



## Research Memorandum

ETS RM-15-04

# Evaluating a Learning Tool for Young English Learners: The Case of the *TOEFL*® *Primary*™ English Learning Center

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Veronika Timpe-Laughlin

August 2015

# ETS Research Memorandum Series

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**Evaluating a Learning Tool for Young English Learners:  
The Case of the *TOEFL*<sup>®</sup> *Primary*<sup>™</sup> English Learning Center**

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August 2015

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## **Abstract**

The *TOEFL® Primary™* English Language Center (ELC) is a web-based platform that contains activities intended to help young English language learners (ELLs) build important communication skills in English. The first generation of the ELC was launched in 2013 and has been used as supplementary teaching material by English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Brazil and Mexico since the 2013–2014 school year. Although the ELC is used in different contexts, little is known about how it is used, what stakeholders think about it, and whether the ELC requires revision in order to better meet the needs of EFL teachers and students. Hence, this study aims to investigate the use of the ELC and, thus, provide empirical evidence regarding (a) its implementation and (b) teachers' and students' perceptions of it. To explore how the ELC is used and perceived by instructors and students, data were collected via online surveys and on-site interviews with both teachers and elementary-level students. The mainly qualitative analyses provided two key findings. First, the findings show that the ELC was used primarily outside EFL classrooms as a supplementary, self-access learning material. As such, it was perceived as a valuable learning tool for language practice, which additionally prepared students for the TOEFL Primary test. Second, responses provide preliminary evidence to support a number of claims Educational Testing Service (ETS) and Edusoft have made about the ELC. Moreover, some suggestions to enhance the ELC program are discussed in this report, as well as factors that should be considered in future materials evaluation research, especially in research with young ELLs.

**Key words:** English learning center (ELC); elementary school; young learners; English language learning; evaluation; learning material

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## Introduction and Background

As the latest addition to the *TOEFL*<sup>®</sup> family of assessments, *TOEFL*<sup>®</sup> *Primary*<sup>™</sup> was launched in 2013. Hence, English language learners (ELLs) can now engage in a “TOEFL journey,” starting early on in their lives. That is, they can move from TOEFL Primary via *TOEFL Junior*<sup>®</sup> to *TOEFL iBT*<sup>®</sup>, assessing their English language skills from elementary to tertiary education and beyond. In order to provide support to younger students embarking on this TOEFL journey, ETS and Edusoft introduced the TOEFL Primary English Learning Center (ELC),<sup>1</sup> a web-based learning platform that provides young ELLs with activities that are intended to help them develop communication skills in English. While the ELC can be used as a self-access learning tool, it can also be employed by English teachers in instructional environments. Therefore, the ELC includes a teacher management system (TMS), a web-based interface that allows teachers to monitor and score their students’ progress in the ELC. As of the 2013–2014 school year, the TOEFL Primary ELC, as well as the TMS, have been employed in EFL instruction in schools across Brazil and Mexico. Therefore, as a first evaluation effort, this study focuses on the uses of the TOEFL Primary English Learning Center (hereafter: Primary ELC or ELC) in Mexico and Brazil.

As supplementary teaching material, the ELC aims to support EFL students’ development of communication skills in English. It is designed for ELLs roughly between the ages of 8 and 11. In alignment with the TOEFL Primary assessment, the ELC includes reading, listening, and speaking components. Reading, listening, and speaking activities are embedded in eight different units, each of which is constructed around a particular topic and narrative (see Figure 1 for a screenshot of the ELC’s interface).

Upon entering a unit, such as At Home (Unit 1), learners can select from seven different lessons (see Figure 2). The first lesson of each unit is labeled “Introduction.” The introductory lessons aim primarily to familiarize the learners with the vocabulary needed for the given unit. They are structured the same across all units; that is, first, they provide vocabulary and pronunciation input, followed by vocabulary exercises such as a memory game activity, matching tasks, or hangman to familiarize the learners with the words used in the context of the unit. These vocabulary activities are then followed by a listening activity and finally, a speaking activity. The remaining lessons (i.e., Lessons 2 through 7) contain different numbers of reading, listening, and speaking activities. These activities implemented in each unit are constructed around a storyline.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the English Learning Center (ELC) interface, featuring the eight units and their associated topics.



Figure 2. Seven lessons embedded in the narrative structure underlying Unit 1: At Home.

In Unit 1, for example, the storyline simulates the process of gradually getting to know a new friend's family while learning about activities and settings in a household. Except for the speaking activities at the end of each lesson, all activities are designed as selected-response items.

ETS and Edusoft have argued that the ELC provides a collaborative, fun, and engaging English language learning environment that supports teachers in tailoring their instruction to students' current proficiency levels. The preliminary claims that ETS and Edusoft have made about the ELC are that the learning center

- helps young students develop essential communication skills in English;
- provides a fun and engaging English learning environment;
- provides a collaborative language learning environment;
- provides young students with a sense of success/accomplishment;
- supports teachers in tailoring their instruction to students' current levels;
- encourages students to play an active role in their English learning; and
- improves students' awareness of English-speaking cultures.

However, currently no empirical evidence exists to support these claims. Moreover, new revised versions of the ELC are scheduled to be designed and launched in 2015. In light of this situation, the primary purpose of this study is to gather feedback from stakeholders and users of the ELC so as to bring empirical evidence to bear on the preliminary claims articulated about the ELC. In this process, the study also aims to reveal areas for further improvement that will inform the revision of the ELC in 2014.

### **Evaluation Questions**

In order to shed light on the implementation and perceived usability of the TOEFL Primary ELC, the following evaluation questions guided the study:

- EQ1: How do teachers utilize the ELC in their instruction?
- EQ2: What are the views of the teachers toward the ELC?
- EQ3: What are the views of the students toward the ELC?

### **Methodology**

Evaluation of learning materials is usually integrated into their overall design and development plan, the expectation being that evaluation activities can contribute considerably to the quality of learning materials. Given that the ELC is still in a state of continuous development

and adaptation, the project employed a developmental evaluation approach (Patton, 2008). Developmental evaluation aims to provide data to inform and guide further revision processes and development decisions to adapt and align the ELC with the needs of its intended users.

The steps taken within this developmental evaluation approach followed the recommendations of Taylor-Powell, Steele, and Douglah (2006). As a systematic collection of information about the use and perceived usefulness of the ELC, this study unrolled in four successive steps: determining the purpose of the evaluation, collecting data, analyzing the results, and using the findings. Given the public, participatory, and inclusive nature of evaluation research, stakeholders were involved in the evaluation to different degrees throughout the process. To maintain focus on the utilization aspect of this evaluation study, the researcher maintained close contact and communication with different stakeholder groups throughout the process. This close cooperation culminated in sharing of the empirical findings with all stakeholder groups to inform further development efforts.

## Participants

Edusoft identified and recruited three groups of respondents: curriculum coordinators ( $n = 2$ ), teachers ( $n = 10$ ), and students ( $n = 43$ ). Participants were either located in Mexico or Brazil, the two countries in which the ELC was used in 2013–2014. Between March and June 2014, respondents completed either an online survey or a face-to-face interview, or in one case, both tools. Table 1 provides an overview of all participants, data collection sites, methods, and times of data collection.

**Table 1**

***Overview of Data Collection Sites, Methods, and Informants***

Data collection site	Type of respondents	Data collection method	Time of data collection
Brazil	Teachers ( $n = 2$ )	Bilingual online survey (English/Brazilian Portuguese)	March–May 2014
Mexico	Teachers ( $n = 6$ ) <sup>a</sup>	Bilingual online survey (English/Spanish)	March–May 2014
Mexico	Teachers ( $n = 3$ ) <sup>a</sup>	Semistructured interviews	May/June 2014
Mexico	Curriculum coordinators ( $n = 2$ )	Semistructured interviews	May/June 2014
Mexico	Students ( $n = 40$ )	Semistructured interviews	May/June 2014

<sup>a</sup>One of the interviewed teachers in Mexico had also taken the survey prior to the interview conducted in May and June 2014.

**Teachers.** As summarized in Table 2, 10 elementary school teachers provided feedback on the ELC, two in Brazil and eight in Mexico. The teachers ranged from 20 to 70 years of age, and all indicated that they had either a teaching license or a bachelor’s degree. While the teaching licenses held by the teachers tended to be for English language teaching (e.g., Cambridge’s Teaching Knowledge Test), the bachelor’s degrees held by the teachers were in a range of disciplines, including computer science, literature, and business. Thus, many of the teachers had been hired based on their ability to speak English and had been accumulating teaching experience over a number of years in the field.

**Curriculum coordinators.** In Mexico, every private school has an English language curriculum coordinator (hereafter referred to as coordinator) who functions as an intermediary and/or facilitator. Among the responsibilities of a coordinator are to (a) manage quality through regular in-class observations, (b) make decisions about learning materials (e.g., textbooks, online learning platforms) to be used at their schools, (c) maintain a close relationship with the Ministry of Education and other curriculum and materials providers, and (d) substitute teach occasionally for an English teacher. Out of the three schools visited in Mexico, two had full-time coordinators who participated in the study. They are referred to in this report as Coordinator 01 (male) and Coordinator 02 (female). At the third school, the English teacher also held the position of coordinator. Thus, that participant was coded as a teacher rather than a coordinator.

**Table 2**  
*Teacher Participant Background Information*

Teacher ID	Country	Age	Highest degree	Taught English for... years	Lived in an English-speaking country	Data collection method
01	Brazil	20–30	BA	6–10	No	BOS
02	Brazil	31–40	TL	11–16	No	BOS
01	Mexico	20–30	TL	1–5	No	SI
02	Mexico	31–40	TL	6–10	No	BOS
03	Mexico	31–40	BA	1–5	No	BOS
04	Mexico	31–40	BA	1–5	No	BOS
05	Mexico	41–50	TL	17–22	No	BOS & SI
06	Mexico	41–50	TL	17–22	Yes	SI
07	Mexico	41–50	TL	11–16	No	BOS
08	Mexico	61–70	TL	More than 22	No	BOS

*Note.* BA = bachelor; TL = teachers license; BOS = bilingual online survey; SI = semistructured interview.

**Students.** All 40 students who participated in this study were in sixth grade at three elementary schools in Mexico. The students, 19 male and 21 female, ranged in age from 11 to 13. As such, the sample of students was older on average than the target population for which the ELC was originally designed (i.e., 8 to 11 years). The students had a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 10 years of English learning experience, with an average of 6.5 years. Thus, the study's ELL participants were very diverse in terms of their levels of English proficiency. All students had completed all units of the ELC at the time of data collection.

All schools included in the study were private and offered up to 3 hours of English instruction every day. Students with widely varying levels of English language proficiency were found within classrooms,<sup>2</sup> with length of English study ranging from 2 to 10 years. Class size also varied from school to school, ranging from six to 33 students. Hence, on a daily basis, the teachers who participated in the study taught a highly diverse group of ELLs.

## **Instruments**

To document and understand how teachers employ the ELC and what teachers and students think about the learning tool, two types of data collection instruments were used: online surveys and face-to-face, semistructured interviews. Following Dörnyei's (2010) and Brown's (2001) recommendations for constructing questionnaires, the questions and items for the surveys and the interview protocols were created by the author in cooperation with ETS assessment development and Edusoft staff. Thus, all items and questions were reviewed by experts in the fields of language testing, educational assessment, item development, and second language pedagogy.

The online surveys were offered bilingually, one for English teachers in Brazil (Brazilian Portuguese and English) and one for English teachers in Mexico (Spanish and English). The surveys were hosted on the Survey Monkey website and contained 39 constructed- and selected-response items in five sections: (I) English Learning Course, (II) Teacher Management System, (III) Your Perceptions of the ELC, (IV) Your English Language Skills, and (V) Demographics. Section I included questions about the context and frequency of the teachers' use of the ELC, as well as their opinions regarding the ELC's content, topics, and activities. Section II focused on teachers' perceptions and opinions of the content, usability, and online interface of the TMS. Section III focused on the teacher's impressions of how students perceived the usability and effectiveness of the ELC, with particular focus on the claims that ETS and Edusoft have made

about the ELC. Section IV contained questions about the teachers' perceptions with regard to using the ELC to improve their own English language skills, and Section V focused on demographics, including the teachers' English language learning and teaching background.

The face-to-face, semistructured interview protocols for the on-site data collection in Mexico were developed in English for teachers and coordinators and in Spanish for students. All interview guidelines were laid out in a similar manner, adapted to the specific roles of the three groups of participants. The teacher interview protocols roughly followed the structure of the survey in order to explore the different aspects in more detail (see Appendix A). Thus, they included questions about (a) demographics and teaching background, (b) use and perception of the ELC and TMS, (c) facility of navigation and functionality of both the ELC and TMS systems, and (d) suggestions for improvement. The coordinator interview protocols included questions about (a) their professional background and tasks, (b) their role in implementing the ELC, and (c) their perceptions of the usability of the ELC and TMS systems. The student interview protocols focused on (a) context and frequency of use of the ELC, (b) perceptions of content, units, and activities, (c) feasibility of navigating the website, and (d) general perceptions and ideas for improvement. All interview protocols included detailed instructions for the interviewers on which questions were to be supported by visual input.

## **Procedures**

The two data collection measures were employed successively. First, the surveys were administered online at the beginning of March 2014. Participants in Mexico and Brazil received an e-mail containing a hyperlink to the survey. As compensation, respondents received an online gift card in the amount of \$35 upon completion of the survey. Second, face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher and an assistant on-site at three different elementary schools in Mexico. Teacher and coordinator interviews were conducted in English in classrooms at the respective schools. In order to provide students with as comfortable an environment as possible, three steps were implemented. First, student interviews were conducted in small groups with two or three students. Second, the interviews were conducted in the students' native language (L1; Spanish). Third, to encourage the students to speak freely, teachers were not present during the student interviews. Each of the interviews, which lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, was audio recorded.

During all interviews, the online learning website was displayed on a computer screen to show pages and features that were addressed during the interview. The interviewers pointed to images on the computer screen to support and help the respondents to recall experiences.

## **Analysis**

In order to investigate perceived usability, the survey and interview data were analyzed by means of different qualitative and quantitative approaches.

**Online surveys.** Frequency distributions and/or overall mean and standard deviation were calculated for each survey item to determine consensus or discrepancy in opinions among respondents. Responses on the 5-point Likert scales were converted to numerical values: 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*somewhat disagree*), 3 (*neutral*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*strongly agree*). Open-ended responses were analyzed for major themes, similar to the procedure used in the interview analyses, and frequency counts of major themes were calculated. Representative responses were extracted as a way of capturing and documenting response patterns in the words of the informants.

**Face-to-face interviews.** The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Student interviews were translated into English. To analyze the data, a meaning condensation approach was employed (Watanabe, Norris, & Gonzalez-Lloret, 2009). This approach systematically abridges interviewees' responses into brief natural meaning units, which then give rise to central themes in the data (Kvale, 1996). In this way, patterns were identified across the different interviews. According to Boyatzis (1998), there are three distinct ways of developing thematic codes: theory driven, prior data or prior research driven, and inductive. Given the exploratory nature of this study, an inductive, data-driven approach was utilized.

Following Boyatzis (1998) and Green (1998), the word-level transcriptions were coded iteratively in reference to the research questions and the sections in the online surveys (i.e., use of the ELC, content feedback, difficulty/ease of using the ELC, etc.) using QSR NVivo 10 software. A final coding scheme was established after four cycles of coding (see Appendix B), and this coding scheme was then developed into a manual that was employed to establish intercoder reliability. A research assistant, fluent in Spanish and English, was trained by the researcher in the application of the coding scheme. Intercoder reliability was calculated for six out of 19 interviews. Average intercoder agreement across all categories was 83%, ranging from 71% to 93%. In line with O'Malley and Chamot (1990), a discussion revealed that the discrepancies in



the coding were the result of slightly different understandings (and, thus, applications) of the coding manual in two categories: background and learning context, and content feedback. Disagreements were resolved via subsequent consensus coding.

In order to identify and examine patterns and thematic trends in the data, frequency distributions were calculated for phenomena in each category. Biased responses (i.e., instances in which the interviewer questions were identified as leading) were excluded from the data before the analysis. The following example shows one such case in which it could not be inferred whether the comments reflected the student's perspective or that of the interviewer:

**Interviewer:** Did you like the characters in these stories?

**Student 01:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And why yes?

**Student 01:** Well...

**Interviewer:** Does it seem like what happens at home?

**Student 01:** Yes.<sup>3</sup>

## Findings

In this section, findings will be outlined from two perspectives: educators (i.e., teachers and coordinators) and students. While the findings for educators will include survey and interview responses, findings for students are based on interview responses only.

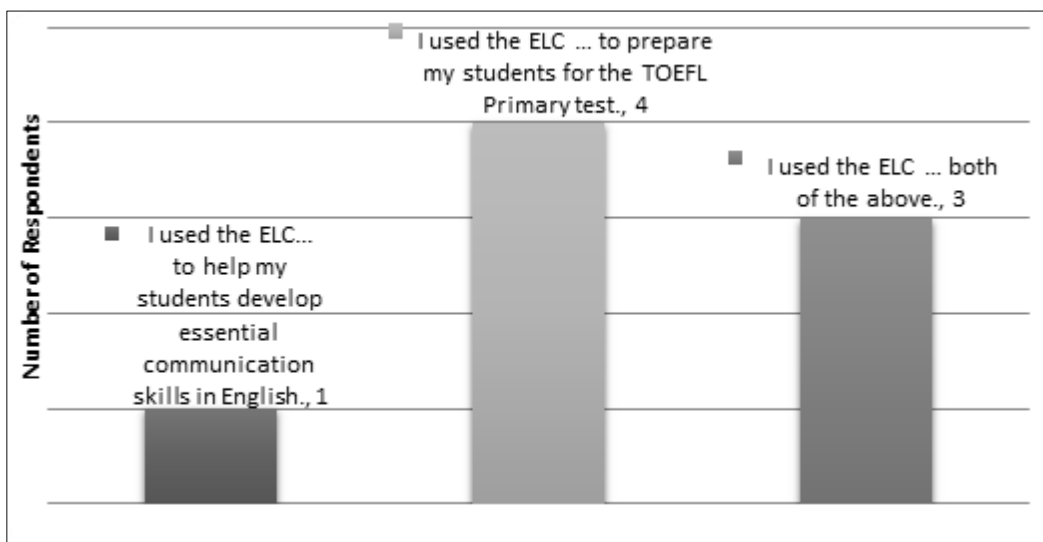
### Educators' Views

The analysis of the teacher survey responses ( $n = 8$ ) and the teacher and coordinator interviews ( $n = 5$ ) provided insights into the views of educators on the ELC and TMS with regard to the following themes: (a) general perceptions of the ELC, (b) frequency and context of use, (c) content feedback, (d) usability of the ELC and TMS, and (e) professional development. In the pages that follow, the findings will be outlined for these five aspects.

**General perceptions.** To obtain a first impression of how teachers perceived the ELC, teachers were asked whether they viewed the ELC platform as test preparation material or as a learning tool. Four teachers indicated in their survey responses that they viewed the ELC as serving a dual purpose: It helps students prepare for TOEFL Primary test while also serving as a learning tool. In the words of one teacher (Teacher Mexico 05), "This has both . . . because it let

students to learn new things but also help them to prepare for the exam.” Three teachers viewed the ELC only as test preparation material, and one teacher viewed it as solely for learning.

Teachers reported having used the ELC both as test preparation and as learning material. As shown in Figure 3, the one teacher who reported viewing the ELC as a learning tool also indicated that she used it primarily for learning purposes. However, half of the teachers in the survey sample ( $n = 4$ ) seem to have used the ELC to prepare their students for the TOEFL Primary test, while three teachers used it for both learning and test preparation.



**Figure 3. Use of the English Learning Center (ELC) as learning material or test preparation.**

The educators’ interview data substantiated the finding that the ELC seems to be viewed as serving two purposes, with a slightly stronger emphasis on test preparation. Of the three educators (two coordinators and one teacher) who discussed their views of the character of the ELC, only one coordinator saw the ELC primarily as a learning tool. In contrast, a stronger emphasis on the test preparation qualities of the ELC was expressed in the comments provided by the other two educators (from two different schools). Coordinator 02 suggested that using the ELC resulted in more exposure with English input and, thus, provided potential learning gains that were reflected in her students test scores. She explained that, in her school, they had

used it [the ELC] as a test preparation, but it also helped them [the students] cause uh last year or all the years before, they had English like twice a week or three times a week. So

having this tool has helped them a lot to improve their English, you know? [. . .]I think it was a really good tool to practice uh for the TOEFL exam. I can guarantee you that if they did like slightly well on the TOEFL, cause I don't think they did too well. If they did slightly well on the TOEFL it is because of this.

The EFL teacher's comments indicated that she viewed the ELC as solely for test preparation:

because they [the students] are supposed to know everything that's inside and it's for practicing for remember some things because obviously they, they supposed to know grammar points and it is it but no I don't think it's not a learning tool yes because they are supposed to know everything. (Teacher Mexico 05)

In sum, the ELC seems to be primarily viewed as serving a dual purpose, that is, as test preparation material that is also conducive to learning English.

**Frequency and context of use.** The ELC is provided to Mexican schools as part of a package of learning and teaching materials distributed by Sistema UNO, a supplier of curricula and learning materials for K–12 EFL education in Latin America. As part of the package, schools were given detailed instructions about how long the ELC should be used with students prior to their taking the TOEFL Primary test. So, when asked why they had selected the ELC, all interviewed educators in the sample ( $n = 5$ ) responded that the ELC was part of the preestablished package provided by Sistema UNO, which the schools had to implement.

Although teachers were bound to the curricula provided by Sistema UNO, they were allowed to implement the ELC in their instruction as they saw fit. Out of the 10 teachers who participated in the study (across all survey and interview responses), no teacher used the ELC less than once a week. Six teachers indicated that they used the ELC once a week, three employed it two to three times a week, and one reported working with the ELC platform every day. Hence, the frequency of ELC use varied considerably across schools and teachers.

Teachers implemented the ELC both as homework and as an in-class activity. While no teacher reported using the ELC only in the classroom, two instructors indicated assigning it only as homework, and eight teachers reported using it both in class and as homework.

The interview and open-ended survey responses revealed that when teachers embedded the ELC platform into their in-class instruction, they primarily employed it for grammar and vocabulary teaching. One teacher commented in the survey that, in class, she and her students

got into one of the site of the students and [they] answered all together reviewing grammar and tenses. [They] went one by one and as soon as [they] finished [they] reviewed all again. (Teacher Mexico 03)

A second teacher described a more interactive use of the learning platform in her classroom instruction. She said that she and her students

review[ed] the vocabulary and practice it. Then [she] gave a clarification or explanation about the grammar point that they [students] have to use in each unit. sometimes. [she] gave extra examples. then they worked in the platform exercises. In the speaking section, before to record. The students answered the question individually, then they practiced in pairs, after that they recorded. (Teacher Mexico 05; spelling and grammar from the original)

These brief accounts show the teachers' willingness to work with the ELC in the classroom (in addition to assigning it as homework) to promote their learners' English language skills.

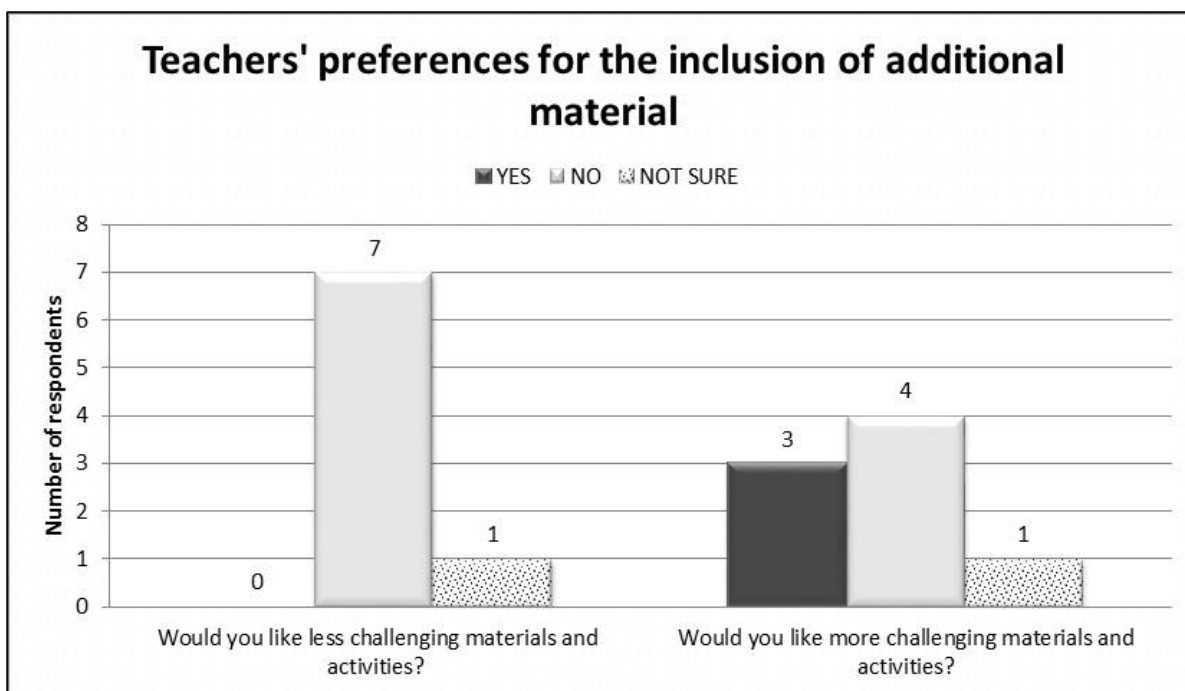
The majority of teachers in the sample reported that their students' ELC work was factored into their final grades. Of the 10 teachers in the sample, seven teachers graded their students work in the ELC platform, providing grades on the basis of the percentage completed (see Appendix C for a sample grading sheet provided by one teacher).

**Content feedback.** In their survey responses, eight teachers shared their views on which units in the ELC they regarded as most useful. The majority of teachers considered all the topics useful. In particular, the unit *At the Restaurant*—which requires direct interaction with an interlocutor—was perceived useful by all eight respondents, followed by the units *At the Shops* and *How We Travel*. The three teacher interviewees substantiated the survey response patterns insofar as they all remarked that they considered all units to be useful for their students. One teacher highlighted the connection of the units to real life topics as a trait that made them particularly valuable. She maintained that all units “were useful ones because it’s like real life. That’s what I told them. It’s real life. So I think those were good ones” (Teacher Mexico 05). Among the interviewees, two teachers did not have any suggestions for additional units and topics, while one teacher argued for the inclusion of more advanced topics, such as industrial processes (e.g., PEMEX and oil production) or environmental topics (e.g., extinct animals). One survey respondent suggested including an additional unit on sports.

**Activity types.** Educators also commented on the types of activities included in the ELC and their usefulness, generally perceiving all the activities in the ELC as useful. In particular, speaking activities were mentioned in the survey comments as being highly useful, given EFL learners' lack of opportunities to interact with L1 English speakers. Moreover, teachers reported spending the greatest amount of classroom time on speaking activities. One teacher, for example, provided the following comment in her survey response: "Well, in every unit we worked, but we took more time to do the speaking activities, also those were that I asked to students to do twice" (Teacher Mexico 06). Five of eight survey respondents indicated that they would appreciate the implementation of more speaking activities in the ELC, and one teacher suggested not only increasing the number of speaking tasks in each unit but also varying the types of speaking activities. In particular, teachers expressed the wish for more interactive speaking tasks to be included in the ELC, requesting "dialogues, real conversations where they [the students] have to be part of it" or "a program or system in which allow you to create conversations with our own voice" (Teacher Mexico 07).

In the interview data, as well, all three teachers highlighted speaking activities as the most useful ones included in the ELC. Among the three teachers interviewed, two argued for the inclusion of more linguistically complex questions in the speaking activities (Teachers Mexico 01 and 05). The third teacher recommended implementing speaking activities (in the form of questions that need to be answered) at different parts of each unit, with the level of difficulty and complexity of the questions gradually increasing in each unit. Toward the end of a unit, she proposed, students could be asked to answer all of the questions together.

**Difficulty.** In terms of the difficulty level of the ELC activities, all three teacher interviewees maintained that the activities were easy for the majority of their students. However, when asked about the potential inclusion of more challenging activities, they evidenced diverse viewpoints. Although no teacher argued for the inclusion of less challenging materials, only three out of eight survey respondents expressed a desire for more challenging materials (see Figure 4), as well as three out of five interviewees. Thus, although all educators who participated in the study agreed that the ELC materials were easy for their students, only half of them ( $n = 6$ ) argued for the inclusion of more challenging materials.



**Figure 4. Teachers' reported preferences for the inclusion of additional material.**

Two potential explanations for this seeming contradiction (i.e., that educators viewed the materials as too easy but expressed little desire for the inclusion of more challenging materials) surfaced in the interview data. First, two of the three teacher interviewees mentioned that the ELC activities were valuable as a review activity, that is, a means of practicing basic English language skills with their students. Insight into a second reason—motivation—can be found in the following excerpt from a teacher interview:

**Interviewer:** Would you like it or would it make sense to have some levels [of difficulty in the ELC]?

**Teacher Mexico 06:** No, I think for the elementary level I think that is great. Even if they have a very good level, we have the problem with some kids that they started. So some of them they, they could try. Even one of them that is in zero English almost zero English like, we can say when he had the speaking part he said “Teacher I want to try” and he tried and he started to speak and I said “Wow, wonderful, excellent!” so because he was motivated by this.

**Interviewer:** Motivation.

**Teacher Mexico 06:** Yes.

This teacher highlighted easiness as a positive aspect that motivated less advanced students to engage in the tasks, providing them with a sense of success and achievement. Thus, review and motivation seemed to be two reasons that teachers viewed the activities in the ELC platform as valuable for education. In sum, the activities included in the different ELC units were perceived rather positively by the educators in this study, as evidenced by several comments provided by teachers, such as the following: “Me parece que estas actividades como están planeadas son motivantes para los estudiantes. Gracias” [*It appears to me that these activities, as they have been planned, are motivating for the students. Thank you*] (Teacher Mexico 04).

**Points of criticism.** Although educators generally viewed the ELC activities positively, some teachers did raise points of criticism and recommendations for improvement. First, the inclusion of productive writing tasks was mentioned as a desired enhancement. While this point was not explicitly asked about in the online survey, two respondents proposed it as a useful improvement. In the interview data, the addition of writing components was also emphasized multiple times by all five educators interviewed. EFL teachers in Mexico are required to teach writing in English, and one teacher maintained that the ELC should be enhanced by means of open-ended exercises,

where they can write sentences, or they can eh complete sentences, for example, not just to drag or to choose, but to write because it is important for example, some of them here in Mexico one of the most mistakes everybody do is the present simple with the verb with the –s. It’s one of the most difficult situation here in Mexico. (Teacher Mexico 06)

Another teacher criticized the ELC’s lack of writing and production-oriented tasks, in particular the large number of drag-and-drop items, noting that “if they would have to write probably a sentence it would be probably uh, uh, better for them, more useful for them . . . because in here they are not producing, they are just choosing and so it’s easier” (Teacher Mexico 05).

Another point of criticism, mentioned twice in the survey responses and once in an interview, concerned the authenticity of the materials. One teacher argued for authentic input in listening exercises:

**Teacher Mexico 06:** I would like, for example, the, to have some listenings, maybe you could include of real speaking because all that we hear they are speaking so clear. They can understand. But in the real life sometimes just the “Oh my God, what is?” . . . But even,

I told them, even that I speak English, sometimes is hard for me to understand speaking so maybe real situations, uh, I don't know, radio speakings, radio announcement and they say "Okay, what's that?"

**Interviewer:** So like background noise and all of that.

**Teacher Mexico 06:** Yes, yes, yes real, because the real one it's like they have to understand because it's very clear. It's for, it's for schools. But some sometimes put something that, insert something that it was the real life.

Thus, based on her own experience as an English language learner, she emphasized the need to include authentic audio texts in order to prepare students for more complex, real-life situations.

The final and main point of criticism put forth by all educators ( $n = 12$ ), both in the survey and the interview responses, was that of technical issues. Technical problems ranged from frozen or blank pages to complete system failures. First and foremost, all educators reported issues with website loadings, as pointed out in the following two comments:

I don't know if it was our computers or the system but sometimes the page was blank and we could not do some of the exercises. (Coordinator 01)

Well, so the problems that I was having is that, for example, my students they said that there was like something white or blue on their screen and they couldn't do anything or that eh they were waiting for the page to charge and they, they couldn't do it. (Teacher Mexico 05)

While such loading issues seemed to range across a number of units, four were identified as particularly problematic: At the Shops (Unit 4), At the Restaurant (Unit 5), At the Museum (Unit 6), and How We Travel (Unit 8).

All three teacher interviewees also mentioned problems with the recording and sending options integrated into the speaking sections of the ELC. One teacher commented:

All of them [students] had the problem of recording. Some of them could record but they couldn't understand it. Even though I never received any speaking and they tried my computer, control remote, but, and we, some of them they could start recording, but they couldn't send. (Teacher Mexico 01)



Another teacher reported, “Some others [students] couldn’t get their recordings. They were trying to do them and they were not able to do it” (Teacher Mexico 05).

Moreover, two educators commented that technical issues decreased their students’ motivation to work in the ELC. One coordinator explained:

Some, some of my students I have, well, you are going to meet later, but I have some really special students and some of them told me “Que aburrido! Ya no quiero. Ya ya. Dejame ir.” [How boring! I don't want to do it anymore. Come on, come on. Let me go.] Because it was frozen and they were, like, losing like 40 minutes over there. (Coordinator 02)

Another teacher confirmed this observation, stating, “Student were waiting for a long time and they just decided not to do it anymore” (Teachers Mexico 05).

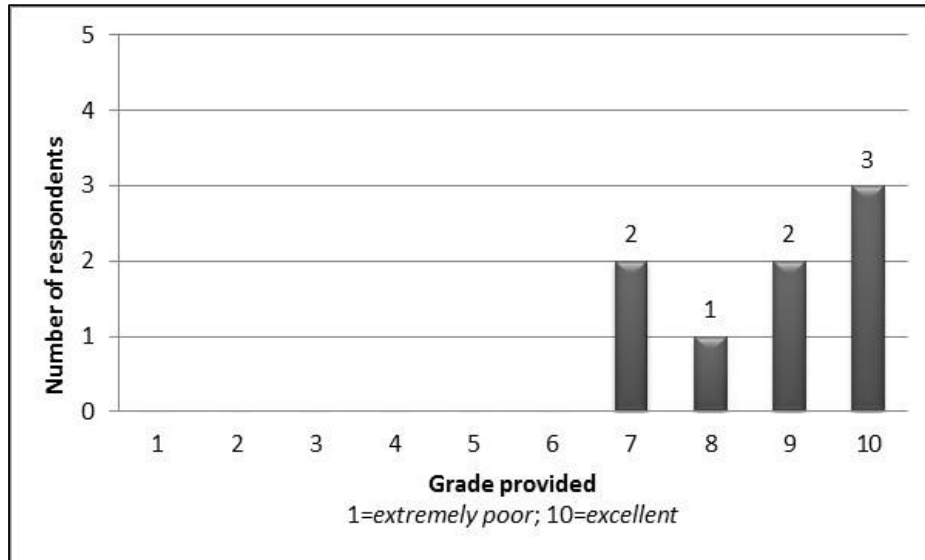
Educators also reported that technical difficulties interfered with their daily routine and work obligations, as shown in the following account provided by a coordinator:

So we could be working on it, but honestly, if I have to spend that much time fixing that kind of problems it’s not effective. Really, I lost like three months. I lost them [three months] because I have to observe my kinder teachers and I didn’t observe them because I was working with the platform, and it was not working and I have the pressure of the TOEFL exam. (Coordinator 02)

Thus, technical difficulties were not only a source of frustration, stress, and anxiety, but also a factor that negatively impacted the coordinator’s professional obligations and responsibilities.

In sum, all educators reported technical problems as a major threat to the usability of the ELC platform. Freezing websites, system malfunctioning, and complete system failure were identified as major sources of frustration for users. The educators strongly requested that the technical issues be resolved in order to provide for a smooth navigation and learning experience.

**General evaluation of the ELC.** Despite the strong criticism with regard to technical issues, teachers generally seemed to hold rather positive views of the ELC platform. As shown in Figure 5, teachers ( $n = 8$ ) who completed the online survey rated the ELC on a scale from 1 (*extremely poor*) to 10 (*excellent*), mirroring the secondary school grading scale used in Mexico and Brazil. Grades provided ranged from 10 (*excellent*) to 7 (*average*) with a mean grade of 8.75. Thus, teachers seem to consider the ELC a very good platform with technical flaws.

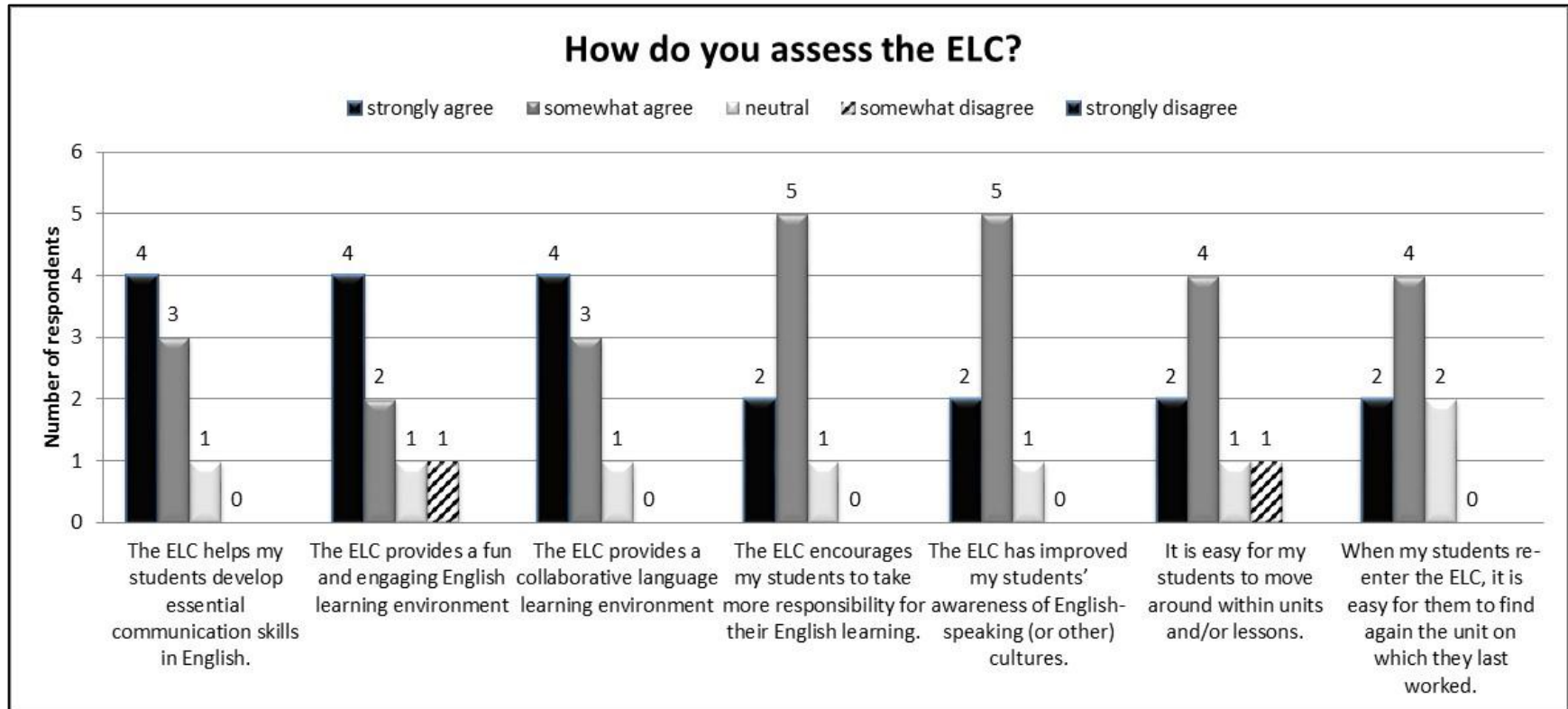


**Figure 5. Overall grades provided by teachers for the English Learning Center (ELC).**

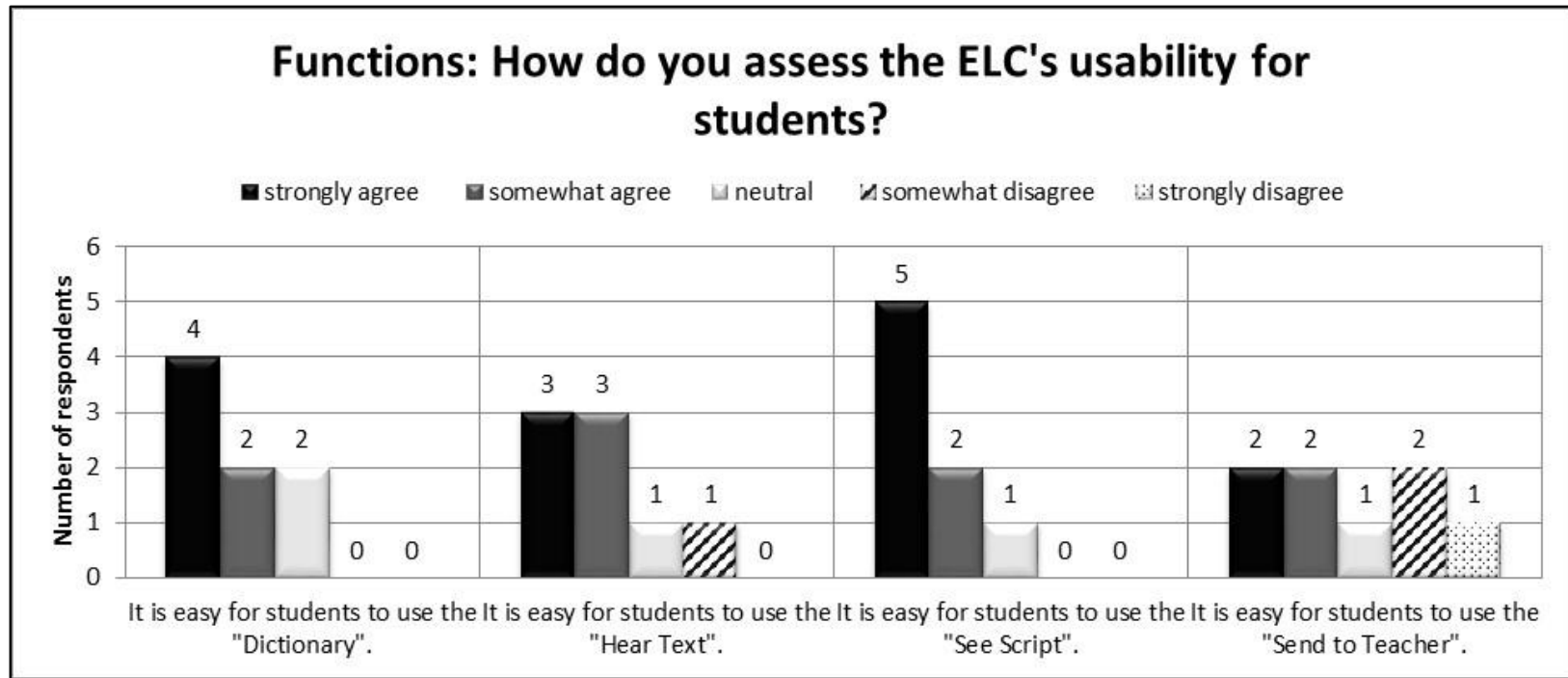
This very positive overall view of the ELC platform is further substantiated insofar as seven of the eight survey respondents indicated that they would use the ELC more in their EFL classrooms if they could. One teacher had no opinion.

**Usability of the ELC.** In their survey responses, eight EFL teachers provided their level of agreement with the seven intended effect/preliminary claim statements put forth about the ELC. As shown in Figure 6, the majority of teachers agreed that the ELC had the intended effects on their learners, confirming that the platform provides a fun, engaging, and collaborative learning environment to foster English language and cultural awareness abilities. Only one teacher (in two instances) questioned an intended effect. Especially with regard to the claim, “It is easy for my students to move around within the units and/or lessons,” the disagreement may be attributable to the technical issues outlined above.

Moreover, the majority of teachers agreed that, overall, it was easy for their students to use the functions embedded in the website, such as the option to obtain visual input by means of the option to see the script when listening to an audio text or the option to hear the text when working on a reading passage (see Figure 7). However, the function to send material to a teacher was rated by three teachers as not easy for students to use, a finding that may also be related to technical problems with the website, as the following comment on this function indicates: “We had many problems to recibe some information, also we had some technical problems, and sometimes were so complicate to understand the process” (Teacher Mexico 03).

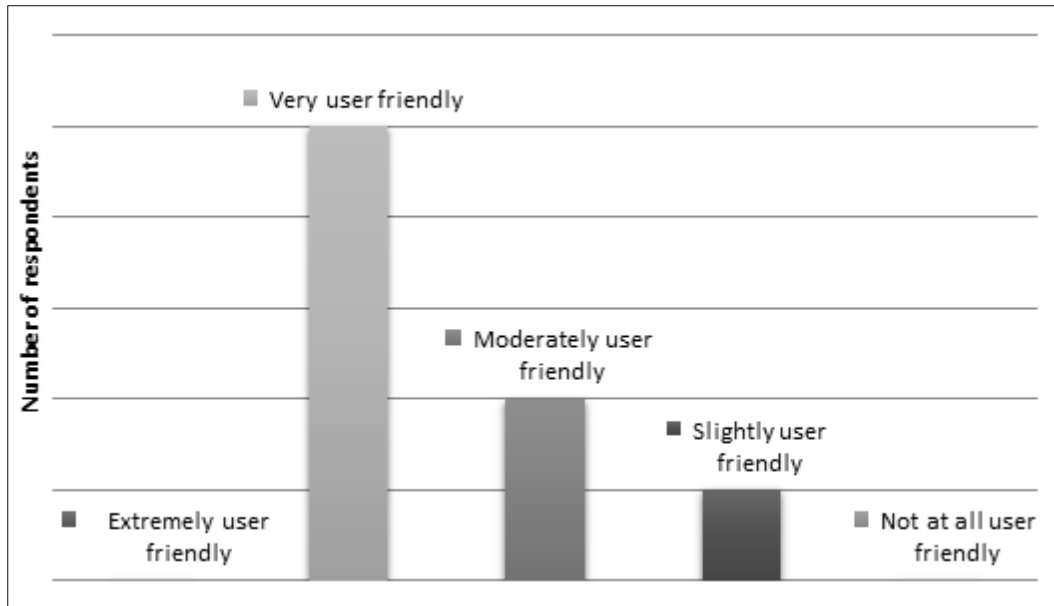


**Figure 6.** Teachers' perceptions of the usability of the functions embedded in the English Learning Center's (ELC's) activities.



**Figure 7.** Teacher's overall evaluation of the English Learning Center's (ELC's) functions.

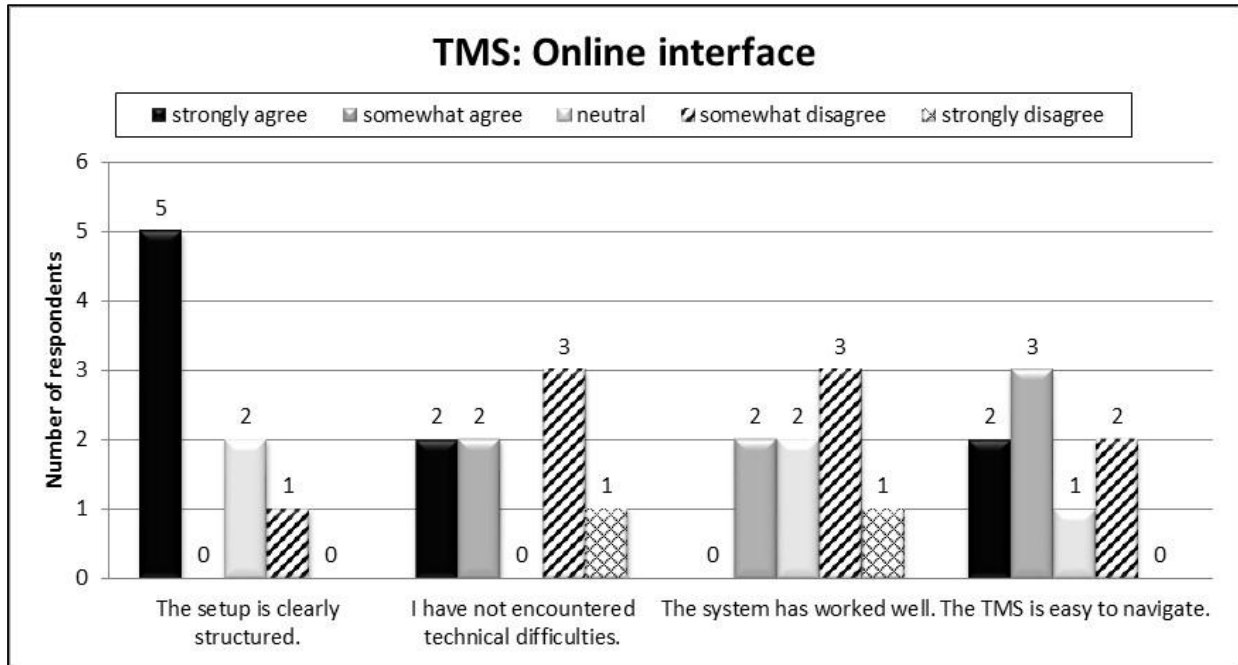
**Usability of the TMS.** The survey responses show that, overall, the TMS was perceived as a rather user-friendly system. Of the eight educators, five (teachers) rated the system as very user-friendly, two (coordinators) rated it as moderately user-friendly, and one (teacher) rated it as slightly user-friendly (see Figure 8). In light of the fact that the majority of the educators regarded the ELC as very user-friendly, the three moderate and fair ratings may be primarily due to the technical difficulties that some teachers encountered while using the system.



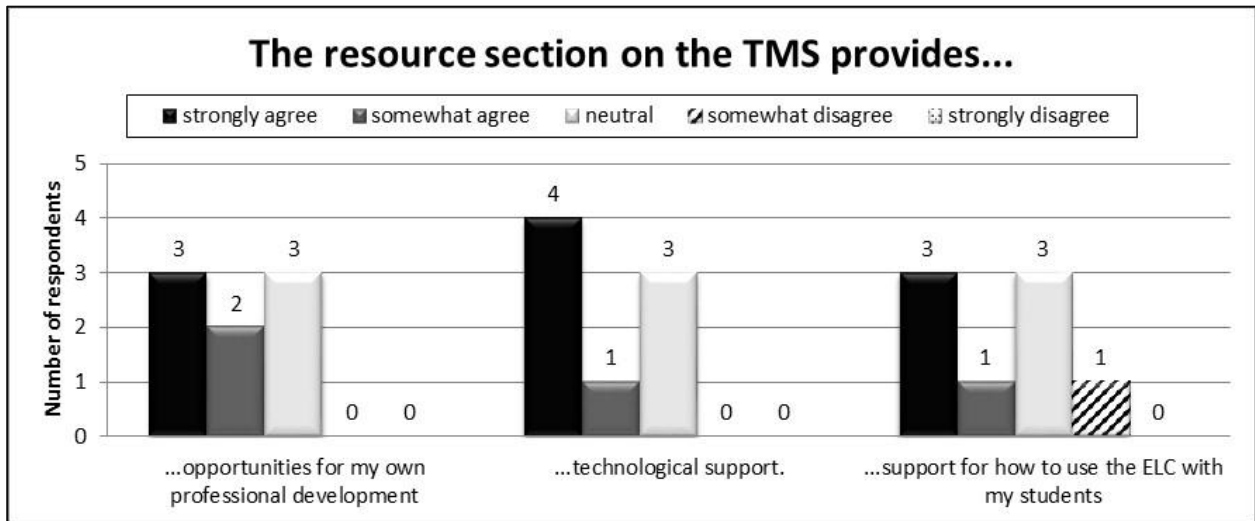
**Figure 8. Perceived user friendliness of the teacher management system (TMS) interface.**

Most teachers in the sample agreed that the TMS was easy to navigate and clearly structured (see Figure 9). However, their ratings of the technological functionality of the TMS indicated that they encountered technical difficulties when working in the system. At least half of the survey respondents ( $n = 4$ ) disagreed with the statements “The system has worked well” and “I have not encountered technical difficulties.”

The majority of the teachers’ survey responses suggests that they were content with the TMS resource section, indicating that it provided opportunities for professional development, technological support, and support for using the ELC with students (see Figure 10).

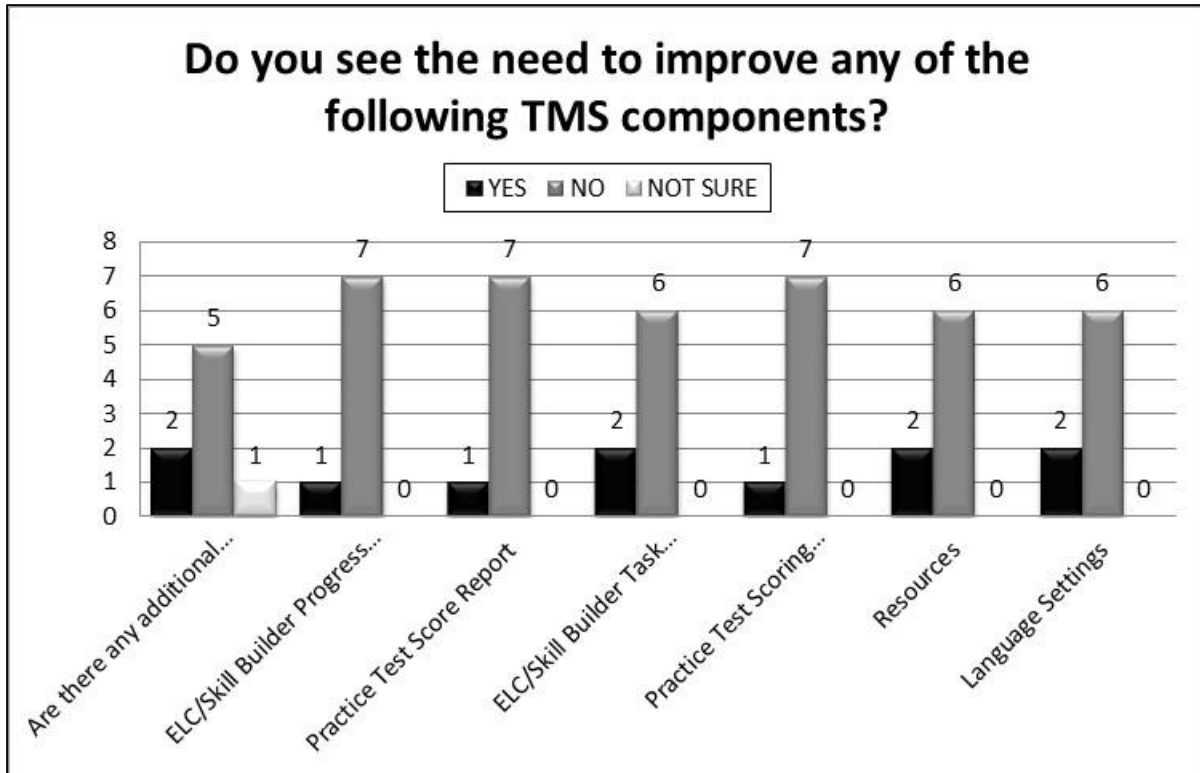


**Figure 9.** Teachers' evaluations of the teacher management system (TMS) online interface.



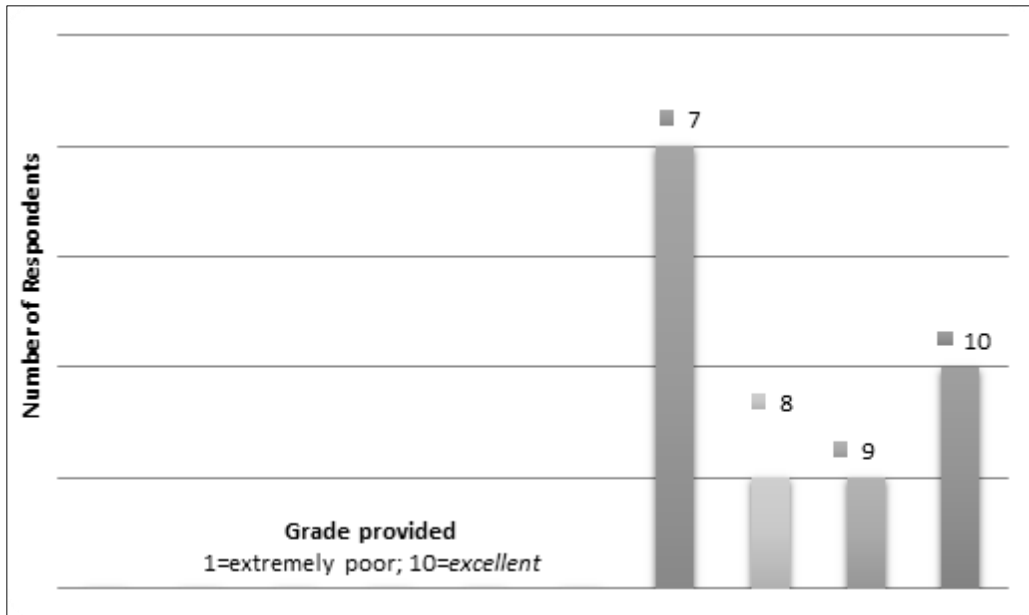
**Figure 10.** Teachers' evaluations of the teacher management system (TMS) resource section.

As shown in Figure 11, the majority of the teachers' survey responses indicated seeing no need to improve the TMS. However, two comments provided in the optional textbox emphasized the need to improve technological functionality. For example, in reference to the ELC/Skill Builder Progress Report, a teacher pointed out that the functionality of the speaking section needed to be improved: "Speaking progress, we couldn't use it" (Teacher Mexico 02). Another teacher remarked, "It had a lot of failures in the system" (Teacher Mexico 03).



**Figure 11. Teachers' opinions about the need of improvement of the teacher management system (TMS).**

Hence, whereas in general teachers were satisfied with the TMS, technological issues that interfered with the implementation of the platform in EFL instruction remained a point of criticism. These technical deficiencies may be responsible for the variance in the overall ratings of the TMS. As shown in Figure 12, the teachers ( $n = 8$ ) who completed the online survey gave the TMS an average rating from 1 (*extremely poor*) and 10 (*excellent*) of 8.13.



**Figure 12. Overall grade provided by teachers for the teacher management system (TMS).**

**Professional development.** All teachers in the sample who completed the survey ( $n = 8$ ) indicated that working in the ELC and TMS had helped them to improve their language abilities. In particular, listening and speaking were mentioned in the open-ended response sections as the skills that the majority of teachers (six out of eight) would like to improve in themselves.

Moreover, two teachers also indicated that their teaching skills were affected by working with the ELC and TMS. These two teachers commented that their use of technology as an educational tool increased as a result of their experience using the ELC and TMS. Thus, they felt that their teaching repertoire had been broadened. For example, one teacher noted that she “learned how to work in a different way, using digital resource that is funnier and more interesting for the students” (Teacher Mexico 08).

### **Students’ Views**

The analysis of the interviews conducted with students ( $n = 40$ ) provides insights into the views and opinions of primary-level ELLs toward the ELC. Findings are presented according to the structure of the interview protocol. Feedback and opinions will be outlined with regard to (a) general perceptions of the ELC, (b) frequency and context of use, (c) content feedback, and (d) usability of the ELC.



**General perceptions of the ELC.** All students ( $n = 40$ ) liked working in the ELC. While some students simply summarized their experience in words such as “It was awesome” (Student 08), some learners clearly identified the specific aspects as reasons for their positive views. The following list is organized from the most to the least frequently mentioned reason, including illustrative examples for each point.

- The interactive design created an innovative, fun, engaging, and entertaining learning environment ( $n = 13$ ).
  - I really liked the idea of how you made it! (Student 35)
  - A fun way to learn English. (Student 19)
- It was helpful and conducive to learning English ( $n = 8$ ).
  - Because I feel like it helps me and I learn a little more. (Student 24)
  - The page is very creative, it has good exercises, and really it has helped me understand a lot of things. (Student 37)
- The colorful images and pictures ( $n = 7$ ).
  - The pictures, images! Well, it has pictures, is easy to do and fun at the same time, it is entertaining! (Student 13)
  - The colors it has! (Student 14)
- It was easy, yet helpful ( $n = 6$ ).
  - Well for me, it's very easy because they're topics that we see on a daily basis, or when we go to visit the museum, our house. And also I think that this helps me more with English, and this way I can get more out of it. (Student 10)
  - It was very easy. (Student 15)
- It provided a welcome change to the normal, textbook-based instructional routine ( $n = 3$ ).
  - I enjoyed doing the activities, instead of staying in class I liked to come here and do the activities. (Student 04)
  - I just like to be in the computer learning new things. (Student 17)
  - It prepared students well for the TOEFL Primary ( $n = 1$ ).
  - It prepared us well for the TOEFL. (Student 26)

In sum, the interview findings reveal that students held quite positive views about the ELC, generally regarding it as a positive, fun, interactive, and engaging learning environment.

**Context and frequency of use.** All students ( $n = 40$ ) reported that they had used the ELC platform both in class and at home. However, their accounts clearly point toward the ELC being used primarily as a homework supplement, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

**Interviewer:** Did you use the course in class or as homework?

**Students 09 & 10:** As homework!!

**Student 09:** But sometimes we also . . . once we did it here, we were going to present something in Spanish and we did it here, but most people didn't finish because the Internet hardly gets here. And most people left to do it at home.

Students reported highly individualized patterns of at-home usage. Some interviewees reported very regular usage, such as once or twice a week on set days, whereas others described having completed all the units at once over a short period of time. Moreover, some students reported that they used the ELC collaboratively with family members:

Sometimes with my grandfather I do the TOEFL practice and my brother does it with me, he is in primary school, and he can also do it. (Student 15)

When I'm in my backyard, I play in the website with my little brother. (Student 18)

Overall, students who reported that they had used the ELC regularly indicated that they had worked in the platform an average of 1.5 hours per week ( $SD = 0.64$ ), ranging from half an hour to 2 hours total per week.

**ELC content feedback.** The student interviewees commented on a number of features implemented in the ELC, such as support options, topics, units, and activities.

**Support options.** As shown in Table 3, the Guided Tour was only used by six out of 40 interviewees. These six students, all from the same school, reported that they had only looked at it briefly. The main reason given by the 34 candidates who reported that they had not used the Guided Tour was that they were not aware of it (e.g., "I didn't even know about it." [Student 21]).

**Table 3*****Reported Use of the English Learning Center's (ELC's) Support Options***

Response	Guided tour	See answer	See and hear text
<i>N</i>	40	13	27
Missing	0	27	13
Yes	6	5	20
No	34	8	7

The options to see and hear text and allow ELC users to hear text in reading activities and to see text in listening activities. These options were accessed by most students and generally perceived as very useful. Among the seven students who reported that they did not use either option, some learners indicated that they did not know about them:

**Interviewer:** Ok. And in this one, for example, with the sound files we also have this see the text option.

**Student 20:** I didn't know what it was and I thought it could be something bad.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so you didn't click on it.

**Student 20:** No.

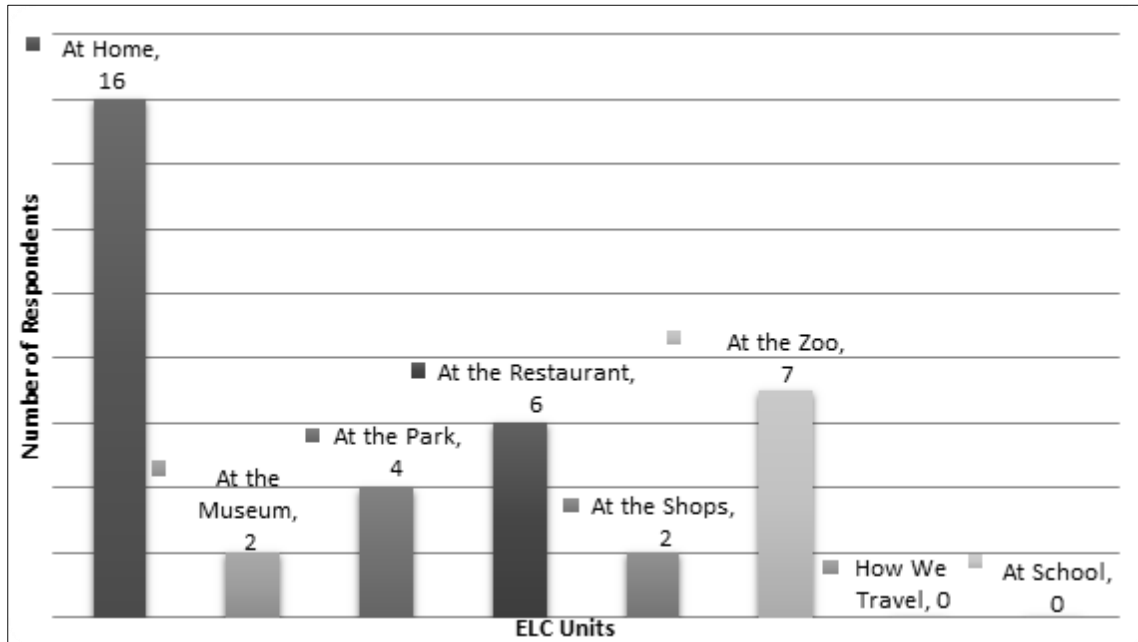
Only five students (reluctantly) reported using the option to see the answer. Most of the students considered use of this option to be like cheating, as shown in the following excerpt:

But when I need to do work then I need to read it and understand it and then later there is the option to see the response but I don't like to use it because I feel like it is cheating.  
(Student 12)

**Topics.** Although most interviewees reported that they liked all the units included in the ELC, the majority of respondents ( $n = 37$ ) also identified a personal favorite unit. As presented in Figure 13, At Home ( $n = 16$ ) was the unit most frequently identified as the favorite, followed by At the Zoo ( $n = 7$ ) and At the Restaurant ( $n = 6$ ). In general, students appeared to prefer topics that were closely related to their everyday activities or immediate surroundings, as shown in the following student explanations:

Because it also refers to the activities I do at my house. (At Home—Student 14)

If I remember, every weekend of my childhood, every weekend I went I, there were new animal to meet, so I learned about them, what they eat, how they live. And, I like animals. (At the Zoo—Student 10)



**Figure 13.** Students' report of their favorite units.

A few students also made suggestions for further topics and places to be included in the ELC. Table 4 provides an overview of the suggested topics and the number of times each was mentioned across all students.

**Table 4**

*Additional Topics Suggested by Learners*

Topic	Number of respondents
At the movies	4
At the airport	3
At the hotel	3
At the amusement park	2
At the beach	2
At the hospital	2
In the streets	2
Sports	2
The environment	2
At the campground	1

The characters and storylines within each unit were perceived as fun, entertaining, and creative, evoking comments such as “I think they were very creative in the stories” (Student 06).

**Activity types.** Students commented on the reading, listening, and speaking activities in the ELC. Overall, the reading activities were considered the most popular and useful by the students. Eight learners commented on the length of the reading passages in the ELC, with four preferring shorter texts and four preferring longer texts. As shown in Table 5, those who preferred shorter texts cited lower difficulty and fun-related aspects as rationales for their preference, whereas those who preferred longer texts argued that such texts are conducive to better comprehension and memorization of information. The perceived difficulty of the reading passages varied across students and proficiency levels. Although some learners were challenged by some of the reading passages, others regarded them as fairly easy.

**Table 5**

***Students’ Comments on the Length of the Reading Passages***

Student reference	
Shorter reading passages	Longer reading passages
I like when they are short but with details, the ones that are very long aren’t very fun for me. (Student 34)	I think longer or more detailed, with stories that go deeper. Because otherwise they just explain something very short to you and they don’t give you any details and they leave you thinking. (Student 32)
I liked the shorter ones because there were times where there wasn’t a response. (Student 35)	For comprehension, I would say longer that way it helps you memorize the information and if it’s clear it helps you answer the question. (Student 26)

The students also reported positive opinions on the listening comprehension tasks. The majority of students highlighted two features as particularly positive: the selected-response item format and the option to repeat the audio texts. Moreover, the interviews revealed a broad variety, both within and across all students, in terms of perceived difficulty of the listening items. As illustrated by the following comments, students tended to perceive some items as difficult and others as less difficult:

There were a few times when I didn’t understand it and then I listened to it, but then there were other times when it was really easy. (Student 24)

**Interviewer:** Did you understand the audio conversations?

**Student 30:** Some, not all of them.

Perceived comprehension difficulty was mentioned by 23 students whose comments indicated that it was either a matter of accent and pronunciation ( $n = 5$ ), unknown vocabulary ( $n = 11$ ), speed of delivery ( $n = 1$ ), or a combination of the above ( $n = 6$ ).

Despite technical glitches, the speaking sections were also viewed positively by the students overall, primarily because these sections allowed them to communicate in an environment that they perceived as less stressful. Four students highlighted that when speaking to a real person they become nervous (e.g., “I did like them but I don’t know because I get like very nervous speaking in a (foreign) language” [Student 38]). The computer-mediated speaking activities in the ELC seem to have provided a less stressful experience for these learners. The following excerpt shows that students described the speaking activities as creating a fun, collaborative learning atmosphere:

**Student 15:** When we practice and it is fun for us when we are focusing on speaking.

**Interviewer:** Ah, the two of you together? [makes a hand gesture that indicated cooperation]

**Student 16:** Yes.

**Student 15:** [inaudible with laughter]

**Interviewer:** So you have fun when you are speaking English [in the context of working in the ELC].

When asked for their views the difficulty of the speaking tasks, the students shared very different perspectives, ranging from remarks such as “It was very simple. All you had to do what say how to fly a kite” (Student 04) to comments such as “It’s that sometimes it is difficult for me, I have problems speaking in English. But the writing, reading, listening and all that is fine” (Student 12).

In sum, all students held generally positive views of all the activities included in the ELC, perceiving them as beneficial for learning English. While the majority of students in this sample regarded the activities as rather easy, some students felt challenged by certain tasks, which they attributed to factors such as speed of delivery in listening exercises, length of texts in reading activities, or unknown vocabulary in the speaking section.

Among all the activities in all three sections, the students highlighted two features as particularly positive: game-oriented exercises and images. Of the 40 learners, 29 mentioned

games as a feature that they particularly liked, and 13 of these 29 learners reported that the game-oriented tasks within the ELC were their favorite activities and/or the reason for their enjoyment of working in the ELC platform. Among the game-oriented tasks, the memory and flower activities were mentioned the most often in comments, such as the following:

**Student 31:** The game with the flower that a picture will appear and you have to guess the word, if you do wrong a petal will fall.

**Interviewer:** So you really liked that activity?

**Student 31:** Yes, I really like it. It is my favorite activity.

Thus, students emphasized games as particularly entertaining and even requested potential enhancements, such as game-oriented writing activities, as shown in the following exchange:

**Interviewer:** And do you have any ideas for what kind of activities?

**Student 32:** Like the games, but writing it, like the speaking activities but writing it.

The artwork of the ELC platform was another feature that was perceived as highly positive and featured among the reasons students liked the ELC platform in general. Of the 40 students, 36 commented that they particularly liked the pictures and images because they were colorful, “bright and happy” (Student 19). Moreover, 14 students mentioned that the images facilitated their decoding of written or oral input. The following comments highlight the perceived supportive and facilitating function of the pictures:

Well, if I understand the audio a little bit, although I realize that it talks about a restaurant, and I see the images and I know what it is talking about. (Student 11)

**Student 22:** Yes, it [a reading passage] was complicated, because we have to read that and look at the image that’s here.

**Interviewer:** Ok, so without the images, is it harder?

**Students 22 & 23:** Yes.

However, some students’ comments indicated a degree of facilitating that may interfere with the purpose of the task. In the context of a listening task, Student 27 said: “I think that those questions I answered with audio and the passage was no longer necessary because I would see

the image.” Moreover, students seem to have connected some of the images in the picture with particular stereotypical ideas about foreign countries, as in the following excerpt:

This is how American houses look like. There, if you live there you can ask an architect to build you a house like that. (Student 05)

Three students proposed the inclusion of videos as a further means of audio-visual support. However, others expressed skepticism about the value of videos, such as one student who noted that “a video could be better, but with only images it sharpens the ear and you understand a conversation better, in the video you concentrate more on the action and you don’t pay attention to what they are saying” (Student 26). In general, students would appreciate video enhancements as a support feature, but they also highlighted the importance of maintaining focus on the intention of a given task.

**Usability of the ELC.** All students ( $n = 40$ ) reported that navigating the website was easy, suggesting that the platform was perceived to be clearly structured and self-explanatory. In particular, the progress bar was mentioned as a positive feature that created transparency by providing an overview of one’s progress when working in the platform.

Although navigation was perceived positively overall, the majority of learners ( $n = 38$ ) reported having encountered technical difficulties while working in the ELC platform. Table 6 presents an overview of the technical issues mentioned by respondents, ranked by frequency.

**Table 6**

***Reported Technical Issues in the English Language Center (ELC) Platform***

Type of technical issue	Number of respondents
Speaking section	14
Blank pages	11
Frozen pages	6
Accessing the ELC	5
Marking	3
Memory	2

The most frequently reported technical problem across all units was difficulty with recorded responses in the speaking section. For example, Student 06 commented, “For the speaking activities I was not able to record them . . . you would start talking like crazy to give the answer but you never knew if it was recording” (Student 06). Students also reported being unable to save and/or submit work, both in the speaking section and in other sections. This had serious



consequences for learners, including lower grades and additional work. For instance, Student 27 remarked, “Sometimes it wouldn’t mark even though I did it and didn’t mark the percentage and would give me a low grade!”

The second most frequently mentioned technical difficulty was that of blank and frozen pages on the website. This issue may have decreased student motivation to use the ELC platform. When asked if she enjoyed navigating the ELC, one learner responded, “More or less because I have a lot of problems with the page because it goes blank on me” (Student 22). Even during the student interviews, throughout which the ELC website was used as a visual stimulus, issues with website loading hindered the smooth flow of the interview.

In addition to issues loading the website, five students reported having issues finding it. For example, Student 12 mentioned, “There is something a bit strange, that it is difficult to find the platform. A lot of times I couldn’t find it. Warnings appeared. And I could only enter using a part of it.” Another learner confirmed that “sometimes the platform didn’t let you enter the site” (Students 40). Most students were unable to recall exact pages or activities in which technical issues were encountered. Several accounts mentioned that the technical difficulties occurred “in all units” (Student 08).

One pair of students reported technical problems in the “memory” game. They recalled, that “in the memory game, the images were getting smaller and smaller and we could not see them. And it took too long to get back to normal” (Student 06). Student 07 added that, for her, “some of the pictures will flip over but others not.”

## **Discussion and Implications**

### **EQ1: How Do Teachers Utilize the ELC in Their Instruction?**

The ELC was part of a package of learning materials provided to the participating elementary schools by the company Sistema UNO. Within this package, the ELC was clearly labeled as a tool to prepare learners to take TOEFL Primary test at the end of their school term. Teacher comments also revealed that they had been assigned a particular timeframe in which they were to work in the ELC platform. Despite these factors, which created an impression of the ELC as test preparation material, the majority of educators in the sample viewed the ELC as both test preparation material and as a learning tool (see Figure 3) and therefore tried to incorporate it into their instruction, both inside and outside the EFL classroom. Teachers tended to first employ the ELC inside the EFL classroom and later on ask students to work in the platform at home.

The eight teachers who used the ELC platform in their classrooms reported doing so in varied ways. Some asked their students to work in the platform individually in the school's computer room, while others did the activities collectively, projecting the website onto the classroom wall for all the students to see. Another teacher reported having used the ELC exercises to teach grammatical phenomena, while yet another mentioned having adapted prompts from the ELC speaking tasks for group work in regular (offline) EFL instruction. Moreover, frequency of use of the ELC varied across schools and teachers.

Among teachers who assigned the ELC activities as homework, some teachers left it up to their students to complete all of the units in the ELC at their own pace (by a certain deadline), while others gave particular units as homework assignments for a given week, keeping students on track and monitoring their progress. Teachers monitored students' progress through the TMS, which—when fully functional—provided teachers with a progress report for each student, including the student's percentage of completion for each unit and for the ELC overall (see Appendix C). Most teachers gave students grades based on the percentage of tasks that they completed, highlighting the fact that use of the ELC involves real stakes for students and as such requires proper functionality.

## **EQ2: What Are the Views of the Teachers Toward the ELC?**

The findings revealed a tendency for educators to view the ELC primarily as test preparation material, but also as beneficial to English language development. Two aspects may have been responsible for this tendency. First, educators mentioned the similarity of activities and tasks between the ELC and the TOEFL Primary test as a reason for viewing the former as test preparation material. Second, Santillana's<sup>4</sup> marketing of the ELC may have influenced teachers' views of the ELC as a tool that aims primarily to increase students' test scores. Redesigning the platform to reflect a more learning-oriented approach may help to address the first aspect, strengthening the ELC's intended function of supporting the development of English communication skills. To address the second aspect, a marketing strategy that enhances perceptions of the ELC as learning material may be necessary. However, it should be emphasized in public information that the ELC is not a stand-alone English learning curriculum, but rather a supplementary learning tool. Although teachers may be slightly skewed toward viewing the ELC as a test preparation tool, this study has produced evidence that they incorporate the ELC into their instruction beyond test preparation efforts (Figure 3).

Moreover, teachers viewed the content included in the ELC as appropriate and interesting for their students. They expressed satisfaction with the number of units in the ELC, and they highlighted the topics' and units' connection to real life as very appealing to primary-level learners. Only one teacher suggested the inclusion of more advanced topics—a proposition that may be due to the fairly advanced population of EFL learners who use the ELC in Mexico.

Educators also regarded the ELC activities as useful and practical. In particular, they highlighted the speaking exercises as highly useful, with several teachers noting that they had incorporated them into their regular EFL classroom instruction. Given the limited opportunities for students to speak English in EFL settings, the ELC's speaking activities provide much-needed speaking time in the target language. Teachers expressed a desire for the implementation of additional speaking tasks, including interactive speaking exercises. Although technological constraints may limit the types of interactive tasks that can be implemented immediately, a teacher manual with ideas for (interactive) speaking and other tasks based on the ELC content could supplement the platform, provide an incentive for increased implementation of the ELC in classroom instruction, and strengthen the character of the ELC as a learning tool.

Although the current version of the ELC includes only listening, reading, and speaking tasks, writing was mentioned by all the educator interviewees in Mexico and twice in the survey responses, highlighting the inclusion of productive writing tasks as a desired enhancement. Although writing was originally excluded from the ELC because it was not found to be a fundamental component of primary-level EFL curricula, teachers in both Mexico and Brazil indicated that writing is a critical component of their everyday EFL instruction. Hence, the implementation of a writing component may need to be considered to further align the ELC with the needs of primary-level EFL instruction—at least in Mexico and Brazil.

With respect to the difficulty of tasks in the ELC, teachers indicated that the activities were fairly easy for their students. Though they unanimously argued against the inclusion of easier tasks, few teachers expressed interest in seeing more difficult tasks in the ELC (see Figure 4). Those who did argue for the addition of more difficult tasks and different levels of difficulty seemed to be motivated by the diversity of levels among their students. Teachers who argued against such changes reported using the platform as a tool for revision and repetition of learned content, which they argued had a motivating effect on their students. As shown above, teachers felt that working in the ELC provided even their lower proficiency students with a sense of

accomplishment. Given that the students who participated in this study were on average older and more proficient than the ELC's target population, the level of difficulty may have naturally been too low. However, it needs to be noted that the ELC is in fact used in sixth grade in elementary schools in Mexico and, thus, by students who have very diverse levels of English language proficiency.

Compromise is required to accommodate both educators who desire more difficult tasks and those who feel that the current tasks are easy but appropriate. Implementing units that are more difficult across the board would risk discouraging less proficient students. It may be expedient to introduce increasing levels of task difficulty within units, starting each unit with very easy activities and gradually increasing the level of complexity. In such a design, more proficient learners would be challenged, and less proficient learners would still gain a sense of accomplishment from completing the easier tasks at the beginning of each unit.

Overall, the teachers' views of the ELC gathered in this study support the claims made by ETS and Edusoft that the platform is an engaging, fun, and collaborative environment for students to practice and develop their communicative skills in English. The majority of teachers expressed interest in using the ELC more often in their classroom instruction. However, they strongly emphasized the need for improved efficiency and technological functionality, which may also allow teachers to (further) use the platform to address students' individual needs. Given the tight curricular requirements schools need to follow, inefficiency due to technical issues can have severe repercussions and lead to discontinuation of use. In sum, although the participants generally proposed only minor changes to content and task difficulty, they emphatically highlighted the need for improvement in the technical reliability of the platform.

### **EQ3: What Are the Views of the Students Toward the ELC?**

Students were not explicitly asked whether they regarded the ELC as test preparation or learning material. Nevertheless, their views seemed to reflect the teachers' perspective. Three students mentioned TOEFL Primary test in the interviews, whereas the majority referred to the ELC as a tool they used to learn English.

Like their teachers, students viewed the ELC positively overall. As shown in the excerpts presented previously, students highlighted the interactive design, colorful and vivid images, and the level of difficulty as features that made the ELC a fun and engaging learning environment conducive to improving communication skills in English.

Whereas ETS and Edusoft have assumed that the ELC is used primarily in classroom instruction, student responses revealed a much more individualized pattern of use. A primary reason for the students' high motivation to use the ELC seems to be the platform's interactive, game-oriented, web-based design. Students reported that these characteristics provided opportunities for individualized and flexible use of content material in different (collaborative) contexts. In the context of the EFL classroom, some students pointed out that the web-based format provided a welcome break from the classroom routine, allowing them to work individually in the school's computer room. Other students appreciated that the ELC allowed them to work at their own pace, supporting more detailed comprehension of some aspects of the English language.

Outside the EFL classroom, student responses revealed large individual differences in use of the ELC. Some worked in the ELC on regular days and times, while others completed all the units within a short period of time. In addition, some students used the ELC in ways that were not envisioned by their teachers. Comments such as "Sometimes with my grandfather I do the TOEFL practice and my brother does it with me" (Student 15) and "I also used it on my vacation" (Student 07) indicate that learners assumed an active role in their English learning, creating collaborative language learning environments in which they used the ELC even outside their mandatory school work.

Students gave rise to a number of suggestions for enhancement of the ELC. In contrast to the teachers, students expressed interest in implementing a number of additional topics in the ELC (see Table 4). They also suggested more game-oriented features, writing tasks, and videos as potential enhancements. The richness and volume of suggestions made by students suggests that the platform engaged them in assuming an active role in their own English learning.

As with the educators in the current study, the data from student responses provide preliminary empirical evidence for the claims made by ETS and Edusoft about the benefits of the ELC. In particular, comments provided by the elementary school students seems to confirm that the ELC (a) encourages students to play an active role in their English learning, (b) provides a fun and engaging English learning environment, (c) provides a collaborative language learning environment, and (d) provides young students with a sense of success/accomplishment.

Nevertheless, attention needs to be paid to the potential danger of reinforcing cultural stereotypes. Although students very much liked the colorful pictures, comments such as "This is

how American houses look like” (Student 05) reveal that pictures need to be selected with care to represent a range of different social strata in English speaking cultures in order to improve students’ cultural awareness.

Finally, students’ overall positive perceptions of the ELC were slightly clouded by technical issues, which interfered considerably with a smooth usability experience (e.g., “I struggled a lot with the platform,” Student 26).

### **Conclusion**

This evaluation study provides first insights into how EFL teachers and primary-level English language learners used and viewed the ELC. Participants’ responses revealed that the platform is generally perceived as positive and beneficial for learning. Moreover, responses provided preliminary evidence for some of the claims made by ETS and Edusoft. As such, the ELC seems to constitute a fun, engaging, and collaborative English language learning environment that provides elementary school learners of different proficiency levels with a sense of success and accomplishment. Moreover, a number of students reported use of the ELC outside the mandatory school context and provided suggestions for enhancements, a fact that suggests that the ELC may have motivated students to assume a more active role in their English language learning. Thus, this report provides preliminary evidence in support of four of the seven claims, although more research is needed to investigate the following three claims: (a) whether the ELC helps learners develop essential communication skills in English, (b) whether it increases their cultural awareness, and (c) to what extent it supports teachers in tailoring their instructions to particular student levels.

Educators suggested a number of enhancements that they would like to see as they continue to use the platform in their in EFL classroom instruction. Outlined in more detail previously, a summative overview of the improvements and enhancements includes

- productive writing tasks,
- additional (interactive) speaking components,
- additional topics,
- game-oriented features, and
- audiovisual input.

In addition to these suggested enhancements, two measures could be taken to further support the implementation of the ELC as a learning tool and to increase its recognition among larger groups of ELLs. The first measure concerns the involvement of parents. As shown in the following coordinator comment, parents were largely unaware of materials such as the ELC, which created confusion when it was introduced.

I think the, the thing that it was the most difficult for us was that parents were not, like, used to work in a platform. So they didn't know anything about working on it. Also, we didn't know anything about working on it. They on, they only send us a letter, saying You are going to start working in the platform. You go inside this schalalala and you may start working with it and since we didn't work with something like this before.

(Coordinator 02)

To address this information gap, a letter could be issued to parents in which ETS or Edusoft introduces the platform and explains its intended uses and benefits. This measure would help ensure that parents are informed about and included in their children's learning activities. A brief manual about the platform could even be included for parents who may wish to monitor or support their students' work in the ELC at home. Through such efforts, the ELC could potentially be a channel through which to reach parents who may be interested in learning English together with their children.

A second measure that might be taken to support the implementation of the ELC would be the creation of a more detailed instruction manual for teachers. Learner responses revealed that several teachers did not provide guidance to their students on how to use the ELC's support options, such Guided Tour and See Answer. The fact that several students perceived the use of See Answer as cheating speaks to a school culture that is not accustomed to more learner-centered, self-regulated learning approaches. If focus is placed on strategic use of these support options, teachers may feel better prepared to work with the ELC, which may in turn inform the teaching and learning culture they implement in their instruction. Moreover, such a manual may also provide (further) support for teachers in tailoring their instruction to students' current levels.

Given that, in evaluation studies, stakeholder groups play a major role in deciding which enhancements will be implemented, findings were shared with representatives from the research and assessment development centers at ETS and ETS' subsidiary Edusoft in the context of two workshops and presentations. Thus, the findings may inform enhancement decisions and joint

endeavors to further improve the ELC. Although these findings provide a glimpse into the uses of the ELC and the perceptions of teachers and students, it should be noted that materials such as the ELC constitute a component of the curriculum—that is, the content and material embedded in the ELC provide the basis for and a portion of EFL instruction in many elementary schools in Mexico. Hence, developers have a dual responsibility to design the ELC for a range of elementary-level EFL contexts while also keeping in mind that they are thereby shaping local EFL curricula. Thus, it is indispensable to conduct further evaluations and investigations at additional sites and in other countries in which the ELC is used, in order to provide a broader empirical basis to continuously inform the ELC’s design and content.

Gathering stakeholder input in examining the usefulness of learning products is crucial for reasons that go beyond simply providing feedback and insights regarding a specific product, such as the ELC. First, publishers and materials developers have a responsibility to deliver high-quality materials that will teach language students effectively. However, publishers usually design and produce learning materials for unknown classes of students. Although publishers may have access to general information about the student body and the learning context (e.g., age range, second language [L2] proficiency level, foreign language versus L2 learning context), they do not have the same amount of detailed information about the learners as teachers do (Amrani, 2010). The current study is a case in point. The actual student body who used the ELC in the current study turned out to be on average 2 years older and more proficient in English than the target population for whom the ELC was originally designed. Thus, as this study has shown, older students also interact with the ELC. Hence, evaluation studies may provide publishing companies and materials developers with a better understanding of the “anonymous end-user” (Amrani, 2010, p. 271).

Moreover, developmental evaluation efforts such as this study offer a means of (further) adapting learning materials designed by publishing companies to specific situational requirements and local learning contexts. Input from stakeholders and practitioners in the field helps to provide researchers and material developers with a clear(er) picture of potential challenges and needs regarding the implementation of materials in a given local context. For example, at the time of this evaluation research, the ELC did not include a writing component. Although the curriculum research that informed the development of the elementary-level standards and learning objectives that underpin the ELC did not find writing to be a skill



commonly taught in elementary-level EFL instruction, this evaluation study showed that in the Mexican context, writing was an important component of elementary EFL education.

While revealing further needs, evaluation efforts also constitute cycles of innovation and a forum for continuous dialogue and mutually beneficial exchange between different foreign language professionals such as teachers, researchers, and material developers. In Mexico, the interviews with EFL teachers helped the researchers understand local teaching approaches, the amount of EFL instruction, constraints teachers face, and how they use the ELC, thus providing insights for potential enhancements such as the introduction of a teaching manual to accompany the ELC. At the same time, external evaluations such as this one offer opportunities for individual educators and stakeholders to engage in professional development activities, which may in turn improve their teaching through ongoing reflection and evaluative thinking. Hence, participatory, action-oriented evaluation research constitutes an opportunity to gradually review and refine materials already in use while bridging the often broad gap between theory and practice.

Before closing, it is necessary to point out the limitations of this evaluation study. First and foremost, the small sample size and predominant focus on a single country (Mexico) constitute major limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Given the small sample size, the study provides only limited insight into the views and opinions of a small, nonrepresentative group of ELC users. Thus, any findings presented should not be generalized to the entire population of ELC users. Rather, they should provide a starting point for further research into the (perceived) usefulness of the ELC in Mexico, Brazil, and other countries in which the ELC is used.

In addition to the sample size, the timing of data collection also must be taken into consideration. Survey and interview data were collected after students and teachers had completed working in the ELC. Although respondents were provided with visual stimuli as suggested in the literature (e.g., Bowles, 2010; Gass & Mackey, 2000), participants verbalized their perceptions and opinions in hindsight. Thus, the information provided may not be an accurate account or reflection of what they were thinking about the ELC in general, or of their experiences with specific activities as they were working in the online learning platform. Hence, selective behavior in the interviews might have resulted in incomplete or distorted information, a challenge to the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the feedback collected through the

interviews. Future evaluation research that includes young ELLs should consider the observation of learners' interaction with the materials under investigation in order to triangulate interview data with insights obtained from observations.

Furthermore, the sample of Mexican students interviewed in the study may constitute a group that is not representative of the intended audience of the ELC. Students in the sample were on average older and more proficient in English than the population for whom the ELC was originally designed. Thus, the findings may not be fully representative of the perceptions of the broader learner population that uses or will use the ELC in other countries. Further evaluation studies that take into account learners' overall English proficiency need to be conducted in order to draw inferences about the relationship between ELC users' language proficiency and their perceptions of the ELC.

Differences in the personalities of the student respondents may also have resulted in limitations. With regard to students, there may have been cases in which one student in the group was more dominant or outgoing and the other learner was more reticent. Despite the interviewer's best efforts to elicit comments from all the students in the small-group interviews, some students seemed only to repeat the opinions of their peers—an effect that Amrani (2010) called “group think” (p. 291). Although the interviewers tried to be accommodating in these cases, differences in respondent personalities may have resulted in an underrepresentation of the views of certain learners.

Underrepresentation may also have occurred in the case of the reported use of the option to see answers. Given the view shared by several students that use of this option was tantamount to cheating, it is likely that actual use of the option was underreported.

Finally, despite the best efforts of the interviewers, the transcripts showed that their questioning was leading at times. Especially with students who were particularly shy, the interviewers used probing techniques that may have influenced the responses of the interviewees. In those instances it could not be inferred whether the comments reflected the student's perspective or that of the interviewer, and so they were excluded from the analysis, which resulted in the underrepresentation of some student views.

This last limitation exemplifies a particular challenge for future research that includes young ELLs as interview respondents. As Turek (2013) pointed out, “Seeking active participation of children in L2 research is still a novel way to research in EYL [English to Young Learners]

contexts . . . as most research tends to be carried out on, not with, young learners” (p. 38; italics in the original). The underrepresentation of young ELLs as equal respondents may be due to particular challenges in conducting research with children. Drawing upon Morrow and Richards (1996), O’Kane (2000) argued, that “ultimately, the biggest challenge for researchers working with children are the disparities in power and status between adults and children” (p. 136). This mismatch in perceived power relations was also encountered by the researcher when conducting the interviews in this study. For example, some students were shy or very nervous before the interview, viewing the interview process as a test. Thus, when interviewing children, researchers may want to employ a participatory approach (O’Kane, 2000) so as to mitigate the perceived power imbalance and build a space in which interviewer and students are equal interlocutors (Mayall, 2000; Roberts, 2000). In an attempt to alleviate students’ anxiety and counterbalance the perceived power difference, the researchers who conducted the interviews in this study, for example, introduced themselves and their jobs, while presenting themselves as learners; that is, they told the students that they were visiting their school to learn about their use and perceptions of the ELC. For future research with young ELLs, it may even be beneficial to meet and get to know students prior to engaging in the research interviews. For instance, this might be accomplished by beginning the evaluation research with classroom observations.

To conclude, the study provided first impressions of stakeholder uses and perceptions of the ELC. The knowledge gained from the feedback of various stakeholders provided preliminary evidence in support of some of the claims regarding the platform’s benefits, as well as ideas and proposals for potential enhancements. Moreover, the study highlighted considerations that may be relevant for future evaluation research in terms of (a) the importance of stakeholder input for the process of materials development and (b) factors that should be considered when conducting interview studies with a particular stakeholder group: young ELLs. The comments and suggestions provided by the different stakeholder groups in this study may inform a first revision of the current platform and, thus, empirically substantiate the next generation of the ELC.

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## Appendix A

### ELC Evaluation Study: Interview Protocol for Teachers

Respondents ID:

Administration Date:

Facilitator: Veronika Timpe

Gift Card #s:

Recorder #:                      Folder:                      File #:

#### Stage I: Greeting and Introduction (approx. 2 minutes)

- Purpose: Welcome teacher and express appreciation for him/her taking the time to participate
- To be included in welcome:
  - Introduction of myself and my role as evaluator
  - Quick description of the evaluation project and the purpose of the interview
    - Sample script: *I've asked for this interview so that I can learn more about the effectiveness of the English Learning Course (ELC). This is a "no holds barred" interview. I want to know what you're thinking, even if it includes strong criticism. That is the only way we can learn about issues that need to be improved. Of course, I also want to know where things are going well, but where they are not going well I really need to hear that message.*

#### Stage II: Utilities (approx. 2 minutes)

- Purpose: Setting the stage for the interview
- Things to include in setting stage:
  - Confidentiality: highlight definition of confidentiality
  - Recording: highlighting the presence of an audio equipment
    - Sample script: *I am audio-recording this interview so that I can later on study what you have said, but it goes no further than the two of us. Anything you say here will remain strictly confidential. The audio-recordings will be labeled in*

*such a way that personal identities cannot be associated. All files will be stored in a secure manner.*

- Language: I ask for the interview to be conducted in English, but highlight that if necessary, respondents may feel free to switch to Spanish.

### **Stage III: Questions (approx. 20 minutes)**

Questions to be asked:

#### ***Background***

First, I'd like to ask you to tell me a little bit about yourself as an English teacher.

- How long did you study English before becoming a teacher?
- What is your highest degree (BA, MA, other certificates)?
- Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country?
- How long have you been an English teacher?
- Could you describe to me the body of students: age, diverse or all same level, how do they learn English?

#### ***English Learning Course (ELC)***

- What was the primary reason for you to use the ELC?
- How did you use the ELC? In class or as homework?
  - Which activities did students do in class and/or at home?
- How did you implement it in class?
- How often did you incorporate the ELC in your teaching (including homework)?
- Which skills did you have your students focus on most often?
  - Reading, speaking, listening
- Is the students' work on the ELC factored into their final grade?
- What units/ lessons/activities did you use most often?
- Would you use the ELC more if you could?
- What units do you think were most useful?<sup>5</sup>
  - What was (not) useful?
- Are there any additional topics that you would like to see covered?

- Are the materials and activities challenging enough for students?
- What activities did you find most useful?
  - Listening: Unit 1 Lesson 2; Unit 8 Lesson 3.1, 3.2
  - Reading: Unit 1 Lesson 4; Unit 8 Lesson 7.1
  - Speaking: Unit 1 Lesson 3.3, 3.4; Unit 8 Lesson 3.3, 7.4
  - Vocabulary: Unit 8 Lesson 1.3; Unit 8 Lesson 7.3

### ***System Functionality***

- Did the ELC work properly at all times?
- Did all the pages load?
  - If not, which ones did not?
- Did the recordings from speaking sections work properly?

### ***ELC in General***

- p. 19 → your perceptions of the ELC
- In general, is there anything else you feel could make the ELC more useful for you and your students?
- How has the ELC affected your English language skills?
  - Do you feel that it has also helped you improve?
  - If so how?

### ***New Ideas***

- ETS is thinking to extend the ELC
  - Would you welcome a modular product based on proficiency level?
  - Self-assessment component or rating that helps to identify the right level for each student?

### ***Teacher Management System (TMS)<sup>6</sup>***

- How user-friendly is the TMS' interface?
  - Potential prompts:
    - Is the setup clearly structured?



- Have you encountered technical difficulties?
- Is the TMS easy to navigate?
- Is there anything you feel could make the TMS more useful for you?

**Stage IV: Thank you (approx. 1 minute)**

Sample script: *Thank you very much for coming here today and for taking the time to engage in this interview. I think it will shed valuable light onto the needs and will help to improve the ELC for you and your students. Thank you!*



**Figure A1.** Screenshot of the English Learning Center (ELC) interface, featuring the eight units and their associated topics.

Appendix B  
Coding Scheme

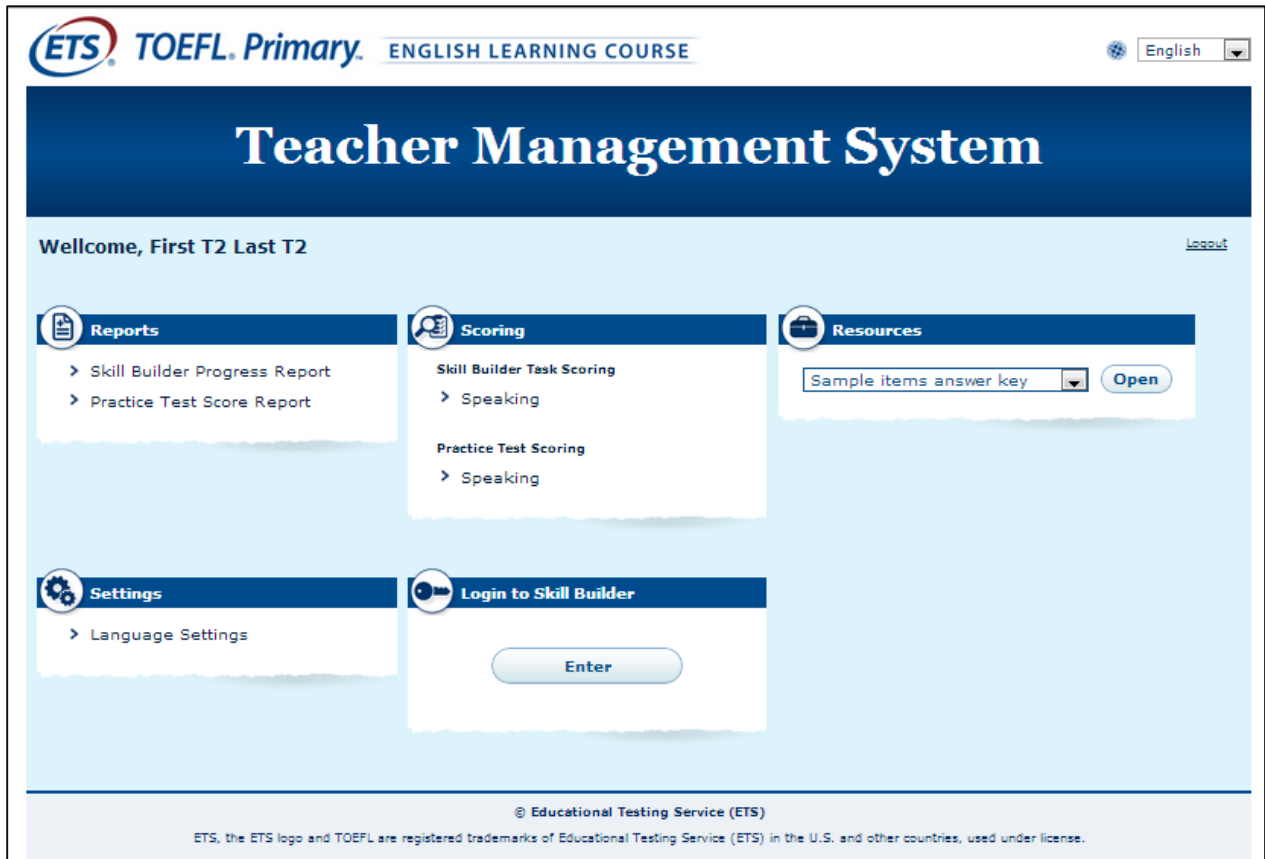


Figure B1. Screenshot of the interface of the teacher management system (TMS).

**Table B1*****Coding Scheme***

Code name	Code description
Additions and enhancements	Any time the interviewee(s) mentions anything that can be added or improved about the ELC
Billy the Monkey	Any time the interviewee(s) talk about Billy the Monkey
Topics	Any time the interviewee(s) mention further topics that could be added to the ELC, such as at the airport, at the movies, at the hotel, etc.
Writing	Any time the interviewee(s) talk about writing tasks or exercises as a component that could be added to the ELC (in addition to reading, listening, and speaking)
Other ideas for ELC	Any time the interviewee(s) mention general ideas for enhancements or additions to the ELC, other than adding Billy the Monkey, further topics, or a writing component
Background and learning context	Any time interviewee(s) describe their jobs, teaching, learning context at their respective school (number of students, levels of students, hours of English per week), or outside of the classroom (i.e., at home)
Context of use	Any time interviewee(s) mention how they use the ELC (i.e., at home or in class)
At home	Apply to specify context of use mentioned
In class	Apply to specify context of use mentioned
Frequency of use	Any time interviewee(s) refers to the amount of time they have used or worked with the ELC (in general or per week)
Biographical information	Any time interviewee(s) refer to their backgrounds, including age, years of learning and/or teaching English, living abroad experience
Student	Apply to specify biographical information mentioned
Teacher	Apply to specify biographical information mentioned
Content feedback	Any time interviewee(s) refer to activity or unit contents
Activity feedback	Apply to specify content feedback mentioned
Games	Apply to specify activity feedback mentioned
Pictures & images	Apply to specify activity feedback mentioned
Pronunciation & comprehensibility	Apply to specify activity feedback mentioned
Storyline & characters	Apply to specify activity feedback mentioned
Favorite activity	Apply to specify activity feedback mentioned
Options	Any time interviewee(s) comment on the support options included in ELC such as Guided Tour, See Text, Hear Text, Check Answers, or See Answers
Unit feedback	Apply to specify content feedback mentioned

Code name	Code description
Difficulty of ELC tasks	Any time interviewee(s) make reference to the ease or difficulty of the ELC or a specific aspect thereof
General student comments	Any time interviewee(s) mentions something about the ELC in general
Likes	Apply to specify general student comments when interviewee(s) mentions something positive about the ELC in general
Dislikes	Apply to specify general student comments when interviewee(s) mentions something negative about the ELC in general
Navigating website	Any time interviewee(s) talk about navigating the website
Technical issues	Any time interviewee(s) mention technical issues
Learning tool vs. test preparation	Any time interviewee(s) talk about whether they see the ELC as test preparation material or as a learning tool or both
Learning tool	Apply to specify learning tool vs. test preparation mentioned
Test preparation material	Apply to specify learning tool vs. test preparation mentioned
Grading of ELC work <sup>a</sup>	Any time the interviewee refers to if/how the ELC is being factored into the students' final grade
Professional development <sup>a</sup>	Any time the interviewee comments whether working with the ELC has affected his/her teaching, professional behaviors, or views
TMS <sup>a</sup>	Any time the interviewee comment on the anything related to the TMS
Claim responses <sup>a</sup>	Any time the interviewee refers to the list of preliminary claims/intended effects

*Note.* ELC = English Learning Center; TMS = teacher management system.

<sup>a</sup>These codes were only employed in the coding of teacher interviews.

## Appendix C

### Sample Progress Report

ELC Progress Report

Select Class: 2nda oportunidad de lograr el 100%

Grupo A

Lunes 26 de mayo

Student name	Total progress	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unite 6	Unit 7	Unit 8
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	44%	86%	86%	92%	0%	0%	0%	0%	86%
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	56%	72%	72%	28%	72%	71%	43%	86%	0%
-	82%	86%	86%	86%	92%	85%	48%	83%	86%
-	94%	92%	100%	43%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	92%	86%	91%	92%	92%	91%	100%	77%	100%
-	61%	92%	81%	84%	22%	53%	75%	81%	0%
-	78%	49%	19%	86%	86%	100%	100%	77%	100%
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	56%	72%	72%	28%	72%	71%	43%	86%	0%
-	82%	86%	86%	86%	92%	85%	48%	83%	86%
-	94%	92%	100%	43%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	92%	86%	91%	92%	92%	91%	100%	77%	100%
-	61%	92%	81%	84%	22%	53%	75%	81%	0%
-	78%	49%	19%	86%	86%	100%	100%	77%	100%
-	73%	86%	86%	86%	63%	85%	28%	86%	64%
-	91%	86%	91%	92%	89%	91%	89%	86%	95%
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
-	84%	100%	100%	62%	43%	100%	57%	100%	100%
-	70%	98%	91%	17%	40%	14%	100%	100%	91%
-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Note that the name of the online platform was changed from English Learning Course to English Learning Center in August 2014. Thus, the older term English Learning Course appears throughout the data, while the new term is used as a reference to the ELC in this report.
- <sup>2</sup> Although it was beyond the scope of this study to measure the English proficiency of all students, teachers repeatedly highlighted the heterogeneity of their students in terms of English language proficiency in their interview responses. Moreover, differences in students' English language ability became obvious in personal conversations held in English with some of the young learners.
- <sup>3</sup> Note that, in this report, all quotations taken from the survey and interview data are direct representations of the original responses, which are presented verbatim, and may thus contain linguistic inaccuracies.
- <sup>4</sup> Operating primarily in Spain and Latin America, Santillana is a global publishing company that markets the ELC to elementary schools in Mexico. The ELC is sold as part of a larger package, containing an English language learning curriculum, textbooks, and other learning and teaching materials.
- <sup>5</sup> See Appendix A. A screenshot of all units was provided as a stimulus to prompt teachers.
- <sup>6</sup> A screenshot of the TMS was provided as a visual stimulus.