



IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLINICS FOR REMEDIAL TEACHING: CONCEPT, FUNCTIONING AND CHALLENGES

Ameerchund Maharaj,

Intakhab Alam Khanⁱ

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

Although EFL students learn English at schools and colleges, the time allotted for their English lessons per day is very limited. Setting up English Language Clinics at EFL colleges/institutes will help students improve and develop their language skills. This paper aims at helping EFL students develop their English language skills by opening English language clinics in schools and colleges. The paper presents the concept and scope of ELC and its usefulness. It also provides an overview of some of the English language clinics successfully run by various colleges in general and Jeddah community college in particular. Finally, it suggests various ways in which English language clinics can be established and implemented successfully for the benefit of students as well as teachers. It also provides some suggestions for extended tasks that can be carried out by the language clinic given enough administrative and financial support. The work is basically of descriptive-exploratory type that involved some English teachers' responses from different colleges/universities and JCC teachers at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-KSA. The findings will be helpful in supporting the theory of establishing ELCs at English departments to cater to the needs of learners facing difficulties in learning specific aspects/skills of English language.

Keywords: clinic, EFL students, English language skills, resources, technology

1. Introduction

English language as an international language is a widely spoken and used language in the world by non-English-speaking countries has urged governments to introduce

Correspondence: email dr.intakhab@yahoo.com

English early in schools. However, EFL students don't spend much time learning English at schools and colleges since the medium of instruction in most schools in non-English speaking countries is not English. This being the case, the students tend to either find difficulty in developing the required proficiency in the English lessons efficiently or forget the learned language skills eventually. When they reach college level, they are unable to cope with the demand of higher education syllabus. Therefore, to help the students practise and develop the English language skills at an early stage, many schools, colleges, and even some universities have opened English language clinics within English departments and have been running them successfully.

1.1. EFL Students

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) indicates the study and use of English language by non-native speakers in countries where English is generally not a local medium of communication, feels Nordquist (2017). In EFL schools, English is not the medium of instruction, but it is taught as a subject just like Math, Science, and History. Thus, it involves teaching English to children as well as adults whose first or main language is not English (AGCAS editors, 2015).

In EFL schools and colleges, the time allocated for English lesson is one or two hours maximum per day just as it is allocated for other subjects. Within these few hours, the EFL teachers will have to complete the course syllabus set by the institution and prepare the students for the examinations. Consequently, the language skills learned during these limited hours become either neglected skills or forgotten skills by the students; when the students go out into the real world, they find themselves in a restricted environment where they switch back to their mother tongue immediately. The opportunities to develop or apply the language skills learned in the language classrooms in real life are very rare.

1.1.1 Remedial teaching

The word "remedial," by both print and web definition, means "to rectify, improve or remedy something." Whether it's reading, or spelling, defining the problem is quite crucial. Diagnosis of the problem is perhaps the first step in working through a student's weaknesses, and there are several ways to initiate this process and attain the predetermined objectives.

In some cases of remedial teaching in the college setting, students have shown significant progress in their abilities to use English as their first or second language. The effectiveness of the courses is influenced by innovation and utilization of some strategies towards imparting long lasting language skills in students. Remedial courses

can positively influence significant improvement in the use of language in students (Selvarajan & Vasanthagumar, 2012).

1.1.2 Learners with special needs

Learners with special needs are those who can't maintain the pace of the normal learners. They fail to attain prescribed aims and objectives for a variety of reasons. In some cases, their failure can be directly attributed to ineffectiveness of teaching. Some students might be affected by some psychological or behavioural issues which may become more crucial in course of time if instruction is not designed to cater to the needs of these special learners.

1.2. Need for English Language Clinics

An English Language Clinic (ELC) can be operationally defined as a place in an academic institution where an English language expert/teacher offers a remedial lesson to a student or a small group of students. It is a fact that these days most non-English speaking countries are emphasizing the importance of English language competency among the learners for many academic and socio-political reasons. Although EFL students usually learn and practice English, it is quite difficult for them to be proficient in the target language due to the limited hours assigned to the English lessons. These results in a lack of adequate practice of the language skills learned. Moreover, the students' difficulties, errors, or any related problems in the language learning experience are left unattended.

The language clinic provides an opportunity for weaker learners to repair their LSRW skills in English by giving them face to face lessons in a remedial learning environment. The errors are pointed out and corrected in a friendly manner. The clinic can assist in enhancing the writing skills of the students from correct use of parts of speech to formation/transformation of sentences. Similarly, the students can also develop their speaking skills in the clinic by participating in one-to-one informal conversations or small group discussions on various topics of their interest based on cultural values. In addition, learners with difficulty in listening skills can improve themselves by utilizing online components designed for listening purposes. It can be made available in the clinic itself. Finally, they can develop their reading skills in the presence of the expert-teacher. A wide range of reading activities available at the language clinic can enrich the learners' collection of new words. Thus, spending time at the language clinic can be an excellent way of utilizing students' free time productively.

1.3 Purpose and significance of the Study

The ultimate purpose of this study is to explore, assess and support the English language clinics roles in the process of remedial teaching for learners with special needs.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Through this study, importance, roles and impact of English language clinics will be explored especially for weaker students. The suggestions would also be offered to make the policies and functioning of the ELC better and more effective.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To know about the importance of remedial teaching for English for weaker learners,
2. To find out the role and impact of ELC for remedial English,
3. To study the process and functioning of ELC for remedial English,
4. To offer suggestions to improve the functioning of ELC for remedial English for weaker learners.

1.6 Research questions

1. What are the roles of ELC for remedial teaching?
2. Is English language clinic useful for remedial teaching of weaker learners?
3. Are students interested in attending ELC?

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited up to the students of foundation year English at various departments/colleges at the university within KSA and even outside the kingdom.

1.8 Limitations

The study is not experimental in nature. It does not include a large sample. The validity and reliability of the tool(s) are not statistically tested.

2. Review of related literature

Historically, in 1849 the first remedial education program was offered at the University of Wisconsin with courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic (Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999). However, comparing remedial education programs of the past with remedial teaching/courses in 21st centuries may never be appropriate. They wrote that

the University of Wisconsin's College Preparatory Program of 1849 provided a possible starting point for what has evolved into today's developmental programs. The authors continued that although assistance with courses has probably been available as long as formal education, more formal "movements" in developmental education have only been documented since the 1960's. Simultaneous with the diversification of the student body came a diversification of backgrounds and college preparedness within the student body (Phipps, 1998). The tutors of colonial colleges worked with at least one class in all subjects, and they were the primary source of guidance for college students at this time (Frost, 2000).

Having realised the importance and potential impact of the English language clinics, many educational institutions have recently opened English language clinics and are running them successfully. The English Language Proficiency Clinic is a specialised speech and language clinic associated with the main Kent State University Speech and Hearing Clinic. They work with non-native English speakers to improve oral English skills including "*perception and pronunciation of the sounds of English, rhythm and intonation in patterns of English, and associated speech production skills in lecturing and presentations.*" (Ohio University, 2014). The English Language Institute at the University of Michigan offers two skill-based clinics to the members of its academic community. Firstly, the ELI Speaking Clinic assists the students who want to improve their spoken English pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy in speaking. (<https://lsa.umich.edu/eli/resources/speakingclinics>)

Long back, Nederveld (1967, 75-80) talked about the importance of the Effective Remedial Reading Program which created base for many researches of those days. The trend of exploring relevance of remedial teaching continued. A group of researchers (Jumani, Rehman, Dilpazir, Chisti, Chaudry, Malik (2011, pp. 697-704) studied Effectiveness of Remedial Techniques on the Performance of Special Students in the Subject of English and found useful.

Swanson (1999, 676-682) explored Interventions for Students with Learning Difficulties: A meta-analysis of treatment outcomes. In addition, Michael Silverstein, Leslie Iverson and Paula Lozano (2002) worked on An English-Language Clinic-Based Literacy Program Is Effective for a Multilingual Population. Lately, Khan (2011, 1248-1257) focused on learning difficulties in English: Diagnosis and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia. His work focused on difficulties faced by the Saudi learners in almost each aspects and skills of English language. In order to provide some tips on cross-linguistic strategies, Khan (2014) presented detailed accounts (pp201-231).

2.1 An Overview

Not many researches were found on the topic related to English language clinics, however studies are available in the areas of remedial teaching, special needs and problem based learning. The present study will open up avenues for future researchers to initiate researches in this area which is quite relevant in at least those places where English learning is not easy.

3. English Language Clinic at Jeddah Community College (JCC)

Keeping the importance of ELC, it was approved by the department committee to establish an English language clinic to meet urgent needs of learners facing learning issues in English. There is an in-charge (the committee head) who works in coordination with the HOD. Teachers concerned take notes of the problems faced by the special need learners; they are then referred to the clinic that follows an announced schedule with teacher(s)-in charge. Finally, the problems are dealt with unless the issue is nearly resolved.

3.1 Who is needed?

A language clinic is a place where experts are needed to assist, help, correct, and reinforce the learners with special needs. The Department can form a team of teachers (small or big) to prepare, design and execute plans. Getting approval from the relevant authorities of the institution to start such a language clinic is very important. As a team, one can also generate some suitable objectives and guidelines for your clinic along with required resource case.

3.2 What is needed?

Following essential things will be required:

1. A room big enough to accommodate teachers, a reasonable number of students and resources.
2. Furniture: tables, chairs, cupboards, etc and stationery items: pens, pencils, papers, glue sticks, etc.
3. Resources Books: (essential) course books, story books, grammar books, worksheets, newspapers and magazines, working computers, Internet, suggestion box (essential) to get the students' feedback, comments, or suggestions.
4. Language clinic schedule sheet (weekly schedule)
5. Attendance card (essential) to record the students' visits and for follow up.

3.3 How to conduct a consultation (student's visit)?

As a friendly setting is essential, it is required to follow following points for better results:

1. Greet the student,
2. Create an informal conducive atmosphere,
3. Make the visitor (the student) feel at ease,
4. Find out the student's language skill that needs improvement,
5. Based on the required skill, use suitable resources and teaching techniques and explain,
6. Involve the student. Let it not be a one sided instruction,
7. Manage the time.
8. Encourage the student to make an appointment for further follow up.

4. Methodology

It was a descriptive-exploratory research. However, it involved designing of tools, collection of data and analysis and interpretation of data collected for the purpose. Teachers in general were given questionnaire to elicit relevance of the English language clinics and remedial teaching. JCC teachers were interviewed to assess the effectiveness of functioning and drawbacks if any. Researchers' own experience and observation were utilized as well.

4.1 Research Questions

1. What are the roles of ELC for remedial teaching?
2. Is English language clinic useful for remedial teaching of weaker learners?
3. Are students interested in attending ELC?

4.2 The sample

Only 51 teachers of English teaching at different colleges/universities returned the questionnaire electronically. Three JCC teachers were interviewed with the help of structured interview, however the interview lead to some informal discussion as well which helped in the process of interpretation of results.

4.3 Data Source

4.3.1 Questionnaire for teachers

A questionnaire was developed by the researchers. Content validity was tested prior to the administration and collection of required data. (Appendix-A)

4.3.2 Interview with JCC teachers

In order to substantiate data gathered through the questionnaire, and elicit specific information regarding the functioning of the ELC at JCC, some questions were scheduled to be asked. (Appendix-B)

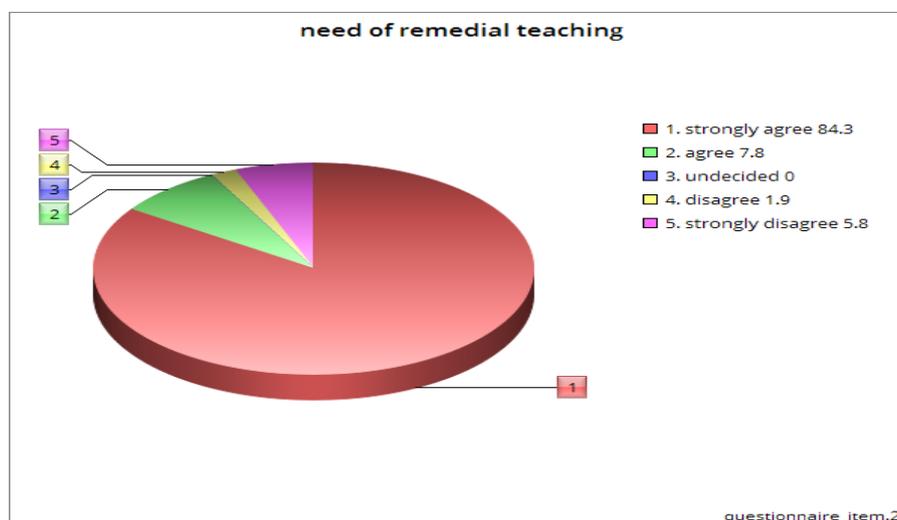
4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Questionnaire analysis (N=51)

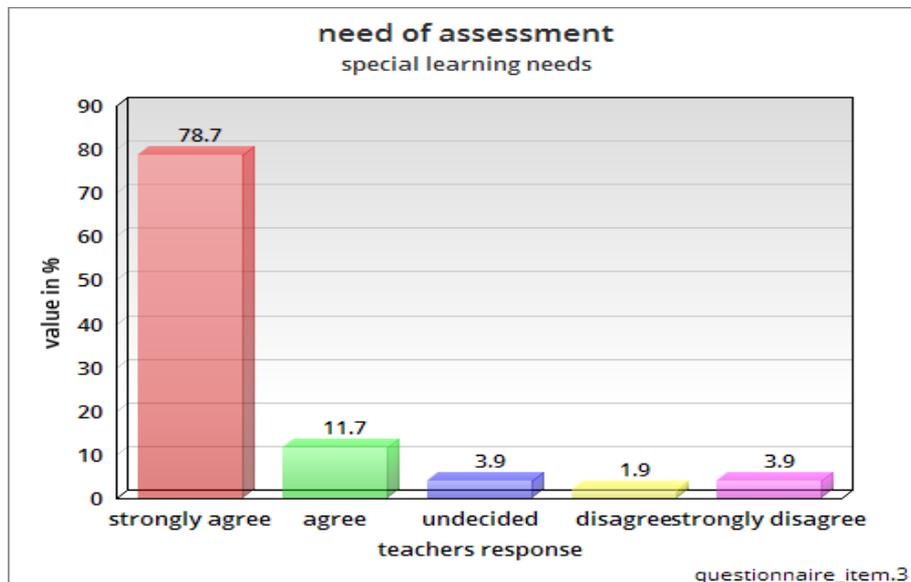
SN	Statements	SA	A	UD	SDA	DA
1	Students are from diverse background.	45	3	-	-	3
2	Most students need remedial teaching.	43	4	-	1	3
3	There is a need to assess special learners' need.	40	6	2	1	2
4	Remedial teaching can gulf the gap between previous knowledge and current level.	35	8	3	3	2
5	Special education techniques can be used to tackle academic issues.	32	9	4	2	4
6	English language clinics can be used as remedial measures.	42	5	2	1	1
7	Teachers can diagnose difficulties and recommend needy candidates who need specific teaching.	41	6	3	-	1
8	Teachers on duty at ELC work on the specific needs of learners as diagnosed by their class teachers.	40	5	2	1	3
9	ELCs boost the confidence of the learners.	46	2	-	1	2
10	ELCs can act as additional but essential resource providers.	42	4	2	2	1
11	Students attend the clinic if they are referred.	47	1	-	1	1
12	They feel more confident after attending the clinic.	36	7	3	3	3

Item wise analysis

1. It has been agreed by 45 respondents over 51(88.2%) that the learners are from diverse background.
2. 84.3% teachers opine that there is a need of remedial teaching.



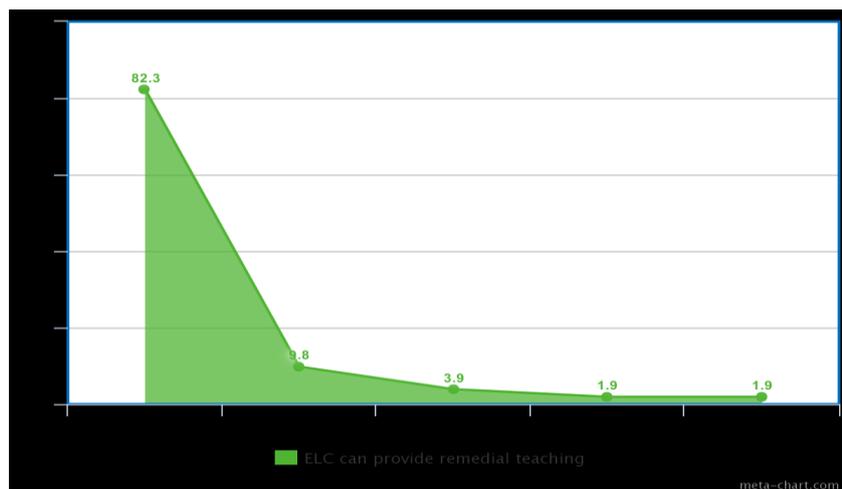
3. 78.4% respondent teachers contend that there is a need to assess/diagnose the learners' special needs in learning the target language.



4. 68.6 % teachers are in agreement that remedial teaching can gulf the gap between previous knowledge and current level.

5. 62.7% respondents contend that special education techniques can be used to tackle academic issues.

6. Around 82% teachers agree that English language clinics can be used as remedial measures.

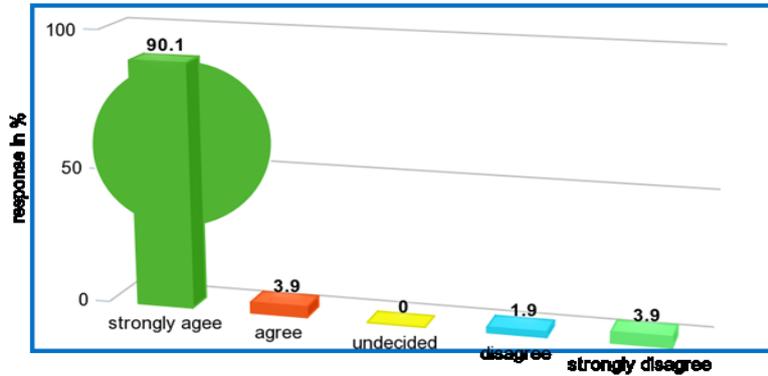


7. 80.3% agree that Teachers can diagnose difficulties and recommend needy candidates who need specific teaching.

8. 78.4% respondents are of the view that Teachers on duty at ELC work on the specific needs of learners as diagnosed by their class teachers.

9. 90.1% teachers approve that ELC can boost the confidence level of learners.

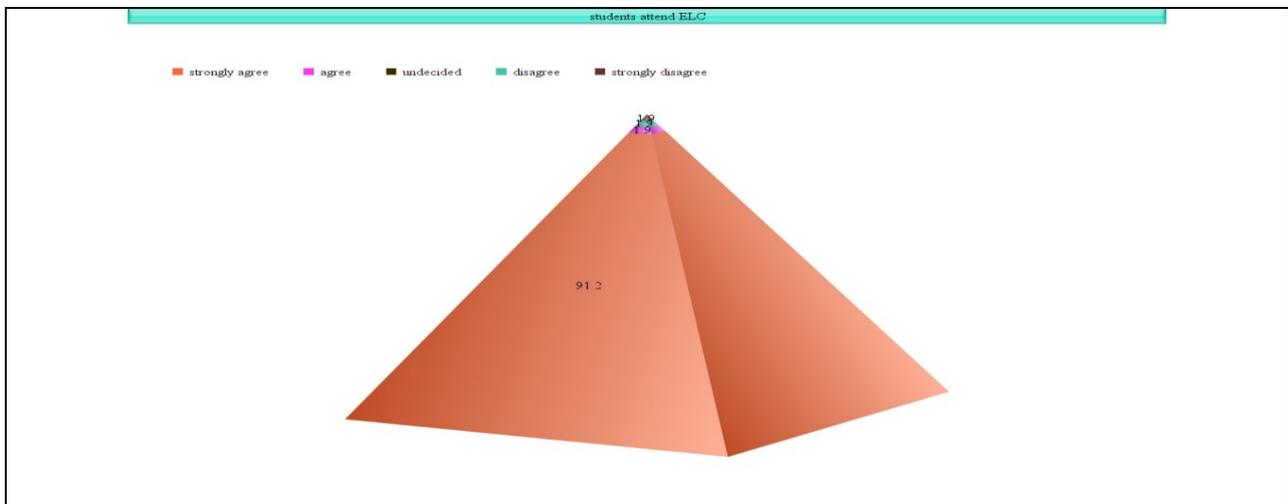
ELC can boost the confidence
 questionnaire.Item-9



ELC is a booster

10. 82.3% teachers are of opinion that ELCs can act as additional but essential resource providers.

11. More than 91% teachers are in agreement with the statement that the students attend the scheduled English language clinics.



12. Around 70% teachers say that learners become more confident after attending the clinic.

4.4.2 Analysis of the Interview

Q.1 Is there an English language clinic at your department? If yes, why does it function?

Teacher 1: Yes, there is. It has been established under a committee. It takes care of weaker students.

Teacher 2: ELC has been working at GRC department for quite some time. It provides special assistance to those learners whose pace is not the same like their mates.

Teacher 3: Yes, there is. It has been working under ELC committee. It takes care of weaker students by guiding them as per their learning needs.

Q.2 Why do you think an English language clinic is at all important?

Teacher 1: ELC was established to provide remedial teaching for those students who can be categorised as learners with special needs.

Teacher 2: ELC was initiated by the ELC committee of GRC department to take care of weaker learners who face different problems which can't be dealt with, in a normal class with all the students. Such a unit is always important.

Teacher 3: A place like ELC has always been of great important because most of the learners face specific problems in learning English.

Q.3 Is there a teacher on duty to attend the referral cases? What does he do?

Teacher 1: Yes, there is. In fact, there are many teachers on duty according to a roaster already distributed and agreed. A teacher in-charge reads the notes of the teacher regarding the weakness of the students.

Teacher 2: The teacher in-charge carefully reads the notes sent by the teacher to the ELC regarding the weakness of a student(s). He finally provides remedial teaching.

Teacher-3: Yes, there is. One teacher is on duty at a time, and he takes care of the notes written by the teacher to the ELC/in-charge on duty. Then he guides the learner(s).

Q.4 What according to you can ELC bring changes in the learning styles of the specific learners who need ELC's intervention?

Teacher 1: ELC can gulf the gap between previous knowledge and current requirement.

Teacher 2: ELC can boost the confidence level of the learners.

Teacher 3: ELC corrects some common errors made by the learners due to their habit and lack of knowledge and skills.

5. Conclusion

It is a fact that classroom learning is the most important language acquisition method. Yet, the EFL students need specific care for error-correction, exercises, and motivation. Since ELC practices in the line of remedial teaching, it can contribute significantly in the EFL setting. It is interesting to find that the learners also take interest in attending the

ELC sessions. At ELC, a friendly environment and face to face intervention on specific issues can assist in the process by which the students feel stress-free and comfortable which makes the language learning process more effective and fruitful. English language clinic at JCC can be equipped with necessary things for remedial teaching if budget allows. Language clinic can have sub areas of remedial teaching like speaking, reading, writing and listening clinics. Similarly grammar clinic can function its own. The language clinic can organize skill-oriented seminars/workshops, and preparing the students for qualifying tests and interviews.

5.1 Implications

ELC can be extremely useful. It can be established in each language department. It will surely help to a great deal in the learning process of weaker students. A systematic approach to ELC functioning is required along with financial and administrative support of the concerned authorities.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, it is recommended that an empirical study is essential in order to assess the effectiveness of the ELCs.

About the Authors

Dr. Ameerchund Maharaj is a South African citizen. Teaching career began with teaching English as first language in South Africa. Started teaching ESL in the Arabian Gulf in 2002 (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman). Presented papers at international conferences in South Africa, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Oman. Obtained Ph.D in 2005. Professional interests include innovative teaching practices, semantics, and teacher professional development.

Dr. Intakhab Alam Khan, an internationally acclaimed educationist and trainer, is associated with King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah-Saudi Arabia. He has almost 24 years of experience in teaching/training/research at various universities. An author of a dozen of academic and research books, and around 65 papers in different international online and print journals, Dr. Khan has taught medical/health/business English in Saudi Arabia. His presentations at international conferences have already been published in ISI indexed proceedings. He is honorary chief editor/associate editor/asst. editor of many online educational journals published worldwide.

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Appendix A

Teacher's questionnaires on ELC

A: Personal information						
Name (optional):	Age:	Affiliation:				
Teaching Experience:	Qualification:					
Part B: Statements on ELC						
Please choose an option from the following:						
*Strongly agree (SA) Agree (A) Undecided(UD) Disagree(DA) Strongly Disagree(SDA)						
SN	Statements	SA	A	UD	SDA	DA
1	Students are from diverse background.					
	Most students need remedial teaching.					
2	There is a need to assess special learners' need.					
3	Remedial teaching can gulf the gap between previous knowledge and current level.					
4	Special education techniques can be used to tackle academic issues.					
5	English language clinics can be used as remedial measures.					
6	Teachers can recommend candidates who need specific teaching					
7	Teaches on duty works on the specific needs diagnosed by the teachers of the students visiting the language clinic.					
8	ELCs boost the confidence of the learners.					
9	ELCs can act as additional resource providers.					
10	ELCs can be divided into sub clinics such as speaking, writing, grammar etc.					
11	Students attend the clinic if they are referred.					
12	They feel more confident after attending the clinic.					
13.	Any other comments:					

Appendix B

Interview for Teachers

Q.1 Is there an English language clinic at your department? If yes, why does it function?

Q.2 Why do you think an English language clinic is at all important?

Q.3 Is there a teacher on duty to attend the referral cases? What does he do?

Q.4 What according to you can ELC bring changes in the learning styles of the specific learners who need ELC's intervention?

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