



## ECA EVALUATION DIVISION

### EVALUATION OF ECA'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS:

#### Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program

#### Key Findings

June 2014

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### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program sends U.S. citizens abroad for year-long assignments as teaching assistants in classrooms around the world. ETAs, who are generally graduating college seniors from around the United States, share their knowledge and experiences of the United States and U.S. society and culture while supporting English language learning through their presence as native speakers. At the same time, ETAs grow and learn from intensive cross-cultural interaction and an international education experience.

The Fulbright ETA Program, which is sponsored by the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), helps promote a broad array of U.S. public diplomacy and foreign policy goals, including increasing understanding and cooperation between U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries, as well as increasing U.S. competitiveness abroad.

### PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

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

- **Mutual understanding.** To what extent does the program foster mutual understanding, cross-cultural learning and relationships between U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries?
- **English language teaching and learning.** To what extent does the program enhance the English language skills of students at host institutions? What English language needs do ETAs fill at host institutions?
- **ETAs' professional knowledge, expertise and development.** What career skills and/or opportunities have ETAs gained from their teaching and independent research projects, and how has this influenced their careers or graduate study? Do ETAs face challenges during their assignments, and if so, how do they deal with them?



## DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

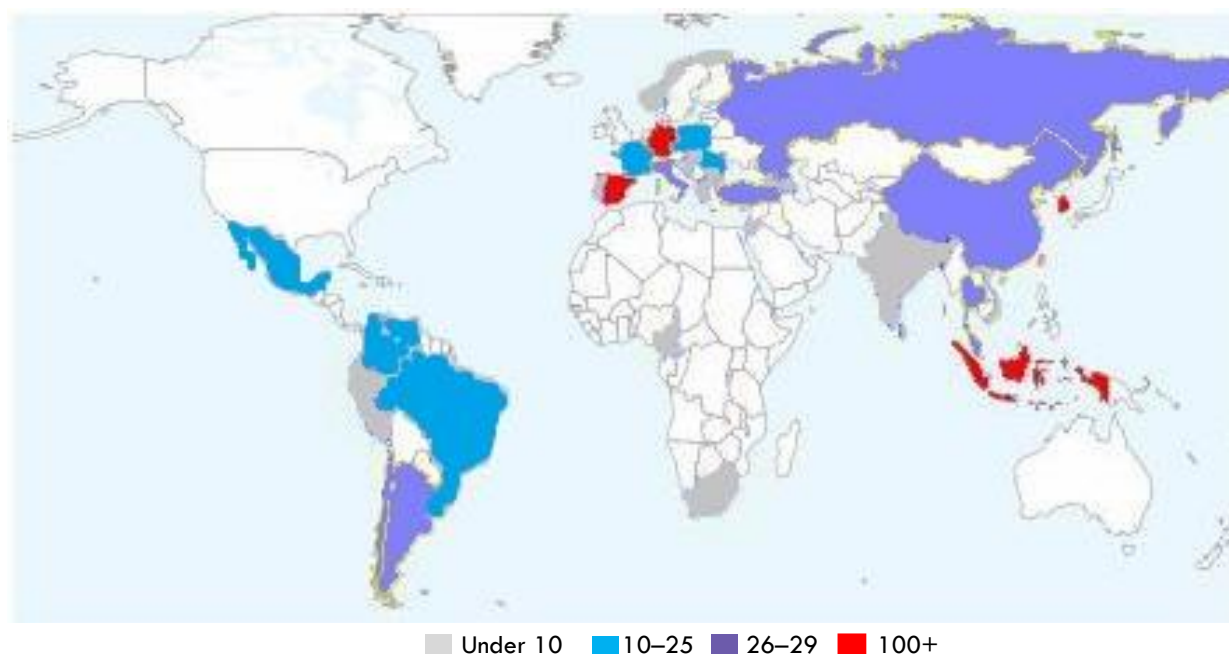
The evaluation used a mixed-method data collection strategy to evaluate the Fulbright ETA Program, which included the following components:

- **Qualitative fieldwork:** In 2011 and 2012, the evaluation team traveled to Chile, Russia, Thailand and Turkey to conduct interviews with ETAs' former colleagues and supervisors at host institutions, as well as with Fulbright Commission staff, Ministry of Education officials, Embassy Public Affairs staff and Embassy and regional English language programming staff.
- **Online survey:** In the fall of 2012, the evaluation team conducted an online survey of former ETAs, collecting responses from 792 ETAs who had participated in the program between the academic years 2004–05 and 2009–10.

## PROGRAM REACH

During the evaluation period, 2,350 ETAs were posted to 48 countries around the world.

**Figure 1. Number of ETAs Placed per Country, 2004–05 to 2009–10**

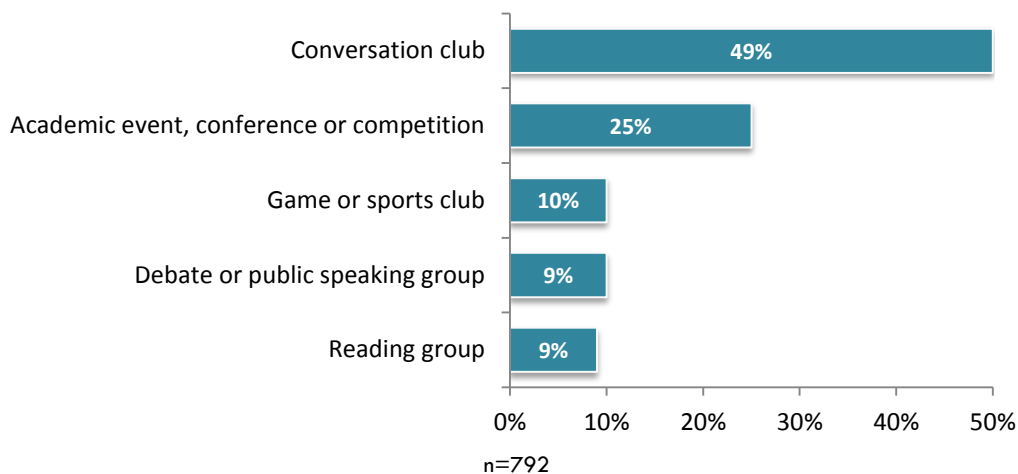


## ETA ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

Fulbright ETAs spend an academic year living and teaching at educational institutions abroad. An ETA's primary purpose in the classroom is as an English language teaching assistant who will work to improve students' English language skills and to act as a conduit for learning about U.S. history, society and culture. ETAs generally serve at a single host institution for the academic year they spend abroad. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of those surveyed were placed in a secondary or primary school, and one-quarter (24%) at a college or university. Most ETAs were placed outside their host country's capital city (82%) and worked with students who had very limited previous exposure to a native English speaker (73%).

Within their host institutions, ETAs have a wide range of roles and responsibilities, including classroom teaching, other English language teaching support and extracurricular activities. In the classroom, while the majority (55%) of the ETAs surveyed worked as assistants under a senior teacher, more than one-third (37%) taught classes independently. Beyond the classroom, three-quarters (75%) of ETAs also led at least one extracurricular activity, most often conversation clubs (49%) or academic events and competitions (25%), such as model UN.

**Figure 2. Extracurricular Activities Led or Started by ETAs at Host Institutions**



Outside of their school duties, ETAs in many countries are expected to engage in projects or activities that relate to their personal, career or educational interests. Three-quarters (75%) of survey respondents engaged in these supplemental projects, most of which were either community service activities or independent learning projects.

**Many ETAs used English language instruction to assist community organizations that supported disadvantaged populations in their host countries.**

*I volunteered at a nonprofit organization for street children. My role was to speak with the children in English, play with the kids and create a digital data repository for the mental health and special education records.*  
—ETA in India

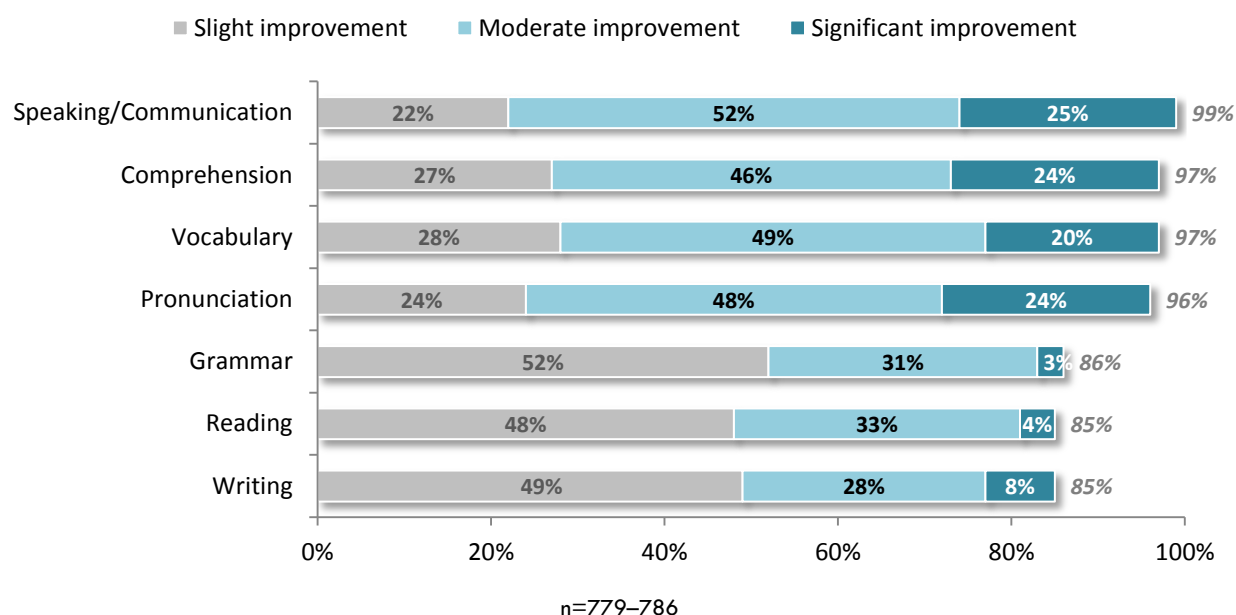
*I taught special English programs for young typhoon victims. I also taught free English lessons each Friday at a nearby senior citizen center.*  
—ETA in Taiwan

*I volunteered to lead a reading group at a local high school, gave English lessons at an orphanage and interned at a water and sanitation NGO.*  
—ETA in South Africa

## SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Fulbright ETAs serve primarily to develop their students' English language skills, with an emphasis on conversation. As such, nearly all ETAs surveyed reported that their students had improved in the following skill areas: speaking/communication (99%), comprehension (97%), vocabulary (97%) and pronunciation (96%). Furthermore, by emphasizing conversation and interactive activities in their teaching, nearly all ETAs (99%) saw their students develop both greater confidence in their English abilities and increased motivation to continue learning, as well as to become more active learners in general (98%).

**Figure 3. Students' English Language Knowledge and Skill Gains: ETA Perceptions**



Host country instructors and administrators interviewed agreed that ETAs are a highly valuable educational resource for their institutions. These former colleagues pointed out that in addition to building students' language skills through interactive activities, the presence of an ETA provides several other benefits for English learners:

- Students get to hear English spoken by a native speaker.
- Where ETAs arrive without fluency in their host country's language, their presence in the classroom ensures that their students communicate in English rather than in their local language.
- ETAs create a relaxed environment that helps students feel comfortable expressing themselves.



## FOSTERING LEARNING AND CHANGING PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES

Given that Fulbright ETAs often are the first U.S. citizens that their students have met, a core component of their role abroad is serving as cultural ambassadors for the United States. The opportunity for face-to-face interaction with a U.S. citizen allows students to learn in depth about U.S. culture and society, beyond what they can find in textbooks or the mass media.

Nearly all surveyed ETAs (97%) took advantage of the opportunity to share their own experiences, cultures and traditions with students to a “great” or “moderate” extent, often tackling students’ preconceptions head on. Indeed, the vast majority of ETAs believed that they had helped break stereotypes of Americans (90%) and/or changed people’s impressions of the United States and Americans (83%) to a great or moderate extent.

In addition to changing perceptions about the United States, ETAs provided their host country students and community members with a more global lens for viewing the world. Specifically, the majority of ETAs believed that they had—to a great or moderate extent—helped people to expand their worldview (76%), exposed them to new ways of thinking (71%) and helped them think more critically about their own countries (51%).

### ETAs changed people’s perceptions of Americans at the institutions they served.

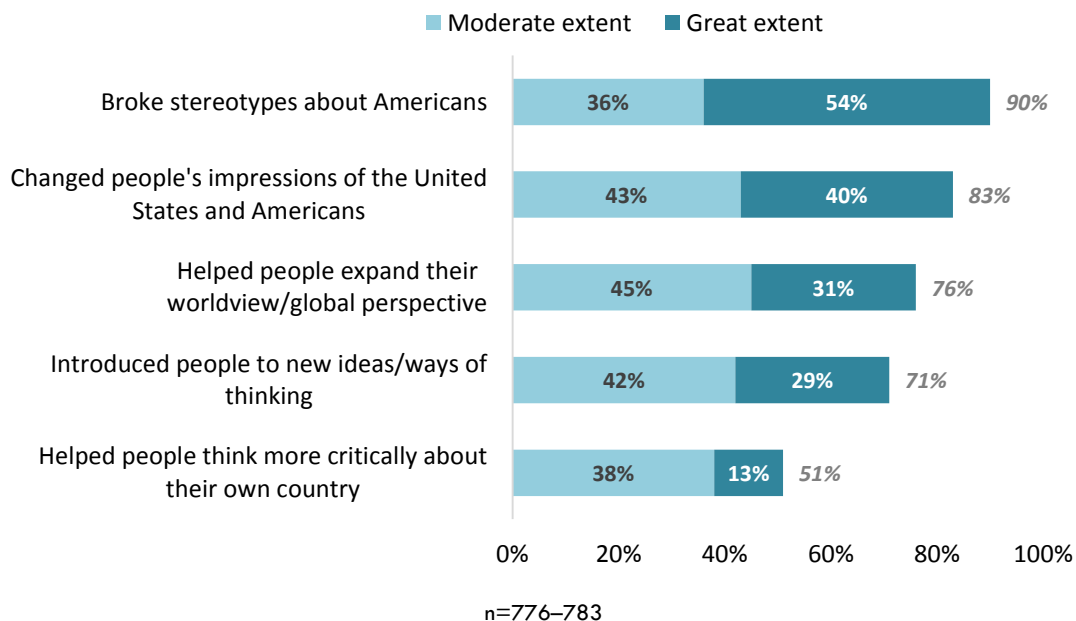
*[The ETA] was quite different from the American stereotype we normally have in Russia, because when you are dealing with people like him, you will change your opinion. That’s what happened with most of us, I think.*

—University professor in Russia

*It’s not only improving speaking, but also opening their minds, because sometimes even students of International Relations, they come here thinking that Americans are not good at geography, or they’re not so interested in other countries. And then they have classes with ETAs. They understand that it’s not true. And I think that it was also great for them just to experience that difference. ... That’s one of the major points of having an ETA teacher—that Americans are humans.*

—University administrator in Russia

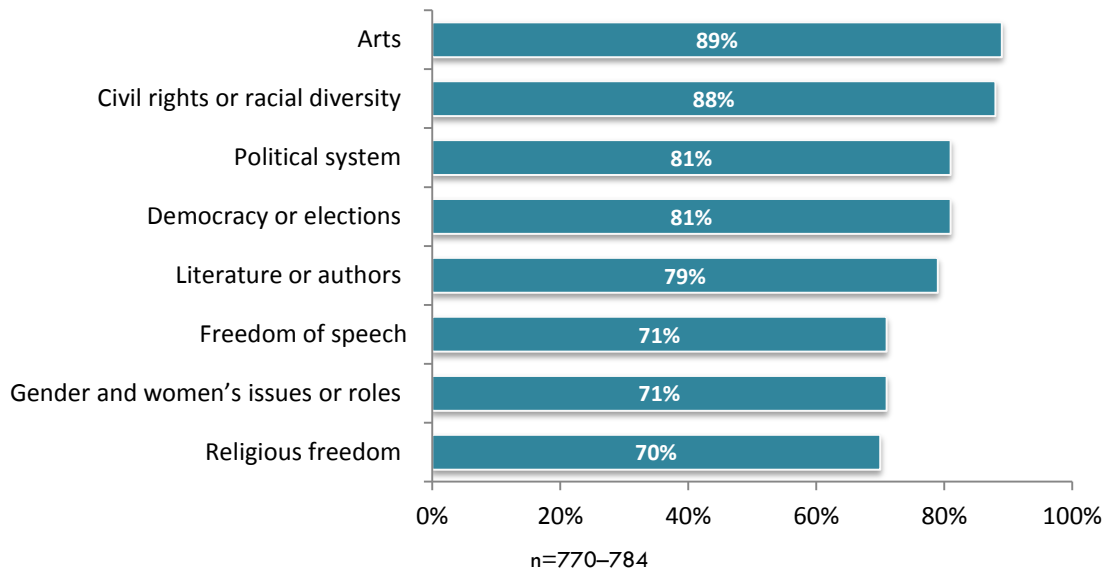
**Figure 4. Breaking Stereotypes and Broadening Worldviews: ETA Perceptions**



## INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF U.S. SOCIETY, POLITICS AND THE ARTS

Fulbright ETAs increased their students' knowledge of U.S. society, politics and the arts by incorporating these subjects into their teaching and extracurricular activities. As shown in Figure 5, at least 7 in 10 ETAs reported that their students had gained knowledge of key subjects related to U.S. society and values, including freedom of speech, religious freedom, and gender and women's roles in the United States.

**Figure 5. Students' Increased Knowledge of U.S. Society: ETA Perceptions**



Many ETAs mentioned that they had taught their students about diversity by discussing the variety of races, religions and ethnicities that make up the social fabric of the United States. Furthermore, both ETAs and their former colleagues noted examples of ETAs using the arts to deepen their students' understanding of U.S. society, such as exploring U.S. culture through films and music, or teaching about race issues through African-American literature.

### ETAs engaged students in topics related to U.S. diversity.

*We shared a lot about cultural misconceptions and stereotypes regarding each other's country. We talked about racism and the diversity of people and cultures we had in the USA. We also discussed who is American and what that may or may not look like.*

—ETA in Indonesia

*I taught them about the life of an American who is not your typical "white American" that they see on TV. I taught them about diversity and how the US is a melting pot made up of people from all different cultures and backgrounds and how we all worked and lived together in one nation.*

—ETA in South Korea

*I was able to work with texts such as A Raisin in the Sun and introduce students to many aspects of African-American culture/literature, which everyone really enjoyed, including myself.*

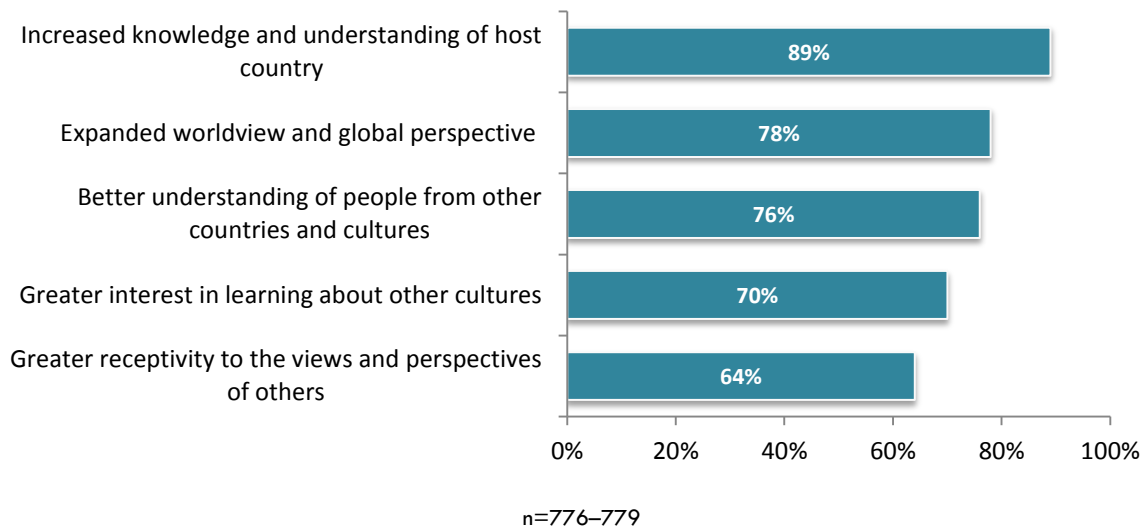
—ETA in Germany



## ETAs' OWN COUNTRY-SPECIFIC AND CROSS-CULTURAL LEARNING

In addition to teaching host country students about U.S. culture, Fulbright ETAs substantially increased their own cross-cultural knowledge and global perspective. In fact, the majority of survey respondents reported that their ETA experience had led to “great” gains in the following areas:

**Figure 6. ETAs' Increased Intercultural Knowledge and Expanded Perspective**



Several ETAs noted that the intercultural competencies they gained from the program are still highly useful for their day-to-day interactions with people from other cultures and perspectives.

### Sharing Experiences

After completing the program, most Fulbright ETAs shared their host country experiences with others. Most commonly, they have discussed their experiences with friends or colleagues informally in conversations—three-quarters (76%) of survey respondents reported having done so frequently. Additionally, most ETAs (70%) shared aspects of their experience online or through social media, either frequently (24%) or occasionally (46%).

### Maintaining Host Country Ties

Most Fulbright ETAs have maintained contact with a variety of people they met during their Fulbright assignments. Specifically, the majority of survey respondents reported staying in touch at least occasionally with other ETAs (82%), host families or other host country friends (70%), former students (53%) and teachers from their host institutions (51%). In fact, nearly all surveyed ETAs (97%) reported maintaining long-term linkages with friends in their former host country, and many of them returned to visit after their assignments ended.

#### ETAs comment on long-term connections with their host countries.

*I expected to be immersed in the culture, but I never expected to form the bonds with my students and colleagues that I did. I have lifelong friends that due to social media, I can still stay in touch with.*  
—ETA in Turkey

*I feel like I gained so much and shared so much. I taught second graders who had only had one prior year of English. When I returned to visit 3 years later, they were speaking to me in full, complex English sentences. ...*  
—ETA in Spain

## PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Fulbright ETAs credited the program with improving their job-related skills and providing focus and direction for future academic and career pursuits. In fact, a majority of survey respondents noted that the program had expanded their skill set (87%) and had clarified their professional goals (73%) to a “significant” or “moderate” extent. More than 6 in 10 ETAs also reported that their experience had helped them obtain a new job (61%) and/or had prepared them for new opportunities (71%) to a significant or moderate extent.

Furthermore, while the program is not designed as a teacher training program, 42 percent of ETAs surveyed went on to pursue careers in education, many of them in the field of English language teaching. Others noted that the program had influenced them to pursue careers in international education, development or relations. Many ETAs went on to pursue advanced degrees in fields that they became interested in during their Fulbright assignments, such as education, language, communication or cultural/area studies.

## ENCOUNTERING AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

During their year abroad, Fulbright ETAs encountered some challenges, such as adjusting to the host country culture and getting settled into their role at host institutions. In particular, two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents experienced a “moderate” or “significant” challenge in understanding exactly what their host institutions expected of them. This uncertainty left many ETAs feeling that they had received insufficient assignments or tasks (41%) and/or that their assignments/tasks did not make use of their skills (35%).

Nonetheless, the support they received from various sources helped them overcome these challenges. A strong majority (82%) of ETAs reported that they had received guidance from mentors or senior teachers. Their mentors not only helped them with their academic duties, but also supported them with their social and cultural adjustment to their host community. ETAs also found support from other teachers at their host institutions, from students and community members, and from their network of fellow ETAs.

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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 Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Program was conducted by EurekaFacts, LLC. Visit <http://eca.state.gov/evaluations-eca> to download the full report.