected world and seizing global opportunities.

Keywords: *English language proficiency, language acquisition, English Language Pathway Program, translanguaging, integrated language learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Global Indian International School (GIIS) is one of the top-rated international schools in Tokyo Japan, and has set benchmarks in its rigorous learning frameworks, innovative curricula delivery, and exceptional academic achievements in International Baccalaureate, Cambridge, and CBSE examinations. Being a multi-award-winning and progressive international school in Tokyo offering a curriculum that nurtures 21st-century skills, GIIS Tokyo became a home for students of around 32 nationalities (55% Japanese, 30% Indian 15% other nationalities) across the globe. However, the multicultural and multilingual environment at GIIS Tokyo has posed a challenge to achieving academic excellence, skill grooming, and personality development among students.

Many students, including a significant number of Japanese nationals, enter GIIS with limited proficiency in English, often hindering their ability to fully engage with the curriculum and participate effectively in school activities. For these students, English is not merely a subject but a gateway to academic achievement and social integration. In fact, from a Western-English perspective, at least half the students need ESL and would get it if they lived in an English-speaking country. Those incompetent learners require continuous support and structured instruction to develop language skills while keeping pace with academic content. In response to this challenge, GIIS Tokyo implemented the English Language Pathway Program (ELPP), a targeted initiative designed to bridge the language gap and support students in developing essential English language skills. The ELPP offers structured instruction focusing on reading, writing, and speaking, tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners at different proficiency levels. By providing individualized support, the program empowers students to gradually build confidence in using English both inside and outside the classroom. This paper aims to explore the evolution and impact of the English Language Pathway Program at GIIS Tokyo, highlighting its role in enhancing students' language abilities and facilitating their academic journey. By sharing insights into the development and implementation of the ELPP, this study seeks to contribute valuable perspectives on supporting language acquisition in diverse educational settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English language proficiency is a critical determinant of academic success and social integration in educational settings worldwide. However, for non-English speaking students, mastering English not only facilitates communication but also opens doors to broader academic opportunities and cultural engagement. This literature review explores various strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing English language proficiency among non-native English speakers and synthesizes them in the following table.

Excerption on ways of improving English competency	Reference documents
Authentic communication and real-life scenarios significantly improve students' speaking and listening skills.	Richards (2006)
Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) allows students to acquire language skills and enhances both language proficiency and subject knowledge while learning subject-specific content.	Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, (2010)
Immersive learning experiences where English is used extensively in classroom instruction and daily interactions have proven effective in accelerating language acquisition.	Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian (2005)
Combining language instruction with subject-area content enhances understanding and language acquisition simultaneously	Swain & Lapkin (2002)
ELPP programs recognize the importance of linguistic diversity and aim to provide targeted interventions to help students overcome language barriers	Birch & Miller (2005)
ELPPs enable students to develop essential language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—that are essential for effective communication and comprehension of academic content.	Tedick & Walker (1994)
Effective ELPPs employ tailored instructional strategies to meet the specific needs of students at different proficiency levels. This may include language immersion, scaffolded learning approaches, and differentiated instruction to ensure all learners can progress toward English proficiency goals.	Genesee et al. (2006)
ELPPs contribute to students' cultural integration and social inclusion within the school community. By enhancing English competency, these programs empower students to participate actively in extracurricular activities, collaborate with peers, and engage meaningfully in classroom discussions.	Lucas & Villegas (2013)
Participation in ELPPs correlates with improved academic performance and higher graduation rates among language minority students.	Thomas & Collier (2002)
ELP programs not only facilitate language development but also nurture students' confidence and self-efficacy in using English in diverse contexts	Cummins (2008)

Table 1: Summary of literature review

The literature highlights the complex nature of second language acquisition, emphasizing the need for integrated language learning approaches. Learners' cultural backgrounds also influence their attitudes towards the target language and their learning strategies. Research

indicates that English learners require several years to achieve fluency, and their language acquisition trajectory mirrors that of native language development. Furthermore, the concept of translanguaging, where the native language is utilized to enhance understanding of the target language, has gained prominence in language education. Considering the findings from the literature and the scenario of students from diverse backgrounds, GIIS Tokyo initiated the ELPP to promote English competency among non-English speaking students.

ELPP STRUCTURE AND METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

The development of the ELPP at GIIS Tokyo involved a systematic approach, incorporating research findings, pedagogical best practices, and curriculum alignment. The program consists of multiple stages, each focusing on specific language skills and academic integration. Additionally, benchmarks were established to assess student's progress and proficiency, aligning with external standards such as those set by the American Council in the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

Underline the concept in introducing ELPP

Before moving to the ELPP, the study reviewed the findings from second language learning which are as follows:

1. Children may require up to ten years to achieve fluency in a second language.
2. Their learning trajectory in acquiring a second language often mirrors that of their first language, progressing from speaking and listening to reading and writing.
3. Although children exhibit diverse learning styles, there are identifiable stages toward fluency, albeit not necessarily linear. Progress may fluctuate as their needs evolve.
4. The concept of translanguaging, where the mother tongue is utilized to enhance understanding of the second language, holds significant importance.
5. It's crucial to support children's ongoing development in their first language to facilitate comprehension of the second.

At GIIS Tokyo, we recognize that proficiency in English is not merely a skill but also a gateway to global opportunities. We understand the significance of effective English communication in today's interconnected world, which is essential for academic success, career advancement, and cultural integration. With this in mind, we launched our English Language Support (ELS) program in 2020. Since then, we have meticulously revised, enriched, and expanded this program into a new structural framework across all GIIS Tokyo campuses. The English Language Pathway Program (ELPP) was introduced as a redesigned initiative aimed to enhance English proficiency among our students. This structured program seamlessly integrates with the diverse curricula offered at our school. The ELPP features different levels structured around two distinct paths:

- English Language Support (ELS)
- English as a Second Language (ESL)

Through a combination of comprehensive language instruction, targeted support, and personalized learning pathways, our English Language Pathway Program (ELPP) aims to meet the diverse needs of our students and facilitate their journey toward English language fluency and confidence.

Program Outline and Stages

Stages

The primary focus of the English Language Pathway Program (ELPP) is to consolidate language proficiency, empowering students to seamlessly integrate themselves into the academic and social environments of the classroom. By expanding their interactions and fostering confidence, the ELPP aims to equip students with the skills necessary for achieving academic success beyond the program.

	Stage 1: Foundational ELS 8 hours/week	Stage 2: Introductory ELS 6 hours/week	Stage 3 (A): Intermediate ELS 4 hours/week	Stage 3 (B): CLSP): Cambridge O Level English Language As a subject	Stage 3 (C: IGCSE & IB Diploma): ESL As a subject	Stage 4: Advanced ELS 3 hours/week
KG - Global Montessori	For students with no previous knowledge of English Advancement to Stage 2: Achieving a score of more than 40% at the end-of-semester assessments.	Advancement between Stages 2 & 3: Achieving a score of between 40% and 60% in the end-of-semester assessments. *				For students scoring more than 60% in the previous levels. * Final transition to the EFL subject with 3 additional hours of Advanced English Language Support
CBSE Primary		Advancement to Stage 4: Achieving a score of more than 60% at the end-of-semester assessments.				
IB Primary Years (PYP)						
CBSE Secondary						
Cambridge CLSP				For students scoring below 60% in their EFL subject. Advancement to Stage 4: Achieving a score of more than 60%		
Cambridge IGCSE					For students scoring below 25% in their EFL subject.	
IB Diploma					Advancement to Stage 4: Achieving a score of more than 60%	

Table 2: ELPP outline and stages

Stage 1: Foundational ELS (English Language Support)

For students with no previous knowledge of English, this stage offers intensive support to establish a strong foundation in English language skills. Emphasis is placed on developing basic vocabulary, grammar, and fluency to facilitate everyday interactions and comprehension of classroom instructions.

Stage 2: Introductory ELS (English Language Support)

Designed for students who can understand basic instructions but lack confidence in communication, this stage focuses on building essential language competencies and fostering confidence to participate in classroom activities and discussions, thereby enriching interaction opportunities.

Stage 3 (A): Intermediate ELS (English Language Support)

Tailored for students nearly ready to seamlessly follow regular English lessons, this stage enhances confidence and competence in engaging with English-language materials. Students develop the skills to express thoughts and ideas effectively, facilitating integration into classroom learning and social interactions.

Stage 3 (B: CLSP): Cambridge O Level English Language

At this stage, students enrolled in the Cambridge Lower Secondary Program (CLSP) curriculum and score less than 60% in the assessments established by their subject of English as a First Language (EFL) will be directed to *Cambridge O Level English Language (1123)*. Designed for learners who speak English at home or school, at near first language level. It emphasizes clear communication, vocabulary expansion, and critical thinking skills through writing and reading activities.

Stage 3 (C: IGCSE & IB Diploma): English as a Second Language (ESL)

At this stage, students enrolled in the IGCSE Cambridge curriculum or the IB Diploma program can participate in ESL classes as a separate subject tailored to meet the specific needs of non- native English speakers. The focus varies depending on the curriculum, such as *IGCSE English as a Second Language (0510)* or *IB Diploma (Group 2: Language Acquisition, English)*, emphasizing the application of English language skills across various subjects and real-life situations. Eligibility for this stage is determined by students scoring less than 25% in the English as a first language subject, ensuring tailored support for those who may require additional assistance in mastering English language proficiency.

Stage 4: Advanced ELS (English Language Support)

Transitioning to standard English classes aligned with curriculum requirements, students apply developed language skills to effectively engage with academic content and assessments. This stage enhances comprehension of complex materials, articulation of ideas, and active participation in classroom discussions and activities.

Syllabus

For the ELS (English Language Support) classes, the syllabus is determined by GIIS Tokyo, allowing for revisions at any time to closely align with the needs and proficiency levels of the students. As part of our curriculum, we will integrate the [Cambridge Global English Series](#), which spans 8 stages tailored for young English-as-a-second-language learners. Aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), these stages ensure students receive a solid foundation in English proficiency from primary to secondary levels.

The Cambridge Global English Series offers a structured approach to language learning, covering grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, and speaking. Employing an inquiry-based, language-rich methodology promotes international communication skills. Engaging learners in diverse topics, it fosters their ability to communicate effectively in English and provides opportunities for critical thinking and content knowledge acquisition.

Emphasising a 'learning to learn' approach, the materials equip students with skills and strategies to confidently navigate new learning situations. The focus is on developing essential listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, alongside vocabulary development and language awareness. Learners participate in curriculum-based activities encouraging active engagement and personalized language use, preparing them to access English-language classroom materials across various subjects.

Class Size

- When executed as a whole program running parallel to the main classes, to ensure optimal results, classes should be capped at a maximum of 20 students per class.
- When executed in small group pull-out-based sessions, the ideal number of students should be less than 10.

Benchmarks

GIIS Tokyo is dedicated to upholding high standards of English language proficiency among ELPP students. To achieve this, the school has established internal benchmarks against which students' English learning journey will be assessed. These benchmarks serve as crucial indicators of students' progress and accomplishments within the ELPP framework.

Moreover, to ensure the reliability of these benchmarks, GIIS Tokyo aims to validate them against external proficiency guidelines. One such esteemed standard is provided by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), renowned for its rigorous and widely accepted criteria for assessing language proficiency. By aligning internal benchmarks with external standards such as those set by ACTFL, GIIS Tokyo aims to maintain consistent and internationally recognized criteria for evaluating students' English language skills. This validation process underscores the school's commitment to delivering a robust and effective English Language Pathway Program to its students.

Structure and Advancement

- The GIIS Tokyo English Language Pathway Program (ELPP) operates within the school setting and is divided into two semesters per academic year. Each semester encompasses a period of instruction and assessment, providing students with structured opportunities to develop and evaluate their English language proficiency.
- Students progress through the stages based on their performance and proficiency, with advancement occurring at the end of each semester.
- Advancement to the next stage is determined through the established benchmarks for the program, as detailed in the previous section, as well as the input from the coordinator and teachers of the English Language Pathway Program.

Academic Team

Educational institutions must provide professional development opportunities for teachers and implement policies that promote linguistic diversity and equity (Lucas & Villegas, 2011).

To fully realize the potential of the program, it is imperative to assemble a team of dedicated professionals. The schools recruit teachers who are highly specialized in the instruction of English as a Second and/or Foreign Language. These educators bring extensive expertise and experience in language acquisition and pedagogy, ensuring that students receive effective and tailored instruction to support their English language development.

Moreover, an English Language Pathway Program (ELPP) coordinator is appointed to oversee the implementation and management of the program across all four GIIS Tokyo campuses. This coordinator serves as a central point of contact for staff, students, and parents, ensuring consistency and coherence in program delivery and assessment. By having a dedicated coordinator, we ensure effective coordination and alignment of goals and objectives across all levels of the ELPP.

Under the supervision and guidance of the school principal, the ELPP coordinator

works closely with the teaching staff to ensure that the program aligns with the school's overall educational goals and objectives. The ELPP coordinator provides leadership and support to teachers, facilitating professional development opportunities and fostering a collaborative environment conducive to student success. Additionally, the coordinator liaises with other school administrators and stakeholders to ensure seamless integration of the ELPP within the broader school community.

After-School Value-Added Services

Additionally, our English Language Pathway Program (ELPP) offers value-added services online for some of our curricula, extending language support beyond traditional classroom hours. This supplementary online support allows students to reinforce their learning and receive additional assistance tailored to their specific needs, further complementing their progression throughout the ELPP stages.

	KG - Global Montessori	CBSE Primary	IB Primary Years (PYP)	CBSE Secondary	Cambridge CLSP	Cambridge IGCSE	IB Diploma
ELS English Language Support Stages 1 to 3 (A: CBSE) From 8 to 4 hours per week	FACE-TO-FACE 15:30-18:30 Part of After School Program (ASP)	FACE-TO-FACE 09:00-15:20 Pull-out-based Tuition During the School Day			↓	↓	↓
	ONLINE 17:30-18:30	ONLINE 17:30-18:30					
O Level & ESL English as a Second Language Stage 3 (B: CLSP) Stage 3 (C: IGCSE & IB Diploma) As per the curriculum guidelines	→				FACE-TO-FACE 09:00-15:20 As a Subject Cambridge O Level English Language (1123)	FACE-TO-FACE 09:00-15:20 As a Subject IGCSE English as a Second Language (Speaking endorsement) (0510)	FACE-TO-FACE 09:00-15:20 As a Subject from Group 2: Language Acquisition, ENGLISH
English as a First Language Stage 4 3 hours per week	FACE-TO-FACE 09:00-15:20 Pull-out-based Tuition: During the School Day Advanced English Language Support (ELS) to facilitate the final transition to English as a first language subject of the relevant curriculum						

Table 3: Modalities of ELPP

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It is observed that our structured approach to English language teaching at GIIS Tokyo has yielded significant improvements in students' language proficiency. The systematic methodology, encompassing various stages of language learning, has facilitated measurable progress. Students demonstrated enhanced skills in speaking, reading, writing, and listening, as observed through regular assessments and classroom activities.

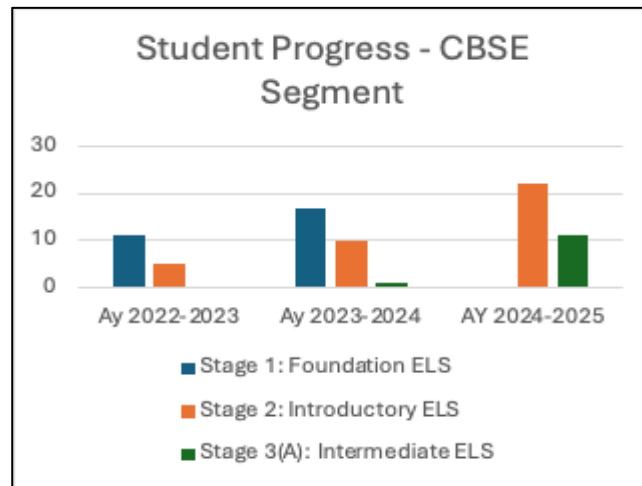


Figure 1: A 12% increase in progress of students in CBSE segment from stage 1 Foundation ELS to stage 3(a) Intermediate ELS

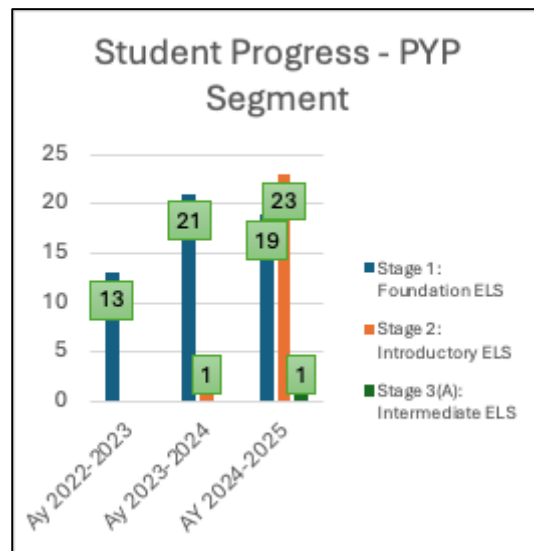


Figure 2: Students progress in PYP segment shows 10% increase from Foundation ELS to Intermediate ELS program

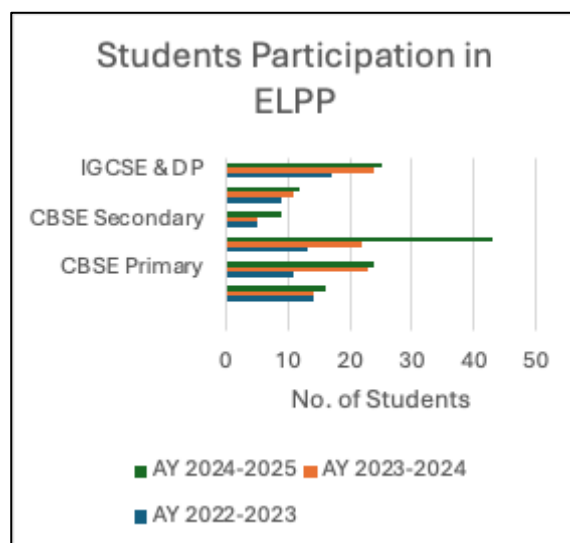


Figure 3: Student participation in ELPP shows increased engagement in CBSE primary students

An essential indicator of our program's success is the positive feedback from parents. Parents have reported noticeable advancements in their children's English proficiency, expressing satisfaction with the teaching methods and the overall progress.

Here is an excerpt from a parent's comment –

“Last year, Kaito couldn't read or speak very well, but this year, he can read English and speak in English. He has grown tremendously in terms of his academics. I am surprised and at the same time happy!”

The consistent improvement across different levels of language proficiency highlights the program's robustness. Students at various stages of their language learning journey showed marked progress, indicating that the structured approach is adaptable and effective for diverse learning needs. Here is another excerpt –

“My child's listening skills have improved drastically, thanks to the holistic education provided by GIIS Tokyo. This has had a positive impact on my daughter. She enjoys both art and math. Her artistic skills have improved significantly, and she really enjoys creating art. Art is her favorite subject, and she loves working on her projects and schoolwork. Her math skills have also improved, and she enjoys learning new concepts.”

This feedback underscores the effectiveness of our structured approach and its impact beyond the classroom, students, and the parent community.

The success of ELPP at GIIS Tokyo emphasizes the importance of a well-organized curriculum in language education. This method ensures that foundational skills are solidified before progressing to more advanced concepts, creating a comprehensive learning experience. In continuation of this trend parents' awareness and support are extremely important. Keeping parents informed and engaged not only

fosters a supportive learning environment at home but also strengthens the overall educational framework. Their satisfaction serves as a testament to the program's success and encourages ongoing collaboration between teachers and parents.

Regular assessments also play a crucial role in tracking students' progress and identifying areas for improvement. We plan to continue and further enhance this methodology. Expanding the program to incorporate additional resources and innovative teaching techniques will benefit both the school and the students.

CONCLUSION

Effective language proficiency programs improve academic performance and foster socio-emotional development among non-English speaking students (Tedick, 2002). The English Language Pathway Program at GIIS Tokyo represents a comprehensive approach to enhancing English language proficiency among students. By integrating language learning with content instruction and providing structured support, the program empowers students to succeed academically and thrive in a globalized world. Continued research and evaluation will further inform the refinement and effectiveness of the ELPP, ensuring its continued impact on student learning outcomes.

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